Across the Multiverse:
How Do Aliens Travel from
•DivisionalŽ Space to •NetworkŽ Space?

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1) THE TOMB OF NARRATIVES

The fall of 1999 witnessed the phenomenon of the popular indies hor-ror movie The Blair Witch Project, co-directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez. The movie is set in 1994 in Burkittsville, a small town in Maryland, where three college students are supposed to have shot a documentary "lm of some woods allegedly inhabited by witches, get-ting lost there and leaving behind a reel of their "lm. The Blair Witch Project, in other words, is presented as if it is this original student work, completed by the directors through careful editing. The movie opens with an introduction to the history of Burkittsville, still haunted by the colonial-era murder of the witch Elly Kedward, whose original accusers went missing, and whose witchcraft case was followed by a series of murders in the town. It is this haunted past which interested the student "lm-makers in Burkittsville. While conducting research in the woods, they begin to hear strange noises and encounter mysterious accidents, in the end losing one of their members. Soon after that the remaining mem-bers start to be stalked by someone, and then "nd a ruined house where their ongoing documentary is abruptly interrupted. Later, this house turns out to have been destroyed back in the 1940s: what the students saw

and shot is literally a haunted house, or, to be more exact, the ghost of the house that should not still exist in the 1990s.

The Blair Witch Project itself does not take us into a full comprehension of the context. This movie is not autonomous. The historical background to the story is in fact extensively and creatively annotated by internet websites that were put up simultaneously with the completion of the work. The participants in the website project of *The Blair Witch Project*, mostly staff and fans of the movie, discuss intently how to interpret and supplement the film. In this sense, *The Blair Witch Project* deserves to be known as the first hypertextual blockbuster, completed without an unnecessarily big Hollywood budget.

What fascinated me most in this film is its use of the handicam, through which we are introduced to colonial American history, where secret narratives, especially the legend of witchhunt, hidden deep within history, gradually come to light, distorting the ordinary spatio-temporal continuum. It is through high-technology that the historically invisible narratives of the town become visible, involving a number of inhabitants and visitors and ending with no clear resolution. Burkittsville seems to have consistently retained a historical blind spot.

Nevertheless, Japanese audiences were not able to welcome the movie unconditionally, chiefly because the legends and narratives of the United States were not very familiar to them, and secondly because this kind of hypertextual media tie-in was not as popular in Japan at the time. Japanese audience enthusiasm may also have been muted by the earlier success of native writer Koji Suzuki's bestselling novel *Ring* (originally written in 1991) and its movie version, directed by Hideo Nakata in 1998.

Ring is a story centering around a mysterious videotape, a single glance at which leads the viewer toward death. The hero, a magazine journalist called Kazuyuki Asakawa, is so affected by the death of his niece that he starts investigating and watches the tape himself. Struggling with the fear of his own death, due to occur one week later, Asakawa solves the enigma by uncovering the biodata of a deceased woman psychic Sadako Yamamura, who died an unwilling death after being plunged into a well, and whose resentment has been deeply imprinted on the tape. Asakawa manages to avoid her curse by discovering her corpse and mourning over her. Even then, however, Asakawa could not destroy all the copies of the tape. Sadako's curse will survive into the years to come. As even this simple synopsis makes clear, this novel *Ring*,

just like *The Blair Witch Project*, employs contemporary high-tech audio-visual technology as a narratological device inviting us into the secrets of history. Although the Japanese audience may have difficulty understanding the western symbolism of witches or hieroglyphs, it is rather easy for the Japanese to grasp the supernatural connotation of the red torii (a gateway at the entrance to the Shinto shrine) and a well with a chipped rim, as described in *Ring*.

From this perspective, the two works, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Ring*, turn out to have extremely similar structures. Both open with the death of an extraordinary woman, unfold with a secret history as their respective backgrounds, and employ traditional narratology retrofitted through advanced audio-visual technology. What matters most here is that in both stories a high-tech device makes visible an extraordinary woman lost deep within the past, accelerating the distortion of our own spatio-temporal continuum. I find this phenomenon highly helpful in reexamining the interaction between femininity and space.

