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What Do We Mean When We Say “Global Science Fiction”? Reflections on a New Nexus

When I was asked to join the plenary panel of the 2011 Eaton Conference on the question “What is Global Science Fiction?” I thought: piece of cake. I have studied non-Anglophone sf for most of my career, edited books and special journal issues on it, and agitated for de-Anglocentricizing sf studies. That seemed pedigree enough to let me say weighty things about global sf, even if I was not quite sure what the organizers had in mind. Were they implying that there is a newly emergent overarching culture of sf, part of a more general global cultural formation transcending the boundaries of all nation-states? Or did “global” signify the sum of all the national sf literatures, each viewed as a distinctive and irreplaceable piece in a world cultural system? The more I thought about it, the less cake I had. When panel-time arrived, and I was sitting in the shining company of Nalo Hopkinson, China Miéville, and Karen Tei Yamashita, all I could say was: I don’t know what to say.

So I should try again. The thoughts that follow are, I am sure, newer to me than to many *SFS* readers. At this moment, sf studies’s—or in any case, *my*—received ideas about what the words “global,” “science fiction,” and even “culture” mean are changing dramatically. Our normal way of discussing these things for the past fifty or so years has hinged on distinguishing and affirming ethnic and national cultures. Whenever we spoke about science fictions we would note the dominance of “Anglo-American” over “French,” “Russian” or “Soviet,” “Japanese,” etc. We would speak about the developed imperialist cultures’ science fiction versus the nonexistence or retrograde status of sf in non-modern cultures, or alternatively of styles such as magic realism occupying the niche that sf does in the hypermodern places. This is how I approached my work on sf and empire, and my sources did too. There were political-cultural value strategies involved: noble, resistant postcolonial societies versus overbearing hegemony, feisty minor literatures who enjoyed our recognition and support as we kicked sand on the Ozymandias of Imperial SF.

Global? It will not work anymore. At least not so simply. Economic and technological globalization has undermined many of the material conditions for most claims of communal sovereignty. The ideals of traditional group autonomy have been weakened by transnational movements and missions. “Global culture,” however, remains a shaky and inchoate idea. We know one side of it very well: the attraction of all previous ethnic and national cultures into the economic web of hypermodern capitalism, and the substitution of diverse local chronotopes with a single value-paradigm throughout the world: speculative capital.

Cultural resistance to this process rarely takes the form of a straightforward defense of the Old Ways. Modernization requires that it appear inevitable to both its agents and its victims. The battle is rather for the soul of the new nexus. Where “globalization” and “globalism” have been coopted by hypercapital, movements such as ATTAC and the World Social Forum have asserted “*autre mondialisation*,” and theorists such as Isabelle Stengers, Paul Gilroy, and Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak have proposed the alternative concepts of cosmopolitanism and planetarity.¹

Culture? Which brings us to culture. This anthropological term used to be linked to geographical location. Sometimes it was used in a fractal sense—minority cultures, for example, might exist in diaspora, subcultures might exist in specific gathering places—but there was usually a sense of homeland or hearth, at the very least a reserve, where distinctive folkways evolved in dialectical relation with distinctive spaces in which they were putatively grounded. To an anthropologist, a culture was a materially evolved sublime object worthy of respect and awe specifically because of its distinct locatable differences. The particularity of a language was the ultimate paradigm-giver. At this moment, however, the extinction of languages has accelerated to a degree that matches the extinction of species; only a romantic (blessings be upon him/her!) can still hold out hope for the preservation of linguistic diversity in the face of hypermodernist, neoliberal exterminations.² In the same way, we have seen the idealization of indigeneity and aboriginality gradually weaken, partly in recognition that they were romantic essentialist notions in the first place, and partly with the understanding that hybridization and migration are historical norms.³ Resistant cultures gained their strong moral positions from cultural practices that resolutely had no place in the circulation of money/information, a stance that has now become materially nearly impossible to maintain. (Consider an extreme, tragic, but telling case: the Brazilian government discovers a previously uncontacted village on a flyover of the Amazon jungle; when they try to re-locate it later to map out strategies of protection, it is gone; the Brazilians surmise it was wiped out by drug smugglers moving product from Peru.)⁴ Given the weakness of traditional cultural practices as strong political-economic alternatives, much of what we now consider ethnic or cultural differences are residual practices and symbols used for local political power within a worldwide system of electronic world-representation.

