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Novum Decay

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Posthuman Science Fiction: *Novum Decay* in *Source Code*

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This article springs from the claim that representations of mundane human life are just as prominent as *nova* in contemporary sf, and that through their generative interplay the genre figures ‘a transient dreamscape for visitation by the (post)human mind, via which the reader gains an expanded perception of not only their own empirical environment, but also of posthuman possibility’ (Hay 2019: 31). The presence of the quotidian in sf confirms the capacity of the (post)human mind to transcend the presumptions of traditional humanism. By deconstructing the rhetorical role of *nova* in Duncan Jones’s *Source Code* (2011), I demonstrate that the novel content of sf fades intratextually, just as *nova* within the genre tend towards entropy intertextually; an accumulative process I shall term *novum decay*.

This thesis problematises the popular notion that genre sf constitutes a linear, self-referencing schema, or ‘megatext’ (Brooke-Rose 2010: 243), which purportedly ‘works by embedding each new work, [...] as a self-structuring web of non-mundane signifiers and syntagms, in an even vaster web of interpenetrating semantic and tropic givens or vectors’ (Broderick 1995: 59). For Damien Broderick and others, sf’s rhetorical components are exclusively comprised by *nova*. Yet, as Joanna Russ demonstrates, the proliferation of the sf genre itself invariably precipitates the intertextual ‘phenomenon of genre material wearing out’ (Russ 2007: 221), since *nova* cannot remain novel in a genre where their imaginative content is depreciated by overuse. This article accordingly expands upon Russ’s premise by challenging the centrality of the *novum* to Darko Suvin’s model of cognitive estrangement, and demonstrating its intratextual instability.

In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), Suvin famously theorizes that sf texts are fundamentally defined by their capacity to produce cognition of the unknown through the

deployment of estranging nova. Suvin proposes that the novum is ‘always codetermined by the unique’, enabling it to delimit ‘relations basically new and unknown in the author’s environment’, and he accordingly extrapolates that the sf genre has an implicitly utopian political character (Suvin 1980: 64). ‘The Suvin Event’, as Gerry Canavan terms the seismic effect of his critical intervention, ‘has framed four subsequent decades of work in the field’ (Canavan 2016: xii). Much like Donald Wollheim’s teleological claim that sf ‘speaks of an infinite range that is open to humanity in the universe’ (Wollheim 1971: 117), Suvin’s seminal theory of sf is premised upon the assumption that the genre’s megatext proceeds towards the *telos* of ‘the destiny of humanity’ (Suvin and Angenot 1988: 13).

In a contemporary context, however, Suvin’s eschatological emphasis upon the novum as the centralising literary device of the sf genre is both outdated and overly prescriptive. Since the Suvinian paradigm assumes that all sf is ‘essentially about grand narratives of science’ (Keen 2019: 14), it valorises a model of human exceptionalism. Yet, since the start of the twenty-first century, the ‘concept of “human” has been broadly challenged, while “posthuman” and “transhuman” have become terms of philosophical and scientific enquiry’ (Ferrando 2019: 21). Given the extensive challenge to the term ‘human’ by posthumanist thinkers such as Francesca Ferrando, N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti, it is necessary to reconsider the extent to which Suvin’s humanistic appraisal is still pertinent to contemporary sf.

The Novum

It remains widely accepted within sf criticism that novelty is the defining feature of the genre. For example, it has been variously argued that sf is reliant upon ‘the critical power’ of the novum (Rieder 2017: 4); that the genre ‘literally distances the traveller from the familiar’ (Seed 1995: x); that sf proves ‘that we need not and should not settle for the familiar

contingencies of everyday existence' (Freedman 2009: 70); that the genre 'depends on novelty' (Shippey 2016: 27); and that it 'invoke[s] a phenomenological world distinct from the quotidian environment' of the reader (Cline 2014: 252). To challenge the assumption that sf is implicitly 'humanistic' (Suvin and Angenot 1988: 45), it is crucial to problematize the category of the novum itself so as to generate a post-humanistic conception of the genre.

