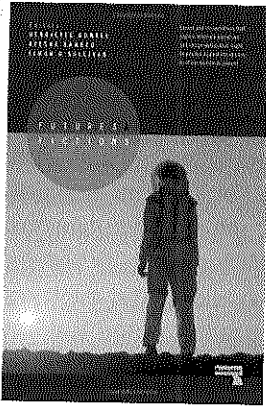


any potential flaws it may possess. For this reason, it serves as a significant scholarly contribution with the potential to further a growing dialogue between two fields that share profound similarities.



Simon O'Sullivan, Ayesha Hameed and Henriette Gunkel, eds. *Futures and Fictions* (Repeater Books, 2017, 408p, £9.99)

Reviewed by Matthew De Abaitua (University of Essex)

Futures and Fictions is an anthology of 'essays and conversations that explore alternate narratives and image-worlds that might be pitched against the impasses of our neoliberal present'. The book is dedicated to the late Mark Fisher whose *Capitalist Realism* (2009), published in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, renamed and recast postmodernism as a cultural logic that admitted to no alternative. The first chapter of *Capitalist Realism*, echoing Fredric Jameson's half-remembered quotation from *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), was entitled 'It's Easier to Imagine the End of the World than the End of Capitalism'.

Futures and Fictions is assembled by three lecturers from Goldsmiths College, London, and the content is drawn from that establishment's reputation for critical theory and artistic practice. Aside from a reprint of Ursula Le Guin's short story 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' (1973), a teasing exploration of the reader's resistance to utopian fiction, the anthology treats sf in its textual form as secondary to other cultural objects such as post-internet art, financial derivatives, manifestos and sonic art. The problem with textual sf is identified in an essay by Simon O'Sullivan: the need of sf as a literature and genre to be readable 'restricts the possibilities' in which theory can comfortably be materialized in the art. Let that complaint about readable texts stand as a warning.

By contrast, *Futures and Fictions* can be approached as a grab-bag of radical optimisms. Each of these impassioned possibilities could productively inform new sf works, textual or otherwise, since they wilfully align themselves with the wild and strange speculations of sf. Robin Mackay, for example, hypothesizes an 'extro-science fiction' in which the laws of nature are contingent and subject to change. Maverick physicists Roberto Mangabeira and Lee Smolin advance a similar theory, suggesting that, rather than searching for timeless laws, physicists must investigate hypotheses about how such laws might evolve.

Mackay's essay also explores the various meanings of the highly polysemous word 'plot': plot as in a casual chain of events in fictional time, plot as a piece of land, plot as an intrigue that occurs in the secret zone between on and off stage.

The agency of potential futures – whether imagined by governments, corporations, or individual writers – is pronounced at a time when the neoliberal version of the future has been contested by populist revolt, first in the form of the Brexit vote and then by the presidential election of Donald Trump. There is a process by which fictions make themselves real, what Mark Fisher refers to as 'hyperstition', a neologism that combines hype with superstition. So why not, in place of the dystopian vision of mass redundancy caused by automation, put forward the alluring paradox of luxury automated communism, in which the public realm is recast as a zone of luxuriance and possibility?

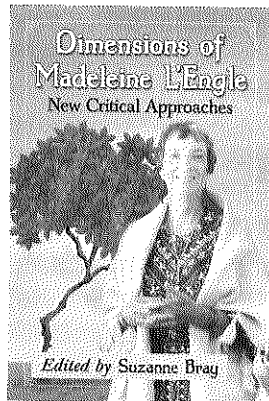
For O'Sullivan, financial derivatives possess a strange temporality that engineer the future from the present. This cultural engineering will be familiar to anyone who lived through the early boosterism of social media, in which the disruption of traditional media by the new platforms was posited as an inevitability and a liberating force. The Cambridge Analytica social media crisis of 2018 has exposed such cant. Power models the future through scenario planning and horizon-scanning, generating financial speculation and consumer trends. If you wish to counter power, the future is a territory that must be fought for. Also included here, the manifesto 'Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation', written by the polymorphous collective Laboria Cuboniks, refutes the emancipatory futurist rhetoric of the tech giants: 'Technology isn't inherently progressive. Its uses are fused with culture in a positive feedback loop that makes linear sequencing, prediction, and absolute caution impossible'. If technology cannot set us free, then we must look to our alienation as 'the labour of freedom's construction'. Vehemently anti-naturalist, 'nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent or "given"', this manifesto runs alongside cultural shifts in transgender and sexual identity. Unbridled utopianism, as Judy Thorne suggests in her interview with Fisher, is an act of wilful world-building that creates a counter-power to end capitalism while simultaneously creating a space to survive it.

The role of retreat and critique in world-building reminds me of Afrofuturism, which escapes into an imagined past (Ancient Egypt in the work of Sun Ra) and a possible future simultaneously. The world-building of Wakanda in *Black Panther* (2018), fusing tribal masks with advanced flying craft, exemplifies a temporality that is part-future, part-past. The dilemma for Wakanda is whether to remain in its privileged nowhere (or *nowhen*) of future-past or whether to make itself known to the wider world and its history, thereby entering the temporality of the present.

In *Futures and Fictions*, the temporality of Afrofuturism is explored in a

conversation between Henriette Gunkel and Daniel Kojo Schrade, concerning artistic practice in which the future is searched for within archives. Afrofuturism is also the subject of a conversation between Julian Henriques and Harold Offeh that discusses how the Industrial Revolution was made possible by slave wealth, thus tying racist exploitation to technology. The terms 'master' and 'slave' are embedded in engineering. Prince, for example, campaigned for the ownership of the master recordings of his music by scrawling 'Slave' on his cheek, drawing attention to the material persistence of racial oppression in the way that black musicians in particular were denied full exploitation of the copyright to their own artistic works. Also included is a conversation concerning the influential 1996 documentary on Afrofuturism, *The Last Angel of History*, that explores the periodicity of this film, how it tracks the transition within the 1990s from an analogue to a purely digital culture.

Having exhausted the territories of space, capitalism began mining time through future speculation. To resist it, to quote Sun Ra, 'we work on the other side of time', imagining futures on whichever surface of the Mobius strip remains uncolonized. Post-financial crisis, capitalist realism can be seen as a historical construct whose time has passed. Jameson's half-remembered maxim no longer holds. It is easier to imagine the end of capitalism, and sf is part of that imagining, for it has always, in the words of Steven Shaviro, 'outline[d] the bars of our prison'. Our times are in flux, what happens next can be informed by unbridled utopianism. We may finally learn where the ones who walk away from Omelas were going.



Suzanne Bray, ed. *Dimensions of Madeleine L'Engle: New Critical Approaches* (McFarland, 2017, 199p, £29.95)

Reviewed by Audrey Taylor (Midway University)

This timely collection, coinciding with Ava Duvernay's Afrofuturist reimagining of *A Wrinkle in Time*, manages what it sets out to do: provide new criticism to bolster the little already done on L'Engle. Ten essays from nine different authors bring together a range of views on L'Engle, intermixing her life, her relationship with

theology, places like France, the southern US, and New York, and her works. A clear boon to L'Engle studies, and perhaps religious and topographic studies, it does not necessarily bring anything specific to sf studies but is a worthwhile collection nonetheless.

An engaging introduction by Bray brings together facets of L'Engle's life and influences. For a truly dedicated fan it likely will not be enough, but for those already acquainted with L'Engle it does the trick, and further study is easy with the competent bibliography included. Even on its own, it is an excellent look into an author too often known only for one book.

The collection is strong as a whole. However, there does not seem to be a grouping of theme or time period to allow readers to anchor themselves. This leads to some structural issues, but also repetitions. Bray's chapters, which bookend the collection, though excellent, cover some of the same territory twice. There is also a little overlap even outside of Bray's chapters: Gerald Preher would have benefited from reading Bray's first chapter, for example, although he still has unique things to say about another of L'Engle's southern works ('White in the Moon the Long Road Lies'). Like several of the other chapters, both Preher and Bray focus on sense of place in L'Engle, an aspect little engaged with elsewhere. Particular strengths lie in intertextual comparisons, religious studies of her work, and a more thorough examination on L'Engle as well as her books than is usually available.

One of the earlier chapters, by Chantel Lavoie, is a confident and assured take on *Many Waters* (1986). Some knowledge of the series she discusses as well as other L'Engle scholarship is likely useful, though not entirely necessary. Regardless of one's L'Engle expertise, or not, the chapter is a delight, with insight into both the story and the criticism that may be used to illuminate it. Lavoie has some fascinating insights into a text often dismissed in critical circles outside of Biblical studies because of its Christian message. For example, Lavoie notes: 'Here again, in a different context, that word *ordinary* signals something apart from itself, because in their new environment of the distant past they are far from ordinary'. By delving into the characters Sandy and Denny as characters, rather than as symbols or allegory, Lavoie is able to get at what is likely the heart of the work, and to do productive scholarship in a way I hope can be emulated in future work on L'Engle. That is, Lavoie doesn't dismiss any one aspect of L'Engle or her works, rather examines them all together, and in context: 'Natural disasters and historical context come up against myth [...] thereby entangling, as L'Engle so fruitfully does, faith and reason, theologies and science, with an emphasis on the challenging quotation she includes from Ralph Hodgson, "Some things have to be believed to be seen"'. Readers will find this an interesting and useful chapter, a considerable feat given the many elements woven together.

Carol Franko's essay is similarly fruitful by focusing its examination of several of the Austin family novels around the adolescent protagonist, Vicky. Franko brings more of the outside scholarship available on L'Engle to the fore than Lavoie, providing a useful background for someone new to L'Engle