Global culture has been welcomed for freeing up creative energies from their confinement in self-isolating regions and mythicized group histories. Where capital sees a putatively free, institutionally unfettered exchange of money, humanists (including, of course, posthumanists) often see a similarly “free” exchange of symbolic goods, a cosmopolitan culture encouraging hybrids, interflows, and lines of flight in a grand, chaotic, carnivalesque planetary imaginary. While we celebrate this dynamism, we must also acknowledge that the current culture of hybridism is produced by the violent deterritorializing of peoples and the ever-accelerating entrainment of populations in technological systems with ever more sophisticated ways of manipulating desires and fears. A

dominant culture of hybridity depends on, and puts a premium on, what would have been called deracination in an earlier age. Constancy to a historical community, to kinship groups, to the place of one's ancestors (indeed, the very concept of ancestors) evaporates. The movement toward one world inevitably involves the volatilization of the diversity within it, so that cultural identities must be viewed as temporary, easily changed, and tactical. These are the values of the enlightened cyborg. They are also the values of global hypercapitalism and transnational plutonomy. For them volatility means profitable crisis: the infinite potential to increase commodification and to consolidate economic power. Within this global culture, the dominant language of symbols is more and more a matter of remixing and mashing up the enormous output of semiotic commodities coming through entertainment systems symbiotically fused with surveillance-and-delivery systems.

The strongest claim for a global culture is that the global economy and media matrix have created concerns that are entirely new, which could never even have been conceived in a more self-contained cultural milieu. Event-streams that affect all of humanity or the natural world—epidemics, meltdowns, refugee waves, global warming, the Net, electronically accelerated and expanded booms and busts, transnational jihads and democratic mobilizations, labor migration, transnational sex and drug trafficking, media hyperrealization, electronic commodomy,⁵ and collective traumas all the way down—inevitably encourage new artistic responses, new forms adequate for the new conditions. These dominant event-flows by definition weaken political borders and all the other metaphorical borders of contemporary social life. They are also deeply entangled with the representation of reality delivered by transnational mass media, which, however culture-specific their local presentations may be, regularly charge them with the affects of shock and attraction that characterize sensationalist fictions. Many if not all of these new topoi coincide with stories that have long been dear to sf: technologically-produced eco-catastrophes, insults to traditional bio-orders, alien invasions invalidating mundane sovereignties, the captivation of souls, commodification of consciousness, transglobal networks of corruption and conspiracy, the eternal promise of the technological fix, the cyber-cornucopia and the slum globe, volatile bodies and 9/11 in Montevideo.⁶

Science Fiction? Understandably, “sf” itself changes as its cultural preconditions change. For a long time I resisted expanding the term sf to cover writing that does not exclude “supernatural” motivations. I have not argued for a hierarchy among fantastic genres; I have never believed that “scientific fantasy” or “SF/F” are destructively irrationalist or merely cynical marketing categories.⁷ I have, even so, assumed that genres and their game-rules involve powerful and specific affects that reveal a great deal about a culture's collective consciousness. Throughout my career I have assumed that there are significant differences among different forms of the fantastic imagination. They are often blended in artistic practice, but a good transgression knows exactly where the thresholds are. I now have to acknowledge that as more and more models of the fantastic flow together from different artistic and folk traditions, what will be

generally understood as sf will include more and more assemblages involving incongruous ontologies of motivation. Sf will be less a kind of text and more a specific attitude, which will often be merely one thread in a work's textual weave. That evening at the Eaton, of the writers who were my companion panelists, not one could be considered an sf writer in a conservative sense. Hopkinson's work regularly involves magical and folkloric-fantastic elements; Miéville's de-forms the conventions of monster fiction and sf in astonishing ways; and Yamashita's is supremely slipstream. When the Eaton organizers were putting together "Global SF," they did not bring any of the usual suspects. They recognized and affirmed that what we used to consider bona fide sf is now a subgenre of a larger formation (John Clute has taken to calling it, with characteristic panache, *fantastika*) that mixes and re-mixes elements once considered distinctive forms, often involving pre-modern cultures leaping straight to postmodernism, into new, fluid subformations of a Global Big Thing.