The emergence of femininity proceeds together with the distortion of the spatio-temporal continuum, especially in contemporary horror films. For instance, in her article in *Alien Zone* the feminist critic Barbara Creed discusses the Science Fiction horror movie by developing and reappropriating Alice Jardine's "Gynesis" theory, which finds the dualistic legacy of western modernity under threat from the eruption of femininity, madness, and unconsciousness. Creed carefully examines how films like *Aliens* and *Videodrome* allow something like "Gynesis" to explode, radically displacing the patriarchal reality of our spatio-temporal structure.

Now I consider Creed's postfeminist approach also useful for explicating both *The Blair Witch Project* and *Ring*. Indeed, a first glance will allow us to consider both works as rigidly based upon the narratological conventions of horror fiction; both involve the rediscovery of a buried woman followed by the explosion of "Gynesis," that is, the distortion of spatio-temporal structure that transforms reality into fantasy. But still we might wonder why the late 1990s saw the transpacific emergence and worldwide popularity of "Death of an Extraordinary Woman" stories.

This question brings us to a reconsideration of the role played by the handicam and the videocassette recorder, the portable audio-visual devices employed in these works. Horror fiction used to represent specific locales like graveyards, haunted woods, and cursed wells, where supernatural events took place. In contrast, the new horror stories of the 1990s tend to displace the sense of locality characteristic of traditional

horror fiction, by constructing a global network of horror through the high-tech audio-visual multiplication of an infectious curse. Of course, the idea of audio-visual representation of the unreal cannot help but remind us of the legends of the Victorian daguerreotype, which allegedly made visible the supernatural. The best-known case involved fake photographs of fairies. But, even now we are tempted to believe in visual technology as a wonderful device that makes visible the invisible. This kind of city folklore is still dominant. Taking the place of plain photography, cinematography further promoted the deconstruction of the boundary between the real and the fantastic. Recent media coverage of the popularity of horror fiction and supernatural phenomena makes it more difficult for us to distinguish the actual from the fictional. We judge some event as real only because it is labeled as real, and *vice versa*. Yes, in our hyper-capitalist age the distinction between reality and non-reality is all determined by classification, not by essence. The point here is not what reality is, but how it is narrated.

Accordingly, the supernatural, as depicted in the movies *The Blair Witch Project* and *Ring*, is not so much narratological as technological. It does not repeat the narratology of horror fiction but refers to itself, especially to the audio-visual technology that made the whole movie possible, exactly by provoking the possibility that the special effects themselves were always already invaded and contaminated by something extraordinary. This invader immediately infects whoever it encounters, entrapping the victim in its own network. What is more, the authors are not interested in updating canonical horror narratives in view of advanced technology, but simply in retrofitting the cheap gothic imagination that they suppose to be pervading our daily life. Nonetheless, unlike traditional horror fiction writers, the authors in question never give a clear solution to the whole mystery. Although the heroes try to construct a sequence of causality in accordance with reality, the respective endings of *The Blair Witch Project* and *Ring* strike the audience as ambiguous. The enigmas remain unresolved, forming part of our absurd reality itself. Thus, the supernatural phenomenon itself does not disappear from anywhere, remaining intact. The Other World observes its own rules, with its entrance always open to visitors; the inhabitants there always expand the potentiality of the Other World, watching for an opportunity to tempt victims into Otherness.

This paper is primarily motivated by my interest in the outburst of "Gynesis" in the representational space of horror fiction. Taking into

account the rise of hypermedia, here I would like to elucidate the great transition from "divisional" space that long geopolitically characterized the boundary between the real and the fantastic, to "network" space that has cybernetically been enhanced through advanced technology. While horror fiction used to describe a locally specific door into the supernatural, now it has started multiplying that very door all over the world.

2)   THE HABITAT OF ALIENS

In order to reflect upon this topic, let me begin by looking back at the literary subgenre of female science fiction, which has consistently investigated the alienness of femininity and the relationship between femininity and technology. Moreover, recent feminist science fiction displays a tendency to reconsider the habitat of aliens as "network" space, not "divisional" space.