To that end, a number of critics have questioned the centralising role the novum plays within the model of cognitive estrangement. China Miéville, for instance, asserts that 'the cognition effect' is no more than an act of 'persuasion' in which the reader willingly succumbs to the rhetorical skill of the author rather than the scientific accuracy of the novum (Miéville 2009: 238). For Miéville, Suvin's scientific usage of the novum is not only a mystification but also ideological; it nostalgically echoes 'a strangely prelapsarian, often instrumentalised, science and bureaucratic rationality' (240). By contrast, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay proposes that in the hypercapitalist milieu of the twenty-first century the 'emergence of novums has accelerated to the point that they matter not just to academic philosophers and futurologists, but to people pursuing their everyday tasks' (Csicsery-Ronay 2011: 58). He therefore suggests that 'the novum, far from being at the front line of humanistic history, becomes an ironic model of quotidian reality' (59) when it appears within contemporary works of sf. Likewise, Rhys Williams concludes that sf 'is no longer capable of estranging us from the hegemonic discourse for which it operates as ideological cheerleader. It is limited [...] by an orientation towards alterity articulated through an idealized imaginary of capitalist enlightenment and progress' (Williams 2014: 626).

Despite the insightfulness of these criticisms, the conclusion that sf's novel content has become intractably conservative as a result of its alliance to a grand narrative of technological, scientific and capitalist modernity is greatly reductive. Far from decentring the novum, such a criticism continues to privilege its defining role within the genre, albeit from a

negative perspective. What is required instead is an expanded understanding of sf's rhetorical strategies that may make sense of why it retains its popularity within contemporary media. This is especially the case when so many of the technologies that sf once fantasized have now become ubiquitous, even banal, realities. At the same time, as once fantastical devices become pervasive aspects of our lived realities, so as human beings we increasingly interact with technology in an interstitial territory that can be best regarded as '(post)human' (Hayles 1999: 246).

Hence, whilst the repetitive, mundane or banal aspects of (post)human life are often a substantial aspect of realist texts, in works of contemporary sf these quotidian elements have a specialized function and are fundamental to the genre's drive toward cognition of that which is presently alien. Whereas Suvin states that 'the boredom of a nine-to-five drudgery relieved [only] by flashes of TV commercials' (Suvin 1980: 24) is anathema to sf, it is precisely this type of social lethargy that necessarily underlies contemporary sf's nova in order to focalize its posthuman impulse. Despite (or even because of) the perpetual anxiety of obsolescence, sf relies on the perpetual 'invention of new living metaphors that redescribe metaphor' and 'allow a new conceptual production to be grafted onto the metaphorical production itself' (Ricoeur 1994: 294). However, whereas for Paul Ricoeur metaphor is vital 'by virtue of the fact that it introduces the spark of imagination' (303), in sf, this spark has a finite lifespan. Since any novel defamiliarization is ultimately unsustainable, every novum the genre proposes is subject to decay, such that this process has become central to the production of new sf.

Novum Decay

The nova of sf texts are fundamentally unstable, decaying both intratextually and intertextually, an assertion which is underpinned by recent cognitive research. In a number of

scientific studies, researchers have used functional magnetic resonance imaging technologies to measure the activation areas present within the brain during the activity of reading. In one such study, ‘metaphor processing selectively activate[s] sensory areas in the modality from which the metaphors primarily derived their meaning’ (Lacey et al 2012: 418), which for the reading of sf suggests that the reader’s ability to cognitively engage with sfal nova must necessarily be grounded in their understanding of familiar, mundane phenomena. In addition, ‘the familiarity of sentences can affect speed and accuracy of processing’ (Desai et al 2011: 2378), including familiarity with a given metaphor:

The target is understood in terms of the base domain through motoric simulations, which gradually become less detailed while still maintaining their roots in the base domain. The negative correlation of primary motor areas with metaphor familiarity and the activation of secondary motor regions for metaphors regardless of familiarity suggest a gradual abstraction rather than a switch in the processing mode. (2384)

These findings suggest that readers’ cognition of metaphors depends upon ‘a gradual abstraction process, whereby relatively detailed simulations are used for understanding unfamiliar metaphors’ but ‘these simulations become less detailed and involve only secondary regions as the familiarity increases’ (2385).

Thus, when an sf work deploys a novum, the arresting metaphoricity of that novum invariably fades, from the moment at which the reader is able to cognitively comprehend its novel content in relation to his/her own reality, while the estranging quality of the novum also proportionately diminishes. The reader gradually approaches cognizance of the novum and, particularly in the case of texts where mundane signifiers are explicitly deployed alongside nova, the otherwise mundane elements function as a catalyst to the cognitive process which facilitates the reader’s increasing comprehension of the sfal elements.