The greater exposure to different traditions of fantastic storytelling cannot help but affect what sf audiences consider generically acceptable. With the availability of sf by more non-European—and especially second-generation, emigré, and multilingual—writers on the rise, we can expect to see the interflow of fantastic elements—oneiric, visionary, hallucinatory, folkloric, mythological, supernatural, surrealist—to increase, not just as entertainment augmentors or artistic experiments, but as naturalized alternative rationalities, aspects of a larger commitment to breaking down technoscience and its plausibility norms from within the myth itself, simultaneously reflecting the blending of alternative ontologies and refiguring the inevitable spectralization of material science as it encounters spookier and spookier phenomena in the folds of matter.

This trend is reinforced by a growing enthusiasm for sf by established national organs for very specific cultural-political purposes. Elsewhere I have proposed that sf is as important for a post-nationalist, culturally expansive, technologically dominant elite as historical and realist fiction were for the nationalist bourgeoisie in Benedict Anderson's model of the construction of national imaginaries.⁸ Rising cultural-economic players in the global system are encouraging—sometimes consciously, sometimes indirectly—the development of a science-fictional consciousness to go along with technoscientific literacy. The Chinese cultural commissars, for example, after determining that inventive engineers in the US were often sf fans, have begun a campaign to encourage the reading and writing of sf to spur homegrown technical innovation.⁹ The Japanese government supports the production, translation, and distribution of manga and anime as a core piece of its "soft power" diplomacy.¹⁰ Indian cinema has turned to sf to punch up pro-Hindutva plots with futuristic CGI spectacle.¹¹ In South Korea, professional-level Starcraft play sustains a major portion of the country's media economy.¹²

A social class educated in science or at least technologically adept is a precondition for the development of a thriving sf culture. Once people feel that technosocial transformations affect every part of their daily routines, the attitude of science-fictionality emerges on its own. It spurs a linguistic dynamism and

social-historical imagination that makes the world appear to be something like a work of sf. Sf is most likely to thrive where the language and educational systems are highly dynamic, and where traditional/religious codes do not restrict cultural innovation.¹³ This was true of historical and realistic fiction as well, emerging as it did out of the Great Transformation from agrarian to industrial production. The difference of our age is its inescapable ubiquity born of speed and global reach. At this moment, it is hard to imagine many places that have not been affected by the culture of accelerated globalization. Remote villages are rapidly being drawn into the digital satellite communications web (brilliantly imagined in Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* [2008] and Geoff Ryman's novel *Air (or, Have Not Have)* [2004]). Regions where scientific schooling has been rare are increasingly developing technically trained workforces as multinational industries seek perpetually lower-wage technical labor. Where this labor force includes a sizable population of engineers and literate workers, as in India, China, and Brazil, we see the appearance of a critical, intellectually sophisticated sf alongside a popular, pulp sector—both varieties balancing the universal topics of the globalized regime (which may range from cyber-savvy to pornography) and designs drawn from region-specific artforms.¹⁴ (A good example is recent Indian sf film, which weaves familiar Hollywood CGI spectacles into Bollywood scenarios, with occasional visual motifs drawn from Hindu mythology.)¹⁵ Where literacy is rarer, familiarity with computers and the Internet may take on a decidedly non-modernist aura, as with the Sakawa boys in Ghana, who mix criminal cyber-skills with witchcraft.¹⁶ Even in the Arab world, where sf-inclined writers have long complained that the education systems have blocked the development of scientific imagination and linguistic invention, works of Arabic sf are becoming known.¹⁷ In the torrent of novums, sf comes naturally. Collisions of social formations inconceivable by earlier thought now occur regularly, veritably forcing the kinds of narrative resolutions of enormous contradictions that are sf's stock-in-trade.

