The Posthuman Lifeworld: A Study of Russell T. Davies's *Doctor Who*

Jonathan Hay

Abstract

Via the analysis of a cross-section of episodes from Russell T. Davies's era of the revived BBC Science Fiction television series *Doctor Who* (2005 – 2010), this paper demonstrates that the programme utilises representations of the viewer's everyday lifeworld to figure a posthuman rhetoric. Through the viewer's in-phenomenal interaction with its representation of the mundane, the show emphasises the already significantly posthuman nature of the technologically saturated lifeworld of the contemporary individual. It challenges Darko Suvin's notion of cognitive estrangement, which fails to describe the show's Science Fictional[1] discourse, and instead proposes the alternate mechanism of cognitive engagement. This inquiry therefore reappraises the thematic concerns of the show during the years when Russell T. Davies served as the programme's showrunner, revealing *Doctor Who's* emphasis upon the everyday (post)human lifeworld. It concludes that the show refutes technocentric ideologies, and thus rigorously demonstrates the consonance between the (post)human present and posthuman future.

In their attempt to characterise the contemporary position of the Science Fiction[2] genre, Brian W. Aldiss and David Wingrove assert that since the beginning of the 1970's, SF "[...] has gone forth and multiplied to a remarkable extent. What was once virtually a secret movement has become part of the cultural wallpaper" (Aldiss and Wingrove 14). Hence, the

---

[1]Hereafter referred to as SFnal.
[2]Hereafter referred to as SF.

pervasiveness of contemporary SF in modern societies establishes a significant correlation between the genre and the realm of the cultural mundane. As John Rieder likewise suggests, the "center of energy, or the fund of cultural capital, for the genre now depends [...] heavily on its central position within the entertainment industry" (Rieder 168). Rieder furthermore affirms that since "SF is organic to mass culture [...] constructing, maintaining, and contesting the category of SF actively intervenes in promoting the distribution of a certain kind of fiction" (Rieder 10). This suggests that an intriguing feedback loop is at play; contemporary SF narratives are ubiquitous enough to constitute a form of cultural mundanity, and yet, it is necessarily through the realm of that same mundane lifeworld that the reader approaches cognisance of SFnal novelty. This paper accordingly asserts that the everyday lifeworld is a prominent component of the rhetorical strategy by which the revived series of the BBC television show *Doctor Who* phenomenologically[3] positions its viewers within a mode of cognitive engagement[4] with its SFnal discourse.

The paper begins with the assumption that these hypothetical viewers of *Doctor Who* are not human. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles emphasises that "[m]odern humans are capable of more sophisticated cognition than cavemen not because modern humans are smarter, [...] but because they have constructed smarter environments in which to work" (Hayles 289). The technologically-mediated development of our species is an emergent phenomenon, actualized by our creation of ubiquitous technologies which collectively surpass the limits of our individual intellects, and which collectively render the category human obsolete. As a means of definition, Hayles argues that "[a]lthough the 'posthuman' differs in its articulations, a common theme is the union of the human with the intelligent machine" (Hayles 2). In concord with Hayles' joint contentions that technological

---

[3]This paper uses the terms phenomenological and phenomenologically in order to assert that the observation of any phenomenon is subjectively actualized, and therefore entirely contingent upon the interpreter's cognitive processes. For a far more detailed description of the importance of phenomenological considerations in the digital age, see Ihde 1993.

[4]A definition is provided for this term later in the paper.

and social progress are inextricably "seriated" (Hayles 20), and that we currently inhabit an intermediary stage between being human and posthuman, this paper refers to our species as "(post)human" (Hayles 246).[5] From this present (post)human situation, we are engaged in the non-eschatological and largely stochastic process of becoming increasingly posthuman.

It follows that the generic rhetoric of contemporary SF texts—such as the revived series of *Doctor Who*—explicitly intersects with Posthuman philosophies. Bonnie Green and Chris Willmott, for instance, emphasise the posthuman character of many of the show's narratives by arguing that "*Doctor Who* has always presented the Cybermen as quintessentially posthuman; as human beings, transformed through the integration and fusion of organic, mechanical and cybernetic parts" (Green and Willmott 56). They accordingly argue that the presence of the Cybermen in the show's visual rhetoric "[...] alerts us to the very proximity of the posthuman era, providing a space in which we — human, [...] and posthuman alike — can imagine and shape and create our future together" (Green and Willmott 68). Whilst Green and Willmott are correct to contend that *Doctor Who* regularly signifies matrixes of posthuman possibility explicitly, this paper proceeds to demonstrate how *Doctor Who* also intersects with Posthuman philosophies implicitly by virtue of the dialectical relationship formed between the viewer and the show phenomenologically. Elana Gomel states that:

> Not only does SF vividly dramatize the implications and consequences of new technologies and new discoveries, it is also a powerful influence upon culture, creating a feedback loop of images and ideas. Many central concepts of posthumanism, such as cyborg, clone, android, human-animal hybrid, and alien, originated in SF. (Gomel 340)

---

[5] See also; Midson, 2019; Hay, 2019.

Hence, Gomel contends that SF functions as a cultural site which literalizes the emergent posthuman "[...] potentiality of *Homo sapiens* whose biological and cultural self-fashioning ceaselessly generates new modalities of subjectivity and consciousness" (Gomel 353). Specifically, in the discursive interface which originates phenomenologically between the SF text and its viewer, a space of posthuman potential is realized from the (post)human present. Thus SF is an important constituent element within the cultural and social spheres which, in our (post)human age, play a particularly vital role in the development of our species. This space of posthuman potential, however, is not simply literalised by SF's estranging narrative strategy, but rather is located in the intersection between the SF narrative and its generic form, its mundane features, and the viewer.