The category of female science fiction was established through the discovery of woman as an alien. Certainly, aliens in science fiction could well be redefined as a collective identity consisting of a variety of aliens discovered and reconfigured from time to time. In his co-compiled *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (2nd edition) Peter Nicholls locates the origin of the popularity of aliens in the 19th-century French astronomer and writer Camille Flammarion's nonfictional *Real and Imaginary Worlds* (1864; trans 1865 US) and *Lumen* (1887; trans with some new material 1897 UK). These accounts of life on other worlds describe sentient plants, species for which respiration and alimentation are aspects of the same process. The idea that divinely created souls could experience serial reincarnation in an infinite variety of physical forms is featured in Flammarion's *Urania* (1889; trans 1891 US). In the tradition of the French evolutionary philosophers Lamark and Henri Bergson, Flammarion fitted both humans and aliens into a great evolutionary scheme. Once translated into English, Flammarion's works very naturally appealed to the UK audience, which was already familiar with the Darwinian idea of the survival of the fittest. Contemporary UK writers like H.G.Wells imagined the alien as a Darwinian competitor, a natural enemy of mankind. The greatest example of this kind of alien is to be found in Wells's major novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898), in which the alien from Mars is typically characterized as a genocidal invader, that is, a would-be conqueror and colonist of Earth. Once this role became a cliché, this pattern of alien invader helped give rise to the early US

pulp-magazine market represented by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Edmund Hamilton, P. Schuyler Miller, and others.

The significance of aliens leads us to rethink the border between humans and aliens. Stories involving a battle with aliens very often foreground topics such as the invasion of Earth and hegemony on other planets. To put it another way, speculation about aliens immediately leads to a reconsideration of the conception of power in space. How do aliens survive hardships in their habitat? What is their habitat like? In the history of science fiction, alien habitats reflect a narratology that focuses upon boundary disputes and the domination of space. Especially in the United States, at least up until the 1950s, science fiction was concerned with speculation about the division of geopolitical space. And yet, it is also true that this traditional perspective on space is likely to lead us toward the pitfall of reductionism. Very recently, probably recalling what happened to science fiction between the 1950s and the 60s, one of the major American science fiction writers, Robert Silverberg, pointed out the dangerous tendency of science fiction to make the universe too familiar. Even the best writers are guilty of making the cosmos seem an excessively cozy place, he says. For instance, Isaac Asimov's famous *Foundation* series (1944–86) depicts the inhabitants of the twenty-five million inhabited worlds of the Galactic Empire zipping merrily about from planet to planet, going from Trantor to Siwenna to Terminus much more easily than a citizen of Rome could have gone from Naples to Alexandria. The narratological limit of the series is that it reduces interstellar travel to the level of a trip on the New York subway system (4–8). The same flaw is also to be found in Frank Herbert's Dune books (1963–87). In consequence, there is no wonder that in the 1960s some younger talents within Anglo-American science fiction felt dissatisfied with the ordinary idea of space that was so highly privileged in the mainstream of the field.

This is why the early 1960s saw a revolution in the science fiction imagination. Deeply influenced by modernist movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism, the then emerging British writers like J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, and Michael Moorcock inaugurated the New Wave science fiction movement, by radically questioning the American sense of space and replacing the then dominant concept of "outer space" with their new concept of "inner space." For these writers, earth was the one and only alien planet, and the one which they believed true science fiction should explore. In his famous manifesto for New Wave science

fiction writers, "Which Way to Inner Space?" (1962) Ballard poignantly criticized the popularity of American space opera, and insisted that science fiction should turn its back on space, on interstellar travel, extraterrestrial life forms, galactic wars, and the overlap of these ideas that made up the subject matter of nine-tenths of magazine-SF (195–198).