The Language Bottleneck and the Politics of Translation. Much of what I have to say about literary global sf revolves around Anglophony. The stubborn imperial fact is that English is the lingua franca of globalization. It is the language of international institutions, of “communications skills,” of new technologies. It is the language of the Internet and of international law. In the globalizing regime English is not seen as something that grounds a collective, but as an invaluable commodity; one needs it to get a good job.¹⁸ In some places (usually former empires), there is resentment about this linguistic hegemony. In most places, English is simply understood to be the medium of transnational capital. Governmental proposals have been made in Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Denmark to make English the second official language.¹⁹ Resentment has not prevented the introduction of English-language instruction at all levels of the Chinese educational system.²⁰ Even French professionals now speak it with a proficiency that would have been astounding a generation ago.

Linguistic centrality is not the same as geographic centrality. The substitution of cultural diffusion for direct governance is one of the major

differences between US global “imperiality” and old-style imperialism.²¹ One subtle effect of this linguistic domination is that those societies that inherited English as their colonial master-language have distinct advantages in accessing global publics. This is true not only because their writers do not need to have their works translated, but because English has become a sort of Grand Central Bottleneck for achieving worldly success—which is increasingly defined as reaching a global audience.

For sf artists, the situation is compounded. Despite the many rich non-Anglo traditions of sf writing, a vast number of tropes, motifs, icons, and historical models in the sf megatext originated or were decisively elaborated in the Anglo-US sf archive. Of course, not every national sf has oriented itself exclusively to the Anglo Machine. Russian sf and Central European sf writers were interested for many years primarily in French sf; the late French master Moebius and other *bandes dessinées* artists were drawn to Japanese manga, the Japanese director Mamoru Oshii to Central European cinema. But in the great metropolis of sf, these have been interesting suburbs. US sf in particular, through the sheer scale of its production over a dozen decades and the volume of compelling models that could not help but emerge in such a mass of works, more or less determined the shape of the genre. The US models can be contested and resisted, but they cannot be ignored.²² In film this obtains even more, since no other society has been willing or able to devote so much of its money and energy to producing immersive sf spectacles and distributing them so far afield. For this reason, we continue to speak of independent-minded or nationally distinctive sf in relation to those models—as “independent,” “national,” “alternative.” Like the English language, Anglo sf is the unmarked term. Because they are frequently seen and so easily recognized, elements of the American style need only to be simplified and abstracted to become an “international” style. Consequently, even in the globalizing expansion of audiences and artists, Anglophone writers from South Asia, the Caribbean, and Australasia, and non-native writers who have chosen to write in English, have easiest access to an audience. Their work will have most immediate dissemination, and it is their innovations that will have the most immediate effect. The problem of a literary global sf is thus intimately tied to the politics of translation.

Sf scholars and artists have complained for many years that the Anglo-American literary establishment does not translate enough non-Anglophone sf. It is difficult to make the case for one genre, however, when the problem is systematic. It is widely believed that, of the major European languages, proportionally the fewest literary translations are into English. Although there is little hard data comparing the frequency and availability of literary translations among different language cultures (most of our information comes from surveys of booksellers), the testimony of translators and teachers trying to construct course syllabi is not ambiguous.²³ Cultural capital has tended to flow one way. It is very much in the interest of non-Anglo societies to translate Anglo-American power products. (One might think that knowledge of other

languages' works would benefit the hegemon, but US culture has been fairly consistent and stubborn on this score, even when it means losing wars.)