This paper therefore proposes that, in order to comprehend the rhetorical territory of *Doctor Who*, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of both the show's phenomenological aspects, and its mundane components. As Don Ihde asserts, the mundane lifeworlds of (post)humans are crucial to understandings of phenomenology, and vice versa, since technologies "[...] are non-neutral and deeply embedded in daily life praxes" (Ihde 13) in contemporary life. Accordingly, the technologies we use habitually "[...] are transformational in that they change the quality, field and possibility range" of (post)human experience and, thus, our technologized lifeworlds are profoundly dependent upon our phenomenological perspectives (Ihde 33). As this paper proceeds to argue, the Davies era of *Doctor Who* explicitly draws upon the ability of its (post)human viewers to assimilate the original novelty of technologies, until they appear mundane from their subjective viewpoints. Hence it proves necessary to foreground the shifting phenomenological perspectives of *Doctor Who*'s viewers, in order to delineate the dialectical relationship which the rhetorical mechanism of the show provokes between its SFnal discourse and its viewers.

This paper's contention that SF interpellates its reader through a subjective cognitive—or phenomenological—process characterised by the assimilation of nova is conversant with Paul Ricoeur's treatise on the discursive relationship between the reader/viewer and narrative. Whilst the thesis of this paper concurs with Ricoeur's contention that "language configures and refigures temporal experience" (Ricoeur 1984, 54), it challenges his correlate assertation that successful narratives therefore function to bring "[...] about an increase in being in our vision of the world which is impoverished by everyday affairs" otherwise (Ricoeur 1984, 81). More accurately, it is precisely the everyday (post)human semantic field which *Doctor Who* deploys to interpellate its viewers towards the cognisance of posthuman newnesses. Likewise, when Ricoeur presumes that if the metaphoricity of a text "[...] is too successful, the unfamiliar becomes familiar, and readers, feeling themselves to be on an equal footing with the work, come to believe in it so completely they lose themselves in it" (Ricoeur 1990, 169), he is only partially correct. The SF genre is fated to persistently fail to narrate the unfamiliar, and through its preordained failure to do so, proves its reader's cognitive ability to assimilate the posthuman potentialities enclosed by its speculative aspects.

Whereas Darko Suvin asserts that SF texts are underpinned by a mechanism of "cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 12), this paper demonstrates that the viewer of *Doctor Who* instead engages with the SFnal primarily through the figure of their mundane lifeworld. Via the formulation of cognitive estrangement, Suvin proposes that SF is a literature dually characterised by the reciprocal interplay between "scientifically" (Suvin 28) grounded cognition, and "radical estrangements" (Suvin 28). Yet, as this paper demonstrates, SFnal cognition in Davies's *Doctor Who* is consistently generated by characteristically non-estranging means. Therefore, this paper coins the term cognitive engagement, and asserts that the show is just as much defined by its non-radical mundane components; its mundane

components are cognitively engaging, rather than estranging, since they are eminently

familiar to viewers. Demonstrably, the viewer's perspectival outlook is altered in the process

of assimilating nova, generating a phenomenological "shift in vision" towards cognition of

the SFnal (Ihde 30). The viewer's present self is not subverted in the process of watching

Doctor Who, but is rather refigured by its imaginative engagement with the show. As this

paper proceeds to demonstrate, it is therefore more accurate to characterise the show's SFnal

mechanism as a process of cognitive engagement. Accordingly, the reciprocal relationship

between the (post)human present and posthuman future which is discursively foregrounded

by the dynamic of cognitive engagement may be understood as a central aspect of the show's

posthuman rhetoric.

  The four series of *Doctor Who* for which Russell T. Davies acted as the programme's

showrunner can productively be read as particularly pertinent examples of this rhetorical

strategy, as is demonstrable via the analysis of a representative cross-section of episodes from

that era of the show.[6] As Joel Krueger argues, "[...] technological augmentations of mind,

body and self are not simply exotic possibilities in the distant future. Rather, these

augmentations are already a central part of our everyday lives" (Krueger 174). Resultantly,

the in-phenomenal "[...] *experience* of augmenting and extending our embodied and cognitive

capacities in various ways" is a significant undertaking of televisual SF texts such as *Doctor

Who*. The Davies era of *Doctor Who* in particular has adapted "[...] itself to the very different

cultural and televisual environments of the twenty-first century" since the programme's

revival (Leach 93). This period of the show is therefore a particularly pertinent object of

study for this enquiry, since it not only depicts the mundanity of viewers' technologized

lifeworlds, but in addition, is itself a component of them. The paper therefore proceeds to

read a number of episodes from the Davies era as technocultural productions that are both

---

[6]It lies beyond the scope of this paper to analyse each of the sixty episodes released during Davies' tenure as showrunner on an individual basis. For a comprehensive academic survey of this period of the show, see Bradshaw et al.

symptomatic, and revealing, of the mundane essence of (post)human everyday life.

Suvin characterises SF as "[...] a symbolic system centred on a novum which is to be cognitively validated within the narrative reality of the tale" (Suvin 80); he proposes that nova are typically futuristic technologies, species, or cultures (Suvin 64). Similarly, he claims that genres like SF deploy nova in order to engender "[...] a formal inversion of significant and salient aspects of the author's "empirical environment" (Suvin 236), which can only be achieved via depictions of "genuine newness" (Suvin 217).[7] Suvin's conceptualisation of the SF genre, however, tends towards teleological determinism by presuming that the novum or nova of a SF text alone facilitate its rhetorical capacity. Conversely, *Doctor Who* solicits rather than inverts the viewer's mundane lifeworld, and hence retools it as a dissimilar means of accessing that same cognitive territory of posthuman possibility. The emphasis upon nova alone within the Suvinian paradigm therefore fails to accurately describe *Doctor Who's* SFnal schema, as the (post)human everyday lifeworld comprises a crucial constituent of the show's rhetorical discourse.