Therefore, in accordance with Viktor Shklovsky's assertion that defamiliarization functions to 'transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of new perception' (Shklovsky 2004: 19), textual representations of the mundane elements of the reader's lifeworld become crucial sfnal devices in themselves. Accordingly, alongside sf's proliferation into the everyday cultural sphere and its attendant emergence as a mainstream genre, the diegetic worlds of many texts within contemporary sf have become increasingly saturated by mundane realism. This turn is conversant with but significantly broadens the scope of Geoff Ryman's 'Mundane Manifesto' (2007), which presumes that the genre's banal elements entirely reside within sf texts set exclusively 'on Earth' (Ryman 2007). Observably, a vast range of contemporary sf works regularly utilize mundane elements in order to facilitate their readers' cognitive engagement, and therefore gesture towards the (post)human character of the contemporary Western lifeworld.

As David Roden states, since human 'technologies are intrinsically functionally indeterminate and multistable' (Roden 2015: 159), our highly technologized lifeworld has become sufficiently everyday in its own terms, despite its immense range of technical complexities. Thus, many contemporary sf texts implicate their audiences in consideration of the potentiality of their posthuman futures by evoking the banality of their technological present in novel terms. The phenomenological process by which nova decay in the minds of their consumers is conspicuously illustrated, both structurally and visually, in the film *Source Code*.

The Quotidian

The opening panorama of *Source Code* is an extensive aerial shot, which portrays a cityscape indistinguishable from that of many contemporary US cities. Clearly, the film's setting is not intended to be immediately defamiliarizing, and so initially, its near-future depiction of

(post)human life is far more symptomatic of films within the realist tradition than it is sfnal. The pedestrian nature of the opening sequence of *Source Code* bears resonance with William Gibson's assertion that despite cyberspace having been the paramount novum of his *Sprawl Trilogy*, it has become just 'another part of the city' (Paikin) since the advent of real-life digitality. As Gibson emphasises, the reader's relation towards the novelty which cyberspace originally encompassed has now been redefined by 'its ubiquity and the absolute quotidian banality of much of what [...] we do with it' (Paikin) in everyday life. Veronica Hollinger echoes Gibson's assertion when she states that 'the present has already been invaded by the future, has already become the stuff of science fiction' (Hollinger 2008: 246).

Correspondingly, *Source Code's* opening draws a contrast between the routine familiarity of Chicago's cityscape, and the considerable posthuman morphology that it encloses on closer inspection. By presenting a multitude of cars, metal buildings and a train from an abnormal viewpoint, the aerial shot renders individual (post)humans invisible, offering a perspective from which we appear to be mechanical or technological entities rather than biological beings. This forced perspective implies that our species' interface with modern technology is extensive enough that 'the contours of our own extended bodies' can, in pragmatic terms, be 'found in our technologies' (Kozel 2007: 99). *Source Code's* opening sequence therefore suggests that the periphery of the interface between our species and technology has blurred into indistinctness in the contemporary world, to the extent that the human/technology dualism is rendered invalid.

Through its mundane *mise en scène*, the film attains a defamiliarizing effect that exposes the already significantly posthuman nature of contemporary everyday life. As the opening of *Source Code* implies, the technological embeddedness of our species is already demonstrable in empirical terms. To take a related example, when walking, 'pedestrians [alter] their visual search behaviour and adaptive gait when using their phone compared to no

phone being present' (Timmis et al 2017: 17), which is also 'consistent with adopting an increasingly cautious stepping strategy which may serve to reduce the risk of tripping/falling' (17-18). As such, our species' interaction with mobile phones has over the course of forty years engendered an empirically demonstrable adjustment to the manner in which we have walked for millennia.

This finding draws a fruitful parallel with Hayles's suggestion that the co-constitutive relationship between our species and technology comprises 'a co-evolutionary spiral in which what we ma[k]e and what we bec[o]me' (Hayles 1999: 164) have become intractably intertwined. Furthermore, as proponents of substantivist theories of technology propose, technologies are non-neutral objects, and so the nature of our species metamorphoses in parallel with technological developments, since technologies 'are more than bundles of internal or external functions. They are materialized potentialities for generating new functions as well as modifiable strategies for integrating and reintegrating functions' (Roden 2015: 162). Indeed, we have reached the point where we cannot do without technologies; they are too firmly embedded in our everyday lives. We can therefore no longer be *we* without *they*, and hence the figure of the human has arguably been irreparably ruptured.