For a moment in the 1960s and 1970s, things were different. The conjunction of détente with the Soviet bloc, enthusiasm for decolonization and nonalignment, the unprecedented increase of students entering university, and the transition of publishing to cheap paperbacks fostered an internationalist moment in Anglo cultures. Latin American, European, Asian, and African literature were considered marketable and sold in a thriving network of bookstores. The boom extended to sf. English-language sf became a profitable mass-market enterprise through books such as Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), Herbert's *Dune* (1965), the novels of Kurt Vonnegut, and the Ballantine paperback editions of *The Lord of the Rings* (already then often treated as sf). Commercial publishers produced translations of major non-Anglophone fabulists such as Borges, Calvino, Kobo Abe, and Monique Wittig, and several anthologies of international sf. New translations appeared of classics (Zamyatin's *We* [1921], Čapek's *War with the Newts* [1936], and Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* [1925], among others). MacMillan's "Best of Soviet Science Fiction" series included Alexey Tolstoy's *Aelita* (1923), the Strugatsky brothers' *Roadside Picnic* (1971), and several dozen other works by the Strugatskys, Bilenkin, Bulyachev, Shefner, and Vladimir Savchenko. Books by Stanislaw Lem, whom publishers considered to be the European Borges, were celebrated in the mainstream press.²⁴

This bold translation enterprise essentially shut down after 1989. Virtually none of the MacMillan Soviets is still in print; some of the classics have been salvaged by small specialty presses, but no new works by Soviet New Wave writers have appeared since then. The last translated volume by Lem, *Peace On Earth*, appeared in 1994. The market, as if following political directives, acted as if the fall of the Soviet bloc meant also the collapse of all cultural competition with the US—especially with regard to sf, which had been viewed as, at best, a window into a quasi-dissident underground. This de facto embargo also means that much of the non-Anglo archive is unavailable in other languages as well, since the constantly shrinking number of publishing houses throughout the world quite often relies on English texts not only for the source language, but for the mere recognition of the text's existence. If it does not register on the hegemon's radar, there is a good chance it does not register at all.

The current pace of sf-related translations into English remains a slow trickle. Major fictions that do appear—such as Vladimir Sorokin's *Day of the Oprichnik* (2006; tr. 2010), Chan Koon-Chung's *Shengshi Zhongguo 2013* (2009; tr. *The Fat Years*, 2011), Ahmed Khaled Tawfiq's *Utopia* (2010; tr. 2011), the novels of Victor Pelevin and Sergei Lukyanenko—are generally treated as literary/slipstream fiction or dark fantasy rather than as generic science fiction. (Only Lukyanenko's dark fantasies have appeared so far in English; his inventive sf remains untranslated, and I suspect this will be the state of affairs until the Russians make a film from one of his sf stories.) The project of VIZ Media, the major distributor of manga and anime in the US, to publish English translations of Japanese sf novels through its Haikasoru imprint is a

major contribution. It is unlikely, however, to be imitated by publishers from other languages, having been made possible by the enormous success of manga and anime over the past twenty years, a cultural phenomenon unlikely to be matched for some time. With the exception of Bollywood cinema, no similar cultural force has been acknowledged recently.

The hope for a vibrant culture of sf translation rests primarily with the Internet, in the constellation of open-access blogs and websites devoted specifically to aggregating translations of and information about non-Anglo writings, such as the invaluable *World SF Blog*. Net-nurtured writers and readers are comfortable with the kickstarter economy of the Web; and we will probably see new models for funding and publishing translated works. Accessible translations will be mainly amateur affairs (in both the French and the Anglo senses of the word), and the desire to make texts available will often trump artistic quality. (Arguably this represents little change from the commercial sphere.) Since so many sf artists who are not native English speakers now live and work in Anglophone metropolises, one can hope that they will consider translations of otherwise inaccessible works a vocation. Publishing ventures such as the Chennai-based Blaft Publications devoted to translating pulp fictions in all genres from Tamil into English indicate that we may see more attention devoted to the global pulp archive than to the elite one.

Academic literature departments and institutions such as the Eaton Collection at the University of California, Riverside can help the situation. The translation boom of the 1960s and 1970s coincided with nationwide movements in the US and UK to teach foreign languages. In the US, it was a national security affair, as school districts received direct Defense Department grants to teach Russian, among other tongues. My own field, comparative literature, which thrived during this cosmopolitan moment, changed its emphasis from text-centered interpretation that often involved translations into English to literary theory in the mid-1970s. We could do worse than to re-emphasize translation as a scholarly enterprise, expanding to include popular genre texts. Given the falling rate of foreign-language learning (which impacts other language cultures by reducing the number of potential translators into English) and the stagnation of academic translation, works by acknowledged major fantastic/sf writers and classic texts may never become available (except occasionally in third-language translations) without active intervention by non-profit academic institutions. The recently instituted SF and Fantasy Translation Awards is a significant step in this direction.