In the first four series of the revived *Doctor Who*—for which Russell T. Davies acted as showrunner—the diegetic world of the show is heavily predicated upon the (post)human everyday lifeworld. The episode "The Empty Child" (2005), for instance, explicitly states that in between their intergalactic escapades Rose and the Doctor have to return to Earth regularly, as they are both of the opinion that the milk they drink onboard the TARDIS "has to come out of a cow" ("The Empty Child", series 1, episode 9, 00:01:43 - 00:01:44). Although the two of them have seen Earth engulfed by the sun in the year 5,000,000,000, fought the Gelth with the help of Charles Dickens, and prevented the Slitheen from invading Earth, they must return almost as often to entirely unremarkable periods of Earth's history in order to stock up on a contemporary means of nourishment which is produced by

---

[7]For more on the Suvinian novum, see chapter 4 of Suvin, 1979. For an alternate account of the role which the novum plays in contemporary SF, to that proposed in this paper, see chapter 5.3 of Andolfatto**.**

anthropocentric biopolitical industries. The Doctor's penchant for cow's milk therefore seems antiquated—perhaps even conservative—only a decade and-a-half after the episode's release, in light of the growing popularity of vegan lifestyle practices and discourses in contemporaneity. As in this instance, through its enthralment with the (post)human everyday lifeworld, the Davies era of *Doctor Who* recurrently proposes that posthuman life too will be significantly mundane.

The show emphasises that technological progress is always incremental rather than revelatory, and that the future will appear just as mundane to the (post)humans who inhabit its temporality as the technologized present does to ourselves. It does so, in part, by depicting the journeys of the Doctor's (post)human companions into numerous periods of their own species' posthuman future, and by dramatising the ways in which the (post)human society of its diegesis is always already significantly posthuman. This is apparent by the manner in which the show's visual rhetoric frequently reinforces its prominent depiction of the (post)human everyday lifeworld, as in the series one episode "Rose" (2005). Although the opening shot of the episode—and hence the revived series of *Doctor Who* as a whole—at first depicts Earth from space, it quickly pans in to a close-up shot of Rose's digital alarm clock, which promptly sounds. Besides foreshadowing the fact that the collective narrative of series one is exclusively set either on Earth, or in orbit of it, this shot emphasises that the (post)human everyday lifeworld is the essential bedrock of the series. This shot is followed by numerous shots of traffic moving through the streets of central London. These subsequent shots function to establish the episode's setting, but do not appear to enclose any SFnal content whatsoever. Rather, the centralising novum of the episode's SFnal premise—the Autons—are altogether visually indistinguishable from its mundane *mise-en-scène* at first. Rose is entirely habitualised to working with mannequins through her job at a department store, and so enters a basement room filled with largely indistinguishable Autons without

giving them a second glance. Even after the Autons have become animate and attacked her, she hypothesises that they must be "students" pulling a prank ("Rose", series 1, episode 1, 00:05:59 - 00:06:00). At this point her initial, habitualised, perception of reality has failed to rationalise the events in the storeroom, and so Rose cognitively comes to terms with the SFnal event she has witnessed via a different interpretation of it—an interpretation which likewise presumes that it was an entirely mundane phenomenon.

After the Doctor disabuses her of this hastily formed assumption, however, Rose's habitual perception of reality is shattered. When she emerges wide-eyed from the basement back onto the streets of London, she has become dehabitualised to the contemporary world following the novelty of encountering an alien species, and is subsequently almost run over by a taxi after walking out into the road. This taxi comes just as close to killing her as the Autons did; therefore, the banal threat of a road accident temporarily subsumes the existential threat of the Autons within the episode's rhetorical sphere. Likewise, when her alarm clock next sounds, the shot in which it does so ostensibly appears to be an exact recreation of the shot in which it sounded the previous morning. She turns it off automatically, only for her mother to remind her that there is no sense in her getting up, as she has "no job to go to" ("Rose", series 1, episode 1, 00:09:55 - 00:09:57) after the Doctor exploded the department store at which she worked, in order to destroy a number of Autons.

At this early stage, the SFnal nova of the show's narrative exert a profound impact upon Rose's life, but over the course of her travels with the Doctor throughout the following series her everyday life gradually becomes increasingly SFnal itself. Accordingly, the nova she encounters become familiar to her, and her twenty-first century life on Earth phenomenologically becomes unfamiliar to her. A few episodes later, she has become so inured to existence aboard the TARDIS that she is able to explain to her boyfriend Mickey that the reason pedestrians do not notice the time machine is due to its "cloaking device"

("Boom Town", series 1, episode 11, 00:05:28 - 00:05:28). She is no longer remotely attuned to the mundane existence Mickey continues to live on a daily basis, however, and is consequently surprised when he tells her that he is now dating "Trisha from the shop" ("Boom Town", series 1, episode 11, 00:28:40 - 00:28:42). Rose is specifically surprised to be reminded that the mundane lives of (post)humans in her contemporary world have continued unabated in her absence.