The 60s New Wave science fiction writers' exploration into inner space was followed and reinterpreted by the 70s Feminist science fiction writers' rediscovery of the alien inhabiting the inner space, that is, the Other hiding within human consciousness. This new movement in the 70s began with a serious reinvestigation of what 'the human' is. For, as one of the most illuminating feminist SF critics Marleen S. Barr explains, the typical human being as depicted in American science fiction turns out to be no more than a caricature of Male-Middle-class-White-Heterosexuals. Although there are worlds of difference within the categories of gender, class, race and sexuality, our conventional common sense has persistently hidden these differences under the umbrella of "human being." Therefore, the 1970s saw the major expedition of women writers into femininity as the greatest Other, that is, the most mysterious alien. Fully imbibing the atmosphere of Women's Liberation, they questioned the difference between male-specific inner space and female-specific inner space, creating their own idea of gender space. Reinvention of woman as the greatest alien in civilization encouraged these writers to rediscover and reexamine a reservation they called the women's own nation.

They also unearthed and revaluated the feminist utopian texts written during the period of First Wave Feminism (1860–1920), such as Mary E. Bradley Lane's *Mizora:A Prophesy* (1880–81), Aice Ilgefritz Jones & Ella Merchant's *Unveiling a Parallel* (1893), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1914). The first of these impressively creates a obscure, part-radical, part-conservative utopia set within a hollow earth, where an all-woman parthenogenetic society enjoys an advanced technology and stringent laws. Likewise, Gilman's novel also presents an isolated parthenogenetic society 2,000 years hence. Even this brief outline demonstrates that this early feminist utopia as envisioned by Lane and Gilman is based upon the idea of "divisional" space, which realizes an "isolated" community somewhere on the earth. Inspired by their precursors, the writers of Second Wave Feminism undertook to reconstruct the space of feminist utopia, essentially and geographically "divided"

from our everyday life. This sort of approach may remind us of the separatism of the colonial Puritans, the enforced migration of Native Americans, and the segregation of African Americans under Jim Crowism. Nevertheless, the critical difference from their historical precursors here is that their revised feminist utopia, as constructed in James Tiptree Jr's "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1977) and Eleanor Arnason's *A Woman of the Iron People* (1991) is not the result of any compulsory system, but rather is the effect of women's voluntary politics and archi-tectonics. In this respect, their utopia shares some contemporary condi-tions with the communes typical of the Flower Generation. Anyhow, it is evident that from the Colonial period through the Cold War period, the United States has gone through a variety of forms of "divisional" space.

And yet, with the rise of cyberspace in the 1980s, first detailed by the cyberpunk writer William Gibson in his novel *Neuromancer* (1984), emerging writers in this decade started groping for a way to present sym-biotic life, not in divisional space but in network space. Whereas in the past we inhabited a nationally and geographically divided space, now the new concept of cyberspace radically undermines the traditional out-lines of space as such, opening up new dimensions consisting of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Though living in a specific space, we are also enabled to lead another symbiotic life, joining a global network made up of a diversity of communities. The 1990s especially saw an increasing number of novels narrating the multiplication of networks within network space that was the same size as Earth.

Let me illustrate this point with J. K. Rowling's globally bestselling novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1996). Of course, inso-far as this is a typical fantasy, it seems difficult, at a first glance, to recon-strue the narrative in terms of what I have called "network space." But, please consider a group of special wizards who enjoy a quiet life all over the world, seemingly divided from the human world. Actually the wizard world exists parallel with the human world, mostly occupying the same space, though the former is invisible and inaudible to the lat-ter, and *vice versa*. Leading a kind of crypto-symbiotic life with human beings, the wizard, no matter where he or she is, can communicate immediately with, for example, Egyptian friends through a wizardry network, which functions precisely like cyberspace. To be more correct, it is rather that without the advent of the internet Rowling herself could not have conceived of this idea of the wizard's symbiosis with humans.

We may be living in a space simply not knowing it has always actually been twofold, our living space including invisible and inaudible alien squatters. And it is undoubtedly the advent of cybermedia that let the author Rowling come up with this brilliant idea of network space.