The Media Supernovum. A network of Internet nodes dedicated to global sf may crystallize into a thriving fan-backed subculture of written sf, especially if the trend to Global English continues. But most likely it will remain a minority system within an overarching regime of visual sf. The significance of literacy for art diminishes when the potential reading public loses interest in complex print texts and has an enormous range of stimulating visual media competing for its attention. So even in the Anglo zones, we are observing the rise of cinematic, video, and game-linked modes of sf eclipsing the written word. At least one

generation of audiences has lived its entire life in the post-literate and increasingly post-cinematic Internet Age. Most people's conceptions of sf are now derived first from visual forms, and only secondarily from literary ones.

In a sense, this is appropriate. The favorite concerns of sf stories are precisely the ones that drive high-tech film and television, with the same proportion of sensationalism, techno-dazzle, and sentimental-grotesque human interest stories. We live in an age when the phenomena that literary sf requires readers to imagine can be displayed with aggressive, near-pornographic visibility. For our current discussion, however, it is more significant that in a global regime artists will look to languages and media that can travel everywhere, especially if it frees their art from linguistic insularity.

A truly global language can exist in narrative art only in visually dominant media such as film/video, in what the Mexican directors Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu call the "Esperanto of film"²⁵—"the language of image, music, human bodies, human voices, and of course subtitles" (Barnard, "Fictions" 209). To some extent this also is a classic problem of modernization and postcolonialism. The Senegalese author-director Ousmane Sembene, for instance, decided to quit writing novels in French to make vernacular films mainly because his own national audience was largely illiterate and French was the medium of the colonial elite.²⁶ (Even when subtitles are involved, reading them is cognitively much less taxing than reading a complicated text, and for better or worse they are drastically simplified utterances compared to the visual information.)²⁷

Both cinema and sf can be considered products of the very cultural hegemony that vernacular cinema strives to evade, and diverse domestic forces compete to control how the media tools are combined with local idioms. The street may find its own uses for things, but when it comes to producing commodities on it, the street is a battleground. National studios adapt versions of dominant Anglo sf narratives and images, so that sf products from feature films to music videos often seem to be cheap parodies of the Anglo paradigms. Such films actually embed a double-consciousness by accenting linguistic and imagistic specificity that is largely inaccessible to everyone who does not speak the language or reside in the culture.²⁸ Modernizing national elites striving to assert national/regional cultural power in the modern world system often claim that their societies have produced alternative rationalities or sciences, propping up the reactionary modernism through which they try to distinguish themselves from foreign hegemony while reproducing their technoscientific power.²⁹ By the same token, popular national/regional sf in visual media, seeking both large domestic audiences and an international one to maximize the profit-potential offered by the evolving global entertainment matrix, strives to marry the proven crowd-pleasing elements of international blockbusters with traditional elements of national cinema. When such national elements catch on, as in Japanese anime and Indian Bollywood spectacle, they enter the global aesthetic vocabulary. They also become foci for hegemonic appropriation.

The drive to reach a global audience has inspired many recent sf film productions. More and more films are released in several countries simultaneously—*Matrix: Revolutions* (2003) was introduced in more than sixty countries all at the same hour.³⁰ While the practice is said to be mainly a way of circumventing piracy, it is also linked to the so-called “International Style” of sf films first associated with Roland Emmerich and Paul Verhoeven, special-effects blockbusters in which cultural references are so formulaic that they cannot lose a non-US audience.³¹ This will no doubt be given a boost by deals Hollywood studios have recently made to penetrate the Chinese distribution market.³² The International Style was first intended to reach large non-US theater publics immediately; but approaching it from the other side, it has also guided non-US studios trying to break into the global market, with films such as the Swiss *Cargo* (2009) and the Spanish *Rec* (2007). Many other international successes have taken the opposite tack, working on a small scale with original f/x and art design, presenting double-coded texts that look outward to the transnational audiences while delivering references for the “home” audience that are invisible to the larger global public. In Neil Blomkamp’s *District 9* (2009), for example, the obvious alien refugee theme is seasoned with references to local Johannesburg events;³³ Mamoru Oshii’s *Patlabor II* (2000) addresses contemporary domestic debates about limits placed on Japanese military power;³⁴ Boon Joon Ho’s *The Host* (2007) obliquely refers to strained US-South Korean relations;³⁵ Áron Gauder’s *The District!* (2009) parodies Magyar ethnocentrism from a Roma perspective.