Rose's experiences, however, are the precursors to the alteration of the mundane lives of her entire species within the show's diegetic world. The Davies era of *Doctor Who* ostensibly begins at a point at which the (post)human species makes first contact with aliens, and in subsequent episodes, set in the contemporary world of the intended viewer, continues to document our species' subsequent encounters with aliens, along with detailing the related effects that such nova have on (post)human daily life. The extent to which contact with aliens has changed the (post)human people of the show's contemporary Earth is particularly evident in the series three episode "The Sound of Drums" (2007). At this point, the (post)humans of the show's diegetic world are habitualised to interacting with "all those ghosts and metal men, the Christmas Star" and similar alien species and technologies ("The Sound of Drums", series 3, episode 12, 00:13:07 - 00:13:12). Because they have become so familiar with alien contact, they are susceptible to the Master tricking them into believing that the fictitious Toclafane have made contact, and wish to offer their species a "place in the universe" ("The Sound of Drums", series 3, episode 12, 00:14:05 - 00:14:07).

Notably, Martha's sister Tish nonetheless refers to making contact with the 'Toclafane' as "first contact" ("The Sound of Drums", series 3, episode 12, 00:16:19 - 00:16:19) in a subsequent scene of the episode. Presumably to her, previous instances of first contact now seem mundane in contrast with the upcoming inter-species negotiation that ostensibly promises (post)humanity access to technologies with which interplanetary travel

could be facilitated. Despite this opportunity to explore the cosmos soon being thwarted, the (post)humans of the show are shown to be already beginning to develop advanced technologies by retro-engineering alien ones left behind by invasion forces. They do so directly in response to the threat posed by the recurrent alien invasions depicted throughout the narratives of the Davies era. The airborne aircraft carrier *Valiant* that is depicted for the first time within "The Sound of Drums," for instance, is a novum capable of atmospheric flight, and so exceeds the technological horizons of the contemporary reader's own (post)human society.

The Davies era of *Doctor Who* also regularly depicts the everyday lifeworlds of societies that are far more alien, as it does in the series three episode "Gridlock" (2007). Nonetheless, after the TARDIS lands in New New York—which is actually the fifteenth 'New' York to be built—Martha's initial assessment of the city is that it "[...] looks like the same old Earth to me, on a Wednesday afternoon" ("Gridlock", series 3, episode 3, 00:03:40 - 00:03:44). This line slyly provides a meta comment on the series' budget-circumscribed SF aesthetic, but also demonstrates the alacrity of Martha's (post)human mind at assimilating nova. The episode's subsequent SFnal premise centres upon the city's circular motorway, which is populated by flying cars, yet is overpopulated by them to the extent that it now takes six years to travel ten miles. As the character Thomas Kincaid Brannigan tells the Doctor, the fact that he has been able to drive "twenty yards" means that he's "having a good day" ("Gridlock", series 3, episode 3, 00:11:41 - 00:11:43). This is his everyday existence. Almost the entire population of New New York, it is revealed, is trapped within the traffic jam on the motorway, and live their entire lives without leaving their cars. Any progress they make on the motorway is necessarily recursive, however, given that it is circular, and all its exits have been quarantined.

"Gridlock's" central novum has the estranging quality that is characteristic of SF, yet

takes its speculative premise from extrapolating the (post)human social concern of overcongestion, so its novelty is also directly cognisant to its (post)human reader. The novel qualities of the traffic jam have largely faded by the midpoint of the episode, and the Doctor takes a journey down through the cars on lower layers to reach the fast lane at the bottom of the queue. With each subsequent car he enters, his interaction with its residents takes up a shorter proportion of the episode's narrative. Hence, with each subsequent car he enters, the episode's plot is further elided. The assumption guiding the production decision here operates on the presumption that the viewer's mind must be guided towards further nova within the text in order for it to continue to comprise cognitively engaging SF.

Nova, such as the airborne cars of "Gridlock", undergo novum decay intratextually, by becoming phenomenologically familiar to viewers. As David Roden emphasises, "we do not know what it would be like to encounter or *be* posthuman" (Roden 124), and hence the tendency of nova to fade in imaginative potency within the narratives of *Doctor Who* gestures towards the show's non-linear and hence non-eschatological figuration of technological development. Consequently, as the mechanism of cognitive engagement portends, Davies's *Doctor Who* does not depict a plethora of nova in order to suggest that "the destiny of humanity is [...]" to be found in our technologies (Suvin 13). Rather, it depicts such nova as a statement upon the entirely mundane fundament of our technologized existences as (post)humans. Hence, the show critiques the technocentrism of contemporary societies, by demonstrating that posthuman existence will appear just as mundane to us as our present daily lives do.

The series three episode "42" (2007) provokes another particularly conspicuous dramatisation of the co-constitutive relation between the (post)human present and posthuman future. It formulates this posthuman drive by overtly rendering the dialectical tension between the SFnal elements of its narrative and Martha's relationship with her mother, who

remains "half a universe away" back on Earth ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:04:08 -
00:04:09). At the beginning of the episode, the Doctor upgrades Martha's mobile phone to
give it "universal roaming" ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:00:10 - 00:00:10), a privilege he
had also previously granted to Rose. Nevertheless, he makes it clear that she will still need to
"know the area code" ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:00:22 - 00:00:23) in order to call any
specific planet—the upgrade is evidently not enough of a technological advancement to save
her the mundane task of having to remember to prefix Earth phone numbers before she makes
a call. Presumably, each time she wishes to call anyone on Earth from this point on, she now
has to enter an additional set of digits. This upgrade in technological terms is therefore a
downgrade in terms of practical usability from Martha's perspective, tempering the newfound
functionality of her phone to call other planets with a decidedly mundane carryover.