The indistinctness of the periphery between (post)humans and technology is made particularly apparent when Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) wakes on what appears to be a train. Although the film's narrative opens *in medias res* on an ostensibly pedestrian train journey, Stevens's wide-eyed survey of his environment reveals that it is entirely unfamiliar to him, and that he has no residual memory of getting on board. Although puzzled about his amnesia, he continues to ride the train as it travels through the city streets of Chicago. The film's visual rhetoric remains entirely absent of sfnal elements up until the point at which its first scene culminates with the train unexpectedly exploding in a giant fireball, at which point the mundane essence of its setting is inexorably shattered. As soon becomes apparent, the

prior realist plausibility of what appeared to be a train journey is actually fabricated by a novum within the diegetic world.

The train is the centrepiece of a simulated iterative environment – the eponymous Source Code – within which Stevens’s consciousness has already been immersed for an indeterminate amount of time. The train’s mundane setting therefore becomes *sfinal* each time subsequent iterations of the same simulation appear in the narrative, even as the Source Code’s novel qualities become familiar to the viewer via its characteristically iterative role as a novum. Additionally, it is implied that Stevens’s amnesia is a result of his mind having been wiped after numerous permutations of the same journey, in order that he experiences it afresh. As his forgetting of prior iterations of the Source Code simulation is akin to the cognitive phenomenon of habitualization towards the repetitive and/or everyday, his plight is analogous to a Western audience’s own habitualization towards their technologized lifeworlds.

The film’s eponymous novum is therefore neither novel nor mundane, but rather simultaneously novel *and* mundane. As its pseudoscientific rationalization within the film reveals, the Source Code technology co-opts a short-term memory track that briefly survives the brain’s necrosis to create the virtual environment that Stevens recurrently finds himself within. Although its nature could easily be misconstrued, the ‘Source Code is not time travel, rather [...] time reassignment’ (Jones 2011), and *de facto* time travel remains as impossible in the film’s diegetic world as it does in our own.

The Source Code is a governmentally developed and financed technology, utilized by a team of secret service operatives to mine the experiential data Stevens gleans from his recursive immersion within the memory track of a passenger killed in an act of terrorism, so as to prevent a subsequent attack. He is repeatedly re-immersed within the simulation until he succeeds in discovering the data that allows the US government to prevent the violent

disturbance to everyday life that the second attack would otherwise comprise. Crucially then, although the Source Code qualifies as a novum in the Suvinian paradigm – as it distinguishes the film’s diegetic world from our own – its technological novelty is deployed for a considerably pedestrian and bureaucratic purpose, and it has no broader impact on the lives of the (post)humans of the film’s diegesis than maintaining political and social hegemony.

Later, Stevens regains consciousness in what appears to be his corporeal body, and finds himself strapped to a chair in a dark room. Source Code’s operators explain to him that he ‘will have eight minutes, same as last time’ in his next immersion in the simulation. As the first narrated iteration of Stevens’s death occurred less than seven minutes into the film, a considerable portion of his interaction with the Source Code during that iteration has been elided, so that there exists a rudimentary disparity between the film’s plot and narrative.

The transition of Stevens’s consciousness back into the realm of the Source Code is narrated by means of a shot of a quacking duck flying over a lake, replicated verbatim from the first narrated iteration. Whilst on board the train, the minutiae of his journey unfold in exactly the same manner that they did before; a passenger spills her coffee as she passes in the aisle; a ticket collector checks Stevens’ ticket; and one commuter clumsily knocks a pile of papers out of the hand of another. The prominence of mundane components within the Source Code simulation facilitates a phenomenological dialectic between the audience’s lifeworld and the film’s. Additionally, the verbatim replication of events in the narrative attenuates the novelty of the Source Code novum from the viewers’ own perspectives. By implying that our everyday lifeworld is constantly encroaching into the realms of sf, the over-representation of the (post)human quotidian within the film links the sf world firmly back to ours, and *vice versa*.

Repetitiveness

Stevens experiences severe cognitive dissonance when he is returned to the simulation, and cannot compartmentalize the fact that he is experiencing a sequence of events which he has experienced before. He thereby proposes that ‘It’s the same train, but it’s different’, his desperate proclamation tacitly echoing Jacques Derrida’s assertion that that which ‘resonates like an old repetition [...] was already, but in an altogether different way’ (Derrida 2006: 15). Stevens spends the second narrated iteration under the conviction that the mundane facade of the simulation is ‘a distraction’ (Jones 2011) from his mission of locating the bomb, thereby upsetting his avatar’s colleague Christina (Michelle Monaghan).

By *Source Code*’s third narrated iteration, however, Stevens has come to recognize that each new permutation of the simulation encloses a reality equally as veritable as its preceding ones, despite their ostensible similitude and corresponding lack of verisimilitude. This time, he begins by setting a timer on his avatar’s watch; moves his foot away quickly enough that it does not get coffee spilt on it; produces his train ticket promptly; and entices Christina to detail the backgrounds of the commuters that she and his avatar regularly travel to work with. Through practice, he not only learns the sequence of events that transpire within the memory track but also how to manipulate his recursive experience in a manner conducive to his mission. Likewise, the film’s viewers have now seen three iterations of the memory track within the *Source Code* novum, so that they are gradually habituated to its novelty.

As Hayles emphasizes, (post)humans regularly ‘participate in systems whose total cognitive capacity exceeds our individual knowledge’, and yet ‘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 1999: 289). Our (post)human situation is accordingly an emergent phenomenon actualized by our creation of technologies which collectively surpass the limits of our individual intellects, and

the technological capacity of our species has cumulatively become greater than could be assumed by the sum of its component entities.

Therefore, the process of successfully navigating the technologized Western lifeworld is managed by means of the individual's phenomenological ability to cognitively become habituated towards a manifold variety of technologies that they are unable to understand. We may, for instance, use a microwave several times a week, but the majority of us would be clueless as to how to build one from scratch. When Stevens starts to manipulate the memory track's simulation, he demonstrates that the novelty of the Source Code has begun to decay from his phenomenological perspective, and yet crucially, the audience's own phenomenological perspective is implicated in the concomitant task of imaginatively assimilating the final aspect of *Source Code's* eponymous novum.

Concordantly, the subjective and phenomenological nature of the audience's perception of the mundane aspects of their own lifeworld comprises a vital, intratextual component of novum decay. Although the Source Code is inaugurated as a novum at the start of the film, by the time its sixth and seventh observed iterations occur, they are reported in a massively elided form, and comprise less than ten seconds of its narrative apiece. The rendering of these later iterations assumes that the viewer has, by this point, become habituated to the idiosyncrasies of the recursive Source Code simulation, and hence, they will already have effectively assimilated its posthuman novelty. By the time he undertakes the final iteration of the simulation, Stevens has become resolutely habituated to the Source Code. During the span of this final iteration, he not only manages to locate and detain the terrorist, but also has time to woo Christina, make peace with his father and hire a comedian aboard the train to perform a set. Stevens's rapport with the technology means he is able to achieve an outcome that not only meets but also exceeds the scope of his narrowly defined assignment.

Alan Wall states that metaphors become exhausted when they have ‘become so predictable that all the original defamiliarization has vanished. Then the metaphor has become a cliché and something new is needed to replace it’ (Wall 2009: 33). His definition of metaphor as an inherently transient textual device seems especially tenable when applied to the schema of contemporary sf texts such as *Source Code*. Although discrete nova undergo novum decay intratextually, this only emphasizes that the posthuman drive of sf functions intertextually and cumulatively, so that ‘the rapid exhaustion of a metaphor means that great progress is being made’ (Jones and Wall 2009: 101). As is true for the Source Code, sf texts deploy nova which become less novel as their narratives progress until, entropically, their defamiliarizing effect on the reader has been exhausted.

The Everyday

Nova inexorably decay throughout individual sf texts to become what Shippey refers to as ‘the datum’, ‘a discrete fact stated or implied in the passage’ (Shippey 2008: 12); ‘nearly all science fiction works have not one but many *nova* [...] just as any paragraph of any non-science fiction work will contain much *data*’ (Shippey 2016: 27). Data is immediately explicable to the reader and produces no defamiliarizing effect whatsoever. Although Shippey asserts that there exists a predilection towards nova rather than data in the sf genre, the two elements are concurrently extant and engaged within a complex dialectical accord. Whereas nova assert the significance of posthuman possibility, data stipulate the extent to which the prospective is embedded within the (post)human material present. The co-constitutive dialectic that exists between nova and data indicates the spuriousness of deterministic assessments of sf as an extended metaphor of linear technological progress.

Whilst the generative interplay between decaying nova and bare data maintains the functionality of the genre’s posthuman drive, it simultaneously precipitates the fact that sf

texts cannot establish nova which are too far removed from the technological horizon of the society which conditioned their textual production. As Fredric Jameson asserts, since total or radical otherness ‘encourages visions of the far future in which we will have lost almost everything that makes us identifiable to ourselves’ (Jameson 2005: 174), any depiction of true otherness within an sf text would necessarily be incomprehensible. Hence, representations of the audience’s everyday lifeworld form an indispensable cognitive connection between the currently known and the posthuman aspect of sf.

Although in *Source Code* Stevens’s decision to repeatedly enter the memory track is motivated by his desire to terminate the iterative cycle he is trapped within, he does eventually succeed and is rewarded accordingly. His release from recursive servitude within the simulation is cathartic and allows him to fulfil the film’s ‘heteronarrative’ (Roof 1996: 108) by winning Christina’s affections – an ending symptomatic of Judith Roof’s assertion that protagonists in sf texts who are characterized by multiplicity must eventually be ‘reduced to manageable singularity’ (78). Yet, crucially, the text’s eucatastrophe is brought about by Stevens’s choice to remain a part of the simulation, drawing a drastically posthumane resolution to the film since, in the final instance, ‘instead of seeking the release of death, he begins to pursue the possibility of a life somehow within Source Code, or within a parallel universe enabled by it’ (Wright, 2018: 81).

Whilst the multiple use of close-up shots of cameras throughout the film foregrounds the ubiquity which technology already holds in our world, and echoes fears that ‘our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert’ (Haraway 2017: 309), *Source Code*’s conclusion confirms that our future is enhanced just as much as it is threatened by our technological interaction. As this analysis has suggested, the figuration of repetition as a narrative element in modern sf transcends the didactic and totalitarian role by which repetitive schema often codified twentieth century dystopias. The repetitive schema of

Source Code does not in the final instance embody the dystopic by eschewing characters' agency, but instead typifies a more nuanced figuration which suggests that the utopian is achievable through our everyday (post)human lives.

This is apparent in the manner by which Stevens gradually learns to accept the truths of his technologized lifeworld as he manipulates the memory track he encounters in the *Source Code* more and more skilfully, before eventually choosing to continue his existence within it. Likewise, although our increasing engagement with technology and virtuality indicates a significant paradigm shift in our recorded history, our (post)human perceptions of what comprises our subjective everyday lifeworlds will continue to morph alongside our interaction with initially novel technologies.

As Roden argues, 'whatever kinds of bodies or minds posthumans may have, they will have to be discursively situated agents practically engaged within a common life-world' (Roden 2015: 75). In this light, mundanity is – rather antithetically – the most posthuman article a given sf text may represent. As our (post)human condition can only be sufficiently understood through a bifocal lens which considers the contemporary world and our past heritage in aggregate, the predominance of novum decay in modern sf demonstrates the ways in which 'humanity' is always already becoming posthuman. Thus, the quotidian or repetitive elements of contemporary sf provide a recognizable and fundamentally (post)human foundation, from which the genre's novelties are able to depart with radical intention to form its overarching imaginative, visionary drive.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that, contrary to Suvin's model of cognitive estrangement, banality does not merely form an ancillary feature of contemporary sf, but rather, comprises a vital component of it. If our 'vision of the imagination, [can be] both enlarged and subtly,

somberly transformed' (Alter 1978: 217) by great works of art, the manner by which sf texts expand the collective posthuman imagination through the process of novum decay is a hugely significant literary and cultural undertaking. Meanwhile, the sf genre maintains its axiological sensation of conveyed newness through the continual publication of new texts, so that its imaginative horizons develop continually in synergy with the concomitant development of (post)humanity.

Although Rita Felski is not discussing sf when she states that everyday life 'is, indisputably: the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds' (Felski 2000: 77), she astutely conjectures the evocative quality which mundanity actualises in dialogue with novelty within contemporary sf. As has been demonstrated, when nova decay in sf texts, the posthuman-imaginative aspect of those texts becomes familiar, and their novelty becomes phenomenologically contingent. The presence of novum decay within the genre therefore de-emphasizes eschatological readings of sf, and emphasises the posthuman potential enclosed by the possibility of development beyond the imaginative horizons which condition any given work of sf.

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