Increasingly, movies are losing their leading role among visual sf media. Though cinematic f/x become ever more spectacular and immersive in order to draw audiences to theaters, most of the movie houses frequented by most of the world’s moviegoers are not equipped with appropriate high-tech projection and playback systems. The gigantism of blockbuster films is being countered by the proliferation of small-site video production: short films, animation, and pirated DVD rips and mashes destined for computer screens. Sophisticated f/x software, editing programs, and digital video cameras are becoming so inexpensive and accessible in markets throughout the world that more and more independent and amateur films appear on YouTube, Vimeo, and similar video sites, which are then picked up and embedded on blogs everywhere in the great viral meme gift emporium. The advent of streaming media has created means to bypass the distribution conglomerates, allowing more independent films to reach ever wider audiences. Where in the past young filmmakers were expected to prove their chops at independent film festivals such as *Sundance*, many of the most acclaimed sf short films came to the public eye as viral prodigies.

The success of Japanese anime as a transnational style that developed independently of the US is no doubt an inspiration for artists throughout the world. Since the conditions for its emergence look to be hard to repeat, however, it is safer to assume that the search for the next transnational aesthetic breakthrough is happening via the application of inexpensive and seductive CGI effects. The most striking recent non-Anglo short sf films (which seem to be the

accepted gateway to major studio contracts, usually in the US)³⁶—such as South African Neil Blomkamp’s *Alive in Joburg* (2005), Uruguayan Fede Alvarez’s *Panic Attack* (2009), Spaniard Jesus Orellana’s *Rosa* (2011), Kenyan Wanuri Kaihu’s *Pumzi* (2009), Brixtonian Kibwe Tavares’s *Robots of Brixton* (2011), and Polish Tomek Baginski’s *The Cathedral* (2002)—all feature accessible CGI and motion-capture programs prominently.

I cannot speak to the expanding influence of sf-themed computer games and how they will provide new aesthetic frameworks for sf art in general. Anyone who has observed an Internet parlor in Manila, Budapest, or Lagos crowded to capacity with young players of *Halo* or *World of Warcraft* can feel the deep seductiveness of the medium throughout the world. Once Internet hookups are extended to remote sites, online gaming will doubtless be the most involving and constant experience that most people will have of science-fictional worlds. One can imagine that translation engines will be developed to a high-level specifically to address multilingual multiplayer interactions. Or, alternatively, games may become yet another path for establishing the worldwide domination of English, beyond this world and into the virtual ones.

Conclusion: Where Are We? Our views about globalization cannot help but be influenced by our positions. Cosmopolitan intellectuals and IMF officers may strive to see the world as a single entity (and they may indeed see difficult-to-apprehend unities), but every community will perceive developments through its own lens. There will often be many shared points of salience, but also powerful hidden ones known only to insiders. Every map of globalization and global culture is a cognitive-aesthetic artifact—a “cognitive map,” if you will, of a territory that is mutating and even passing away at the moment the map is drawn. Because globalization has no classical spatial or temporal boundaries, it requires new cartographies and geographies. If it is a chronotope (an idealized chronotope of chronotopes, perhaps), what we can never fully determine is whether we are watching it from the outside or from the inside. In either case, it is a singularity constantly reconstituted. Not unlike a Facebook Wall, it presents a constellation of affinities and communicational exchanges that appears self-sufficient; but each Wall is also isolated from others’ views, and operates as a mysterious assemblage of other equally mysterious assemblages. As Vilashini Cooppan writes,