   Later in the same episode, it becomes apparent that a series of twenty-nine identical
security doors sealed with different passwords stand between the crew of the *SS Pentallian*
and its auxiliary controls. By the time Martha reaches area seventeen, however, the episode's
narrative has depicted only three of the twelve verification questions which have elapsed
within the plot. Since there are more interesting novelties playing out onboard the ship at the
same point of the plot during which Martha and Riley are progressing systematically through
the series of doors, the narrative depicts the other events instead. Their further progress is
therefore elided, once it has been established that their endeavours are repetitive enough to
scarcely merit being detailed within the programme's narrative any further. In order to open
one of the security doors which the episode's narrative does depict Riley and Martha
unlocking, Martha must use her newly upgraded mobile phone to call her mother back on
Earth. She does so in order to ascertain whether it was Elvis Presley or the Beatles "who had
the most pre-download" number one singles ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:09:39 - 00:09:40).
This scene not only implies that the survival of the crew of the *SS Pentallian* depends on a

mundane fact from Martha's (post)human life in modernity—and thus there is a direct causal relationship between the (post)human past/present and the posthuman future—but also employs the interchange between Martha and her mother to comically undercut the dramatic tension of the SFnal scene. The phrasing of this security question additionally implies that the advent of the Internet continues to comprise a historically significant threshold of (post)human progress in the forty-second century.

Yet fascinatingly, in the short story "The Machine Stops" by E. M. Forster in which the concept of the internet originates, characters who use it already refer to it as "the wearisome Machine" (Forster 92). Therefore, in direct contrast to its momentous importance in the narrative of "42," prior to it being a tangible technology, the fictional progenitor of the internet was already a SFnal novum rendered in mundane terms. As this suggests, the proliferation of the notion of the Internet into (post)human life is rhizomatic and, likewise, the processes by which technologies are created and disseminated is rarely linear. As Roden stresses, although "the human population is now part of a complex technical system whose long-run qualitative development is out of the hands of the humans within it", our species is inclined to quickly transition from regarding discrete technologies as novel to regarding them instead simply as cultural wallpaper (Roden 165).

Martha's survival depends on her ability to convince Francine to research the answer to the Elvis/Beatles question online, yet her mum is principally annoyed that Martha hasn't been answering her phone calls or replying to her messages. Even when Francine does sit down at her laptop in her mundane white-walled living room to attempt to find the answer, she is delayed by the fact that "the mouse is unplugged" ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:11:15 - 00:11:15). The ludicrous contrast between their respective situations functions to put Martha's plight in proper perspective, and makes the strange happenings onboard the *SS Pentallian* cognitively resonant. As Francesca Ferrando states, since "most human societies

have increasingly adopted daily habits of living that are leading to a point of non-return in ecological and sustainable terms", the everyday lifeworld must accordingly be recognised as an essential site through which (post)human agency is manifested (Ferrando 104). If we are to become posthuman, Ferrando suggests, the damaging environmental consequences of our everyday lifeworlds upon the planet we inhabit must be understood. This objective, the paper suggests, is achieved by viewers' cognitive engagement with the manifest depiction of their everyday lifeworld within the Davies era of *Doctor Who*.

After the correct answer — Elvis — has been used to open the security door, Francine demands "a serious talk" ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:12:44 - 00:12:46) with her daughter, only for her demand to be drowned out by a nearby crew member's scream as another crew member vaporises her endothermically. Although our present and the text's future are engaged in a ludic interplay which emphasises the posthuman potential of our species, the two timeframes of "42" are different to such an extent that they can scarcely coexist in dialogue with each other. When she and Riley are on the verge of falling into the Torajii sun, Martha calls Francine once more, this time desperate to talk about anything other than her own impending demise, such as "what [her Mum] had for breakfast, what [she] watched on telly" ("42", series 3, episode 7, 00:28:27 - 00:28:31). Martha can gain comfort through this act, but the act of calling her mother cannot in any way prevent or even delay her impending incineration. Martha's mobile phone thus figures within the schema of "42" as a modern (post)human apparatus that is not only an intermediary means of advancing towards a broadly defined posthuman state, but also an apparatus which will be redundant, even laughably anachronistic, in such a setting. Hence, in this instance, the yawning technological lacuna between the two timeframes of the episode—in one, a (post)human struggles to operate a laptop, but in the other interstellar travel is utterly routine—symbolically demonstrates that our (post)human societies are far from being truly posthuman.

Later in series three, the episode "Blink" (2007) once again employs the (post)human mundane lifeworld as a central aspect of its SF narrative. Whereas the vast majority of alien species in *Doctor Who* are designed along aesthetic lines which deviate from the visual rhetoric of the viewer's everyday life, the Weeping Angels introduced by the episode are visually indistinguishable from statues. Indeed, as the episode's coda emphasises—through its rapid montage of shots of numerous real-life statues—humanoid statues are near ubiquitous in modern societies, and it is precisely the uncanny figure of the (post)human everyday lifeworld which haunts "Blink." As Erik Davis contends, our everyday lives are predicated upon the basis of ingenious technologies which, for instance, "[...] use the electromagnetic dimensions for heating up Pop-Tarts and transmitting golf tournaments" (Davis 40), despite the fact that the scientific and mechanical basis of these technologies remains alien to the vast majority of us. "Blink" is considered by many fans and critics to be one of the scariest episodes of *Doctor Who* (Jones; Raisler et al.); it is scary precisely because its near-invincible antagonists uncannily play on the notion that the unexamined aspects of the technologized lives we all live daily, yet take for granted, might in fact harbour secret meaning—and perhaps even embody danger. When she first glimpses a Weeping Angel in an abandoned house, the episode's primary protagonist, Sally Sparrow, has no idea whatsoever that she is looking at a creature almost "as old as the universe" ("Blink", series 3, episode 10, 00:31:39 - 00:31:40). She is likewise entirely unaware that it is genetically coded to remain quantum-locked when viewed by any living creature and, hence, although it ostensibly appears to be an utterly inanimate humanoid effigy made of rock, it is actually one of the fastest and deadliest creatures in the universe. By evoking the arcane aspect of the Turing Paradox[8] in explicit relation to the manner by which the Weeping Angels' statuesque state is simultaneously unknowable and unobservable to (post)humans, their tendency to become

---

[8] For a succinct definition, see Harris and Stodolsky, 1982.

quantum-locked whenever observed can be seen to emblematise the impenetrability of our species' scientific advances. In a similar vein, by underlining "[...] the dependence of subjectivity on [the] iterating technical infrastructure" of everyday life, Roden emphasises that the technologies we use on a daily basis fundamentally—yet unpredictably—alters the mental disposition of our species (189). The gnostic quality of the Weeping Angels is therefore symptomatic of the ubiquity of scientifically and technologically mediated products within contemporary (post)human societies, expressing a trepidation at our reliance upon such products given their cognitive impenetrability.

When Sally later returns to the house, and remarks that the episode's premise is a "bit ITV" ("Blink", series 3, episode 10, 00:04:53 - 00:04:54), she remains convinced that the Weeping Angel is nothing more than a statue. This assumption structures her thought processes to the extent that she is initially unable to parse the visual evidence that "It's got closer to the house" in the intervening time ("Blink", series 3, episode 10, 00:05:40 - 00:05:42). Specifically, Weeping Angels prey on the tendency of our species to become habitualised to seemingly motionless objects. Their mode of offense thus exploits the extent to which millions of years of evolution have conditioned the action of blinking to be such a habitual act that we are scarcely able to prevent ourselves from doing it impulsively, even when we consciously try to take control of the semi-autonomic reflex. Weeping Angels remain quantum-locked when within another creature's visual field. Therefore, Sally and Larry's best defence against them is to hold visual contact with them and refrain from blinking for as long as physically possible. This, they soon realise, is a task which is far easier said than done. In multiple instances, a character is left alone face to face with a Weeping Angel and must make a concerted effort to maintain eye contact with it by not blinking — in order that they are not touched by it and transported backwards in time as a result of it feeding off their temporal energy. In each of these sequences, the camera slowly pans

forward into a close-up shot of the character's eye as they face a statue exhibiting teeth and claws significantly larger and sharper than they had previously seemed.

In addition to the Weeping Angels, "Blink" works to expose the underlying and characteristically (post)human interstices between the purportedly dichotomous categories of the novel and the everyday in SF in multiple other ways. As a Doctor-lite episode, it consciously attempts to tell an engaging SFnal narrative with as little recourse to the programme's centralising novum as possible, and so revitalises the SFnal format of the long-running show. Indeed, the show's eponymous centuries-old Time Lord appears in person for fewer than five minutes of the episode's entire narrative, and plays only a supporting role in the achievement of its *eucatastrophe*. As the Doctor spends the majority of "Blink" trapped in 1969 without his TARDIS, Sally and Larry must take on his heroic mantle and work to defeat the Weeping Angels without his companion, a sonic screwdriver, a psychic paper, or—for the majority of the plot—even access to the TARDIS. Yet through a prominent recursive element of its narrative—a film of the Doctor giving Sally and Larry advice on how to defeat the Weeping Angels—the episode nonetheless allows its eponymous protagonist to influence the events unfolding in Wester Drumlins in 2007. This advice is not, however, imparted from any SFnal medium, but instead has been encoded as an Easter egg on each of the seventeen DVDs that Sally owns. Like the Weeping Angels themselves, her collection of DVDs which had previously seemed entirely commonplace to Sally is now transformed into something profoundly novel. The first time we see the DVD Easter egg, it is fittingly part way through, playing on repeat in the background of a shot, and thus is incomprehensible at the first viewing. Sally and the episode's viewer then encounter sections of the Doctor's monologue multiple times over the course of the episode, and by the point in the narrative at which it is first played from start to end in full, both the viewer and Sally have become habitualised to its informational content. Larry, in fact, has seen the monologue so many times that he claims to

Sally that he has the line "the Angels have the phone box [...] on a t-shirt", since it has become so familiar an utterance to him ("Blink", series 3, episode 10, 00:31:21 - 00:31:25).[9] Hence, the episode is able to cognitively shock its viewing parties by eventually transforming what formerly appeared to be a film of the Doctor vocalising a range of non-sequiturs into one half of a fully-fledged conversation between him and Sally, which purposefully informs her of precisely what the Weeping Angels are and how she can defeat them. By new import being generated from the film which both parties have at this point seen repeated multiple times already, and thus already believed themselves to be familiar with, the episode demonstrates SFnal nova to be contextual and phenomenological. As in this instance, nova are not fixed entities, but rather, the estranging potency of any given novum is subjectively contingent, and depends both upon the viewer's acclimatisation toward its SFnal content, and the context of its deployment within the show.

The phenomenological aspect of novelty in everyday (post)human life is also emphasised in the episode "Partners in Crime" (2008), which opens series four. At its outset, Donna Noble and the Doctor separately infiltrate the headquarters of Adipose Industries, both doing so under the guise of being health and safety inspectors. They both interview workers at the company's call centre and separately discover that it is in fact the front for an alien breeding scheme which mines the body fat of (post)humans—not through any palpably defamiliarising alien technology—but rather through a new variety of diet pills.[10] Those taking the diet pills inexplicably lose one kilogram of their body weight at precisely "ten minutes past one, every night, bang on the dot without fail" ("Partners in Crime", series 4, episode 1, 00:06:18 - 00:06:22). Unbeknownst to its users, the pill causes the parthenogenesis

---

[9] Perhaps inevitably, the meta quality of this line has since been capitalised upon by numerous online clothing designers attempting to appeal to the *Doctor Who* fandom. This cultural response to "Blink" is a telling example of the contemporary SF genre's mainstream cultural position, since it demonstrates that the show's nova are liable to being reduced to the level of the truly mundane through fandom.

[10] Medicines are a pertinent example of a technology which the majority of (post)humans interact with, yet which few cognitively comprehend the full scientific basis of.

of their body fat at this time in the morning, generating a live Adipose from it. Although (and perhaps precisely *because*) they do not understand exactly how it operates, most of the pill's users have already accepted the imposition of this strange technology into their sociocultural lifeworld. To the (post)humans of the episode's diegetic world, the diet pills are now just another 'thing' within lives already saturated with 'things'. Along the same line of thought, Donna herself has decided that the spaceship Titanic, which nearly crashed into Buckingham Palace during the earlier episode "Voyage of the Damned" (2007), was simply "a hoax" ("Partners in Crime", series 4, episode 1, 00:25:24 - 00:25:24). She accordingly only comes to understand the alien nature of the pill inadvertently, after using the toilet room where another character happens to be undergoing full bodily parthenogenesis. Later, when Donna arrives home, her mother berates her for having missed tea-time, remaining entirely unaware of the alien events her daughter has witnessed. The diet pills and the Adipose are therefore symptomatic of the hegemonic predominance of fatphobic ideologies in contemporary Western societies. The episode patently science fictionalises the ubiquity of such currents of thought and, by doing so, reveals the extent to which fatphobic ideologies comprise a banal yet pervasive form of biopolitical control.

"Partners in Crime" additionally makes it apparent that Donna no longer feels that she belongs on Earth since the SFnal events of "The Runaway Bride" (2006), and, at the beginning of the episode, she is consumed with the prospect of finding the Doctor again, in order to be able to journey through time and space with him once more. She states that she "[...] woke up the next morning [to the] same old life" ("Partners in Crime", series 4, episode 1, 00:33:24 - 00:33:26), and struggled to deal with its absolute normality since her phenomenological perspective had been altered so radically. For her, contemporary life has become too mundane in contrast with all the strange 'things' that she witnessed during the process of suppressing the Racnoss invasion. The next day, she and the Doctor continue their

parallel investigations into Adipose Industries. In order to be able to stay in the building overnight whilst remaining undiscovered, Donna hides in a toilet cubicle, and the Doctor hides in a broom cupboard. After the humanoid alien, Matron Cofelia, discovers them, they attempt to flee in a cradle—which would usually be employed to clean the windows of the office block—but their escape is thwarted by Cofelia's sonic pen. Thus, as the episode progresses, the ostensibly pedestrian office block and its associated paraphernalia become defamiliarised by playing host to numerous SFnal set pieces, to the extent that eventually the office block effectively *is* a SFnal setting in all but aesthetic.

In the Doctor-lite series four episode "Turn Left" (2008), meanwhile, Donna is possessed by a Time Beetle after meeting an enigmatic fortune teller and is forced to relive a pivotal decision in her own timestream. This pivotal choice is the moment at which she chose to turn left instead of right at a road junction and consequently got a temp job at H.C. Clements, met and fell in love with Lance Bennett and in turn met the Doctor in "The Runaway Bride." The first iteration of this pivotal, yet ostensibly utterly picayune, decision is rapidly followed in quick succession within the episode's narrative by its second iteration in which Donna is forced to make the opposite decision and consequently turns right instead. By its conceit—that as a direct consequence of this alternate everyday decision Donna never met the Doctor—the episode proceeds to formulate an alternative history of the revised series of *Doctor Who's* own established canon.

Since Donna never met the Doctor in this new chronology, she is not there to save him from his hubris at the centre of the Earth during "The Runaway Bride," and he subsequently dies after preventing the Racnoss invasion, without getting the chance to regenerate. Donna thereafter relives many of the subsequent alien invasions of the Davies era within the new timeline the Time Beetle has created—a timeline in which the Doctor is no longer alive to intervene on behalf of the interests of Earth's (post)human population.

Therefore, when the Judoon teleport the Royal Hope Hospital onto the moon in "Smith and Jones" (2007), there is now only one human survivor of what has become a tragedy, and Martha is among the dead. Donna watches coverage of the extraterrestrial occurrence on the news with her mother, Sylvia. and her grandfather, Wilf. Donna and Sylvia, however, are far too cognitively absorbed by the mundane aspects of their lives to expend any attention whatsoever upon the momentous events unfolding on the television screen. In despair, Wilf remarks, "they took that hospital all the way to the moon, and you're banging on about raffle tickets!" ("Turn Left", series 4, episode 11, 00:12:52 - 00:12:56). Although the lottery is a weekly occurrence, and the Judoon's transformation of the hospital is a unique phenomenon, such a novel event has only momentarily interrupted the routine mundanity of Sylvia and Donna's lives.

In a meta comment on the Davies era's recursive penchant for alien invasions of Earth in Christmas episodes, Rose advises Donna to "get out" of London the following Christmas ("Turn Left", series 4, episode 11, 00:15:23 - 00:15:23). She does, and thus survives the nuclear holocaust visited upon London by the collision of the spaceship Titanic with Buckingham Palace. The Adipose devastate America. The Sontarans' ATMOS stratagem is narrowly thwarted, but only by the Torchwood team sacrificing their lives to save (post)humanity. Subsequently, all the lights of the surrounding galaxies begin blinking out— without the Doctor's intervention, the sentient populations of their planets are just as condemned to extinction as the episode implies that (post)humanity itself is. As "Turn Left" therefore emphasises, Donna's decision to turn either left or right out of Little Sutton Street becomes truly momentous, and she must now return to "the most ordinary day in the world" ("Turn Left", series 4, episode 11, 00:37:55 - 00:37:57), in order to change the momentary decision she made.

In the third narrated iteration of her decision, Donna rewrites her altered past by

committing suicide and causing a traffic jam on the road leading to Griffin's Parade, so that her past self turns left to avoid the traffic, and eventually meets the Doctor once more. The multiple iterations of Donna's turn left/turn right decision are therefore absolutely central to the episode's SFnal premise—despite their ostensibly everyday character—and counterpoint the episode's revisitation of the alien invasions of Earth by alien species in earlier episodes. By taking a recursive journey through the Davies era of *Doctor Who's* established canon, "Turn Left" ultimately affirms that although he may need to be assisted by a (post)human companion, the Doctor is the predominant constituent of the show's canon which is responsible for the continued existence of (post)humanity.

As becomes clear by the copious number of alien invasions of Earth—and of London in particular—during the Russell T. Davies era of *Doctor Who*, this period of the show challenges human exceptionalist ideologies by rhetorically positing that a superior alien must repeatedly intervene in (post)human affairs in order to ensure our survival. The show which bears his namesake contends that without the Doctor, we would have been annihilated numerous times, and emphasises that his continued heroism is entirely unmatched by any value exhibited by our own actions, delegitimising teleological humanistic narratives of progress which presume that we are the authors of our own destiny. If, "the story of technological progress continues to hold such power [because] it literalizes a quest myth we can no longer take seriously in ourselves" (Davis 325), then by evoking the (post)human viewer's everyday lifeworld in a manner which subverts the linear narrative of technological progress, this period of *Doctor Who* demonstrates that the (post)human present and posthuman future are sharply co-constitutive. By refuting the "notion of a one-dimensional becoming" in this manner, the show simultaneously implies that the very indeterminacy of our species' future comprises a distinct prospect for the materialisation of (post)human agency (Ferrando 181).

As this paper demonstrates, the Davies era of *Doctor Who* utilises the mechanism of cognitive engagement to produce its SFnal discourse. Via the phenomenological means by which it operates rhetorically, the show comprises a critique of technocentric ideologies by affirming that posthuman life will be just as mundane as our daily (post)human lives are. As such, the importance of novum decay to the show's SFnal discourse suggests that the Suvinian paradigm must be further challenged by Critical Posthumanist scholars of SF.

Works Cited

Andolfatto, Lorenzo. *Hundred Days' Literature: Chinese Utopian Fiction at the End of Empire, 1902 - 1910.* - Brill, 2019.

Aldiss, Brian W., and David Wingrove. *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction.* - Victor Gollancz, 1986.

Bradshaw, Simon, and Antony Keen et al., editors. *The Unsilent Library: Essays on the Russell T. Davies Era of the New Doctor Who.* Liverpool, The Science Fiction Foundation, 2011.

Davis, Erik. *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic + Mysticism in the Age of Information.* - Harmony Books, 1998.

Doctor Who. Series 1 - 4. BBC, 2005 - 2010.

Ferrando, Francesca. *Philosophical Posthumanism.* - Bloomsbury, 2019.

Forster, E. M.. "The Machine Stops." *Selected Stories / E. M. Forster*, edited by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell, - Penguin, 2001, pp. 91 - 123.

Gomel, Elana. "Science (Fiction) and Posthuman Ethics: Redefining the Human." *The European Legacy*, vol. 16, no. 3, May 2011, pp. 339 - 354.

Green, Bonnie, and Chris Willmott. "The Cybermen as Human.2." *New Dimensions in Doctor Who: Adventures in Space, Time and Television*, edited by Matt Hills, - I.B. Tauris, 2013, pp. 54 - 70.

Harris, R. A., and L. Stodolsky. "Two state systems in media and "Turing's paradox." *Physics Letters B*, vol. 116, no. 6, Oct. 1982, pp. 464 - 468.

Hay, Jonathan. "(Post)human Temporalities: Science Fiction in the Anthropocene."

KronoScope: Journal for the Study of Time, vol. 19, no.2, Sep. 2019, pp. 130 - 152.

Hayles, Katherine N.. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. - The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Ihde, Don. *Postphenomenology: Essays in the Postmodern Context*. - Northwestern University Press, 1993.

Jones, Paul. "Blink voted most terrifying Doctor Who episode – and Steven Moffat is the writer who scares us most." *Radio Times*, 31 Oct. 2014. <https://www.radiotimes.com/news/2014-10-31/blink-voted-most-terrifying-doctor-who-episode-and-steven-moffat-is-the-writer-who-scares-us-most/>. 9 Jun. 2019.

Krueger, Joel. "At Home In and Beyond Our Skin: Posthuman Embodiment in Film and Television." *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, edited by Michael Hauskeller, Thomas D. Philbeck and Curtis D. Carbonell, - Palgrave, 2015, pp. 172 - 181.

Leach, Jim. *Doctor Who*. - Wayne State University Press, 2009.

Midson, Scott. "One Is Too Few, but Two Are Too Many": Love as Hybridity in *eros* Mythology and Cyborg Romanticism." *Journal of Posthuman Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, Jul. 2019, pp. 25 - 44.

Raisler, Carrie, and Zack Handlen et al.. "Do *Doctor Who*'s Weeping Angels still terrify?" *AV Club*, 10 Feb. 2013. <https://tv.avclub.com/do-doctor-who-s-weeping-angels-still-terrify-1798240967>. 9 Jun. 2019.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative - Volume 1*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

--- . *Time and Narrative - Volume 3*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, -

The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Rieder, John. *Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System*. - Wesleyan University
Press, 2017.

Roden, David. *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human*. Routledge, 2015.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary
Genre*. - Yale University Press, 1979.