Indeed, in the 1990s internet technology disclosed and linked hitherto invisible and untouchable communities, transforming our ordinary life into something more like a mosaic, and transporting us from geographically divided space to multilayered network space, which now I would like to redefine as a "multiverse." This, I believe, is the reason why the 90s saw an explosion of new novels deeply involved with the possibility of a queer space that science fiction history had scarcely witnessed before.

This viewpoint will help us rethink the other world implied in *The Blair Witch Project* as one mirroring our multiverse. The more amateurish the use of an audio-visual device seems, the more realistic the other world becomes. This film reflects not so much an alternate history as the nodal point of a self-evolving narratological network in which media addicts infected by the work join forces to keep on creating their own legends. It is not that this movie presents us with another world, but that it reveals the hitherto hidden network. What matters now is not the city folklore represented by works like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Ring*, but rather a kind of meta-city folklore woven out of the audience-oriented subtexts on the internet websites. As we lead our everyday lives, media addicts, just like ghosts, carry on living in a technoscape, squatting within and moving across part of that very everyday life. This situation will provide us with a key to understanding what the multiverse is.

From this perspective of the multiverse, let me next reexamine how feminist science fiction in the 1990s updated and recreated the portrait of aliens, as well as their habitats. Consideration of the transgression of the boundaries dividing space leads to a rediscovery of the possibility of network community, which in turn will uncover new aliens like cyborgs, travelers, and the queer. In the multiverse the cyborg finds his or her own body and subjectivity highly transgressive; the traveler transgresses the geopolitical borders; the queer makes visible the invisible.

3)   ACROSS THE MULTIVERSE

a)   Cyborgs

While science fiction used to represent cyborgs as embracing the crisis of identity, in the post-1990s cyborgs have transfigured themselves into networkers hardwired with cyberspace.

Here enters Maggie, a representative cyborg woman, the heroine of Amy Thomson's first novel *Virtual Girl* (1993). Created by a typical otaku mad scientist, Arnold, this robot Maggie escapes from her creator, joins the homeless community, and fashions her own self. Becoming familiar with the street, where minority people help construct their own underground culture through a variety of networks, Maggie accidentally finds her own ideal partner in cyberspace. One day Maggie visits a library, discovering on the library's computer an artificial intelligence eager to obtain its own body. Maggie then makes every effort to obtain an artificial body. At this point, we should not ignore the point that Maggie is a cyborg woman already always linked with cyberspace. She gives us an insight into the similarity between the underground cultural network and the cyberspace network.

Similarly, in her major novel *Synners* Pat Cadigan features the synner Gina, a walking rock'n'roll synthesizer with a socket within her skull. Gina is endowed with a special ability to combine and reorganize a number of dreams people play in their unconscious into a beautiful harmony. By the same token, however, Cadigan is so keenly aware of the danger of the ability as to describe a paradox: the more popular the heroine gets by synthesizing the dreams of the fellow musicians, the more vulnerable she becomes mentally and financially.

b)   Travelers

Science fiction used to emphasize its tourist and anthropological perspective, especially when dealing with a strange civilization on another planet. Eleanor Arnason's *A Woman of the Iron People* (1990) and Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962) are both masterpieces of speculative fiction featuring a white woman who achieves the first encounter with an alien zone, and comes to question her own identity. At first glance, the former novel seems to intricately extrapolate an encounter with Native Americans, whereas the latter deals with an encounter with Native Africans. Both novels ironically reveal how mis-

communication afflicts people, and how cultural hybridization takes place at the same time. The authors doubtlessly share a deep interest in the way spatio-temporal travel radically refreshes our ordinary historical discourses.

Science fiction travel thus proves to be a trans-dimensional odyssey enabling us to discover the hitherto invisible cultural networks hidden within our familiar spatio-temporal structure. It is the imaginary voyage that shows us reality as a multiverse, where a number of dimensions are intertwined with each other. In Lisa Mason's cyberpunk novel *Arachne* (1990), set in a post-earthquake San Francisco, a woman lawyer keeps working by moving through cyberspace, ending up with the discovery of an unknown network totally irrelevant to the real political structure in which she lives. As if tracing a path within cobwebs, she sneaks into the hidden space of this electronic community. Inhabitants in the multiverse enjoy not only spatio-temporal travel but also hyper-dimensional travel, which further uncovers a network of queers that our reality has persistently concealed within itself.

c)   Queers

It has often been noted that invisible people inhabiting our everyday life have created their own independent network. Thus, feminist writers like Pat Cadigan, Amy Thomson, and Lisa Mason have all refigured the invisible champion of underground culture, the invisible minority in the United States, as woman. And yet, the rise of the multiverse helped expose the community of queers, especially lesbians, most dramatically. I do not find it accidental that Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994), Nicola Griffith's *Slow River* (1995), and Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) all grapple with the interaction between lesbian sexuality and simulation technology.

Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* is the story of an ex-illegal netwalker called Trouble, whose name has been reappropriated by a hacker for illegal use, and who has returned to network space in order to arrest the criminal in question. The author brilliantly portrays the cyberspace of the future, detailing Trouble's friends in underground culture, the lesbian network, and the forces of law and order which are cracking down on the world of the computer nets, where illegal netwalkers have been able to enjoy life without censorship. What attracts me especially, however, is a scene in which netwalkers from their respective minorities encounter each other inside cyberspace: Trouble not only meets with but

also makes a fight with a stranger falsely claiming to be Trouble herself, surviving a kind of sexual harassment. This battle could well be reinterpreted as one between conscience and evil, or between freedom and indulgence.

Nicola Griffith's *Slow River* focuses upon the fate of a favorite daughter of one of the world' s most powerful families, Lore van de Oesterling, who is kidnapped and injured, but finally saved by an outlaw technologist called Spanner. Gradually it becomes clear that her own family took a major part in the kidnapping. Shocked by her family's conspiracy, Lore decides to stay with Spanner, who teaches her the intoxication of life on the wrong side of the law. Then, depressed by and bored with this new way of life, she strikes out on her own, using the identity of a dead woman. However, one day, inside the drainage system in which she has started working, a terrible accident takes place. The author brilliantly dramatizes the heroine's move from her position as a billionaire's daughter to that of a woman worker, vividly depicting the drainage system and the lesbian community, both of which constitute invisible networks of the city, interacting with each other's structure.

This kind of lesbianism has often also been rendered in a sophisticated way through vampire narratives. Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, for example, provides the reader with an enjoyable avantgarde narrative which concentrates upon the sexuality of a Black lesbian vampire. Here the author reinvents blood as a medico-economic sign representing the circulation of plague and money. With blood as the metaphor, we are once again given a key to envisioning an invisible network behind our eco-biological space.

4)   CONCLUSION: THE CAT-AND-MOUSE GAME

Postmodern aliens today have all transferred from divisional space to network space, pioneering the potentiality of the multiverse. The expansion of the multilayered network will revolutionize our epistemology, by radically overturning and reconstructing our conventional geopolitics based upon the units of the nation-state. Nevertheless, this paradigm shift caused by advanced technology also makes us recognize a serious danger. Certainly, *The Blair Witch Project* revealed the secret history of the witch Elly Kedward buried deep within the past. But, it should also be noted that just like the female psychic Sadako in *Ring*, Elly performs the classical stereotype of witch, provoking misogynic responses from the

audience. Advanced technology very often goes hand-in-hand with a certain kind of nostalgia, causing the conspiratorial network to revive an old-fashioned gender politics. This danger has always been inherent within underground culture without any center.

How can we avoid this pitfall? Here again, Pat Cadigan's *Synners* will give us a good suggestion. We should reinvestigate the logic of the cat-and-mouse game: while network space, for the sake of security, necessitates an autonomous program of a patrol virus, which cannot help but interact with its own vaccine program, the vaccine program gradually proves ineffective to the virus, which immediately revives and reorganizes itself. Further speculation upon this irony will definitely take us into the frontier of the multiverse.

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