Any map presents the global as a local utterance, for any attempt to represent “the world” inevitably bespeaks the mapmaker’s own placement. To change a map, then, is to change not only what we look at, but also the very place and premises from which we look. It is to encounter not just the strangeness of the world, but our own selves made strange. (27)

Sf has had an important role in the Enlightenment striving to view the world as a unitary thing. From Kepler’s *Somnium* (1634) and Voltaire’s *Micromégas* (1752) to *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and *The Matrix* (1999), the genre has depicted humanity as if from outer space as one species, and the world as one planet. Globalization of one form or another has been the default vector of

sf from the beginning. The scientific-materialist rationality of European Enlightenment thought is now coming under challenge from other rationalities and other mythologies that are being heard not only because of the economic power behind them. They are also being translated into terms that allow them to interfere with the dominant fictions of imperial Anglo-European discourse. This does not mean that science fiction has become so fuzzy that it is no longer a meaningful genre term; but it has become an even more turbulent one than it was in the past. The “science” of sf now means whatever conjunction of intellectual and technological tools is effective for asserting instrumental political power on the global stage. The “fiction” means whatever archive of narratives is most powerful in a culture—and indeed across cultures—for seducing publics into enjoying fictions about these “scientific” powers. Discursive border wars and erasures will continue. Cultural alliances will change in surprising ways. But perhaps sf in this expanded sense will also be acknowledged as the art that has been most concerned with constructing ways of imagining this technoscientifically constructed—and deconstructed—“world.”

NOTES

1. On cosmopolitanism, see Stengers, Gilroy, and Beck; Spivak’s remarks on planetarity as a critique of globality appear in her *Death of a Discipline* (71-102). For a sustained critique of the new cosmopolitanism’s tacit class biases, see Jazeel.
2. On the pace of language extinction, see Lovgren, Binns, Sutherland, and Harrison. For a nuanced and hopeful analysis, see Mufwene.
3. On debates surrounding “strategic essentialism,” indigeneity, and aboriginality, see Paradies, Zenker, Lattas, Ram, Alan Barnard, and the subsequent discussion, “The Concept of Indigeneity.”
4. See “Guard post for uncontacted Indians over-run by ‘drug traffickers’.”
5. Richard Simon invented the wonderful term *commodity* to describe quasi-erotic union with advertised commodities. It is a great pity it has not caught on.
6. Fede Alvarez’s short sf film, *Panic Attack* (2009), depicts a robot-alien attack on Montevideo with 9/11 motifs.
7. On the question of the fantasy/sf distinction in Marxist criticism, see my “Lucid Dreams.”
8. On the extension of Anderson’s “imagined communities” argument to sf, see my “Dis-Imagined Communities” and also my “SF and Empire.”
9. The evidence is so far anecdotal: see Cheryl Morgan’s report on her blog, and Damien Walter’s on his.
10. On Japan’s “soft power” cultural diplomacy, see Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin.
11. On the Hindutva and contemporary Indian sf film, see Alessio and Langer.
12. On the place of professional Star Craft play in South Korea, see Lee et al., as well as Jin and Chee.
13. See my *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (14-15).
14. See Ginway (467-68) for an elegant formulation.
15. See Alessio and Langer on this trend in the sf film *Koi ... Mil Gaya* (2003); see Basu on the convergence of superman motifs with Hindu superhero traditions.
16. See Dotse, and Thomas Morton’s documentary film, *The Sakawa Boys* (2011).
17. For internal critiques of Arabic sf, see Malik, and the interview with Arabic sf writer Achmed Khammas on the blog *Islam and Science Fiction*; see also “Is There or Ain’t There Arabic Science Fiction?” on the blog *Arabic Literature* (in English).

18. On the imperialist dimension of English linguistic hegemony, see Rabdi and Tan, and especially Phillipson (1-16).

19. For the debate about English in South Korea, see Song. A summary of the debate in Japan can be read on the SSJ (Social Science Japan) Forum (see “Making English Japan’s Official Language”); see also “Denmark, Japