Connected or What It Means to Live in the Network Society. *By Steven Shaviro.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 289 pp. ISBN 0816643636.

The tradition of science fictional works, beginning with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* has been a significant cultural forum for ideas about technological and sociocultural transformation. For Steven Shaviro, science fiction is neither simply a projection into the future nor a reflection of present cultural values. It is a genre that is "about the shadow the future casts upon the present. It shows us how profoundly we are *haunted* by the ghosts of what has not yet happened." (p. 250, italics in original). Today, science fiction and critical theory have a "privileged relationship" to one another; both kinds of writing are attempting to trouble the social "reality" of the technosphere and to cognitively map the space of late technocapitalism.

    Connected or What it Means to Live in the Network Society is a sophisticated hitchiker's guide to cyberculture and the network society. It is, Shaviro announces, a speculative rather than empirical exercise in digital cultural theory. Science fiction novels by Ballard, Burroughs, Delaney, Dick, Gibson, Jeters, Misha, or Noon are read symptomatically along side music videos by Bjork and films by Cronenberg, Ferrar, Romero, Scott, and the Wachowski Brothers. For Shaviro, science fiction is a "practice of continual experimentation, just as science and technology themselves are" (p. xi). By writing cultural theory as science fiction, he aims to make the invisible technological, social, economic, affective, and political forces that are conjured up by science fiction "visible and palpable." So even if the late technocapitalist system is unrepresentable, theory can provide the postmodern subject with a sense of place within that system. Besides addressing familiar themes and issues arising from our digitally, networked technological experience (intellectual property regimes, surveillance, viral marketing, etc.), Shaviro critiques the rhetoric of cyberenthusaists, technoevolutionary arguments, and accounts of artificial intelligence. As Jody Berland has described in "Cultural Technologies and the 'Evolution' of Technological Cultures," technology, biology, and evolution are articulated within postmodern culture. If biology has become the new economics, and the evolutionary metaphor has become the 'truth' in some cybercircles, Shaviro explains why: theories of evolutionary biology and free-market economics are structurally equivalent and obsessed with efficiency and utility.

    What is most interesting is how the book deviates from the conventional organization of a book; structurally, it is a labyrinth of our networked existence and technocultural superstructure. It is impossible to describe all the book's pathways so I will only mention a few that fascinated me. One pathway leads, at the very end of the book, to "nothing"—or, more specifically, the *illusio* that nothing cannot be coded as information, the universal equivalent for all commodities, and the medium of exchange for all knowledge, perception, passion, and desire. "Because of this nothing," writes Shaviro, "too much is never enough, and our desires are never satisfied" (p. 250). At the same time, the book is openly eclectic in its links to Descartes' "Evil Genius" and Leibniz's "Monadology," Marx's subsumption of labour under capital, and Deleuze's "control society." Shaviro thinks that a postmodern metaphysics "proper" to a network society begins with crisis, undecideability, and expenditure. His mental ecology functions to weed out some of the bad ideas about the meaning of our connected existence that have been planted by John Perry Barlow, Ray Kurzweil, Tom Peters, Terrence McKenna, Hans Moravec, Steven Pinker, Richard Dawkins, and Susan Blackmore to name a few. In the spirit of William Burroughs, he does a remarkable "cut-up" job mixing samples of Kant and Marx, Bataille and Baudrillard, Foucault and McLuhan, Nietzsche and Baudrillard, and Hardt and Negri. Shaviro's writing pulses to the rhythm of Deleuze and Guattari, especially Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and his reading of Nietzsche as a radical neo-Kantian. It will be up to other readers to evaluate this mixology on philosophical grounds. As contribution to technocultural theory, mixmaster

Shaviro achieves his goal: to make his work feel as radical as the "reality" of cyberspace and network society and as strange as science fiction.

So what does Shaviro think it means to live in the network society? In the context of perpetual chaos and crisis, this is a question of postmodern consciousness and subjectivity, networked space and time, and discourses of the virtual and the actual. (Post)humans are now connected with everything else including artificial intelligence, schizoanalytic cartographies, and technoevolutionary engineering. To understand connectedness, Shaviro says we might look beyond the animal world—beehives, wolf packs, migrating birds—to "just-so" stories about mushrooms—which are "intrinsically networked, or connected"—and psychedelic drugs. To understand the appeal of neo-noir in our contemporary science fictions, we must see neo-noir as the "privileged simulacrum of the absence of simulacra"; neo-noir functions to makes us feel the "real" used to exist. While Marx associated vampirism with capitalism, Shaviro associates China Mieville's in-human "*slake-moths*" and George Romero's living-dead "zombies" with the implosion of neoliberal capitalism. Consuming Castells' work on the "network society" with a twist of Deleuze, we may rewrite Marx: all that is solid melts into flows of commodities, expression, and affect. Dollars, bytes, DNA, and LSD are described as the "magical substances, the alchemical elixirs, of global network culture of financial, informational, and biological flows. By becoming "universal equivalents," they homogenize what was heterogeneous, and they cease to "represent" exchanged objects, they have become, in a Spinozaist flourish, "immanent attributes of one and the same social substance" (p. 193). A philosophical theory of ontological parallelism poses a real challenge to communication studies because "there is no room for representation" (p. 194). A whole different problem arises when Shaviro, following Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, asserts that modernity's Otherness or Outside "has no meaning in today's globally networked world (p. 175)." This is, as Ian Angus has convincingly argued, a particularly U.S. view of the end of the dialectic between the inside and outside, centre and the margin, of neoimperialism and Empire.

Readers may find some of the book's other claims to be contentious. Are digital have-nots living outside the network (whose structure and reach is a function of scarcity and deprivation), or are they, as Shaviro claims, actively disconnected from the network (defined as a realm of pleonastic abundance). Has the capitalist obsession with scarcity, efficiency and the struggle for survival now yielded to manic consumer spending and financial speculation? Is it still possible to conceptualize society-nature exchanges and competition as driven by an excess of energy, resources, potential in the biosphere or economic sphere? Is the mediasphere the only "nature" we know?

In the end, Shaviro, in tune with the "spatial turn" in social theory and cultural studies, proclaims we have moved "Out of Time and into Space" (p. 130). Moreover, in the current vision of cyberspace, anything we want may be ours, as long as we pay the monetary and informational price because information has become the universal equalivalent for experience. As for the future network society, "experience will be digital or not at all" but "what you get is never quite what you paid for: It's always just a tiny bit less" (p. 249). *Connected* may be read as a companion volume to Vincent Mosco's *The Digital Sublime*: *Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*. As Mosco argues, *The Digital Sublime* does not warrant claims about the end of history, geography, or politics, but Shaviro's work shows that the way our world is being transformed warrants greater attention to "events in their potentiality" and "singularities" as points of discontinuity. In this way, he points us away from the ordinary and toward a counterhistory from below political economy. Otherwise, the more things change, the more things will stay the same, and who would wish for that? Even if historical time and authenticity, as we moderns once understood it, are out of reach, transformation is ongoing and adaptation is only the "inner," not "outer," limit to change. At the same time, amidst all the talk of innovation, connected intelligence, and the information economy, the "one real

innovation of the network society" is that surplus extraction is centred on consumption as well as production. But what's missing in the exchange process is "what is *more than information*: the qualitative dimension of experience or the continuum of analog space in between all those ones and zeroes" (p. 249, italics in original). From the standpoint of neoliberal, cybercapitalism, "this surplus is nothing at all." But it is this "nothing" that insinuates itself into our science fictions, our dreams, our nightmares, and, hopefully, our understanding of new media.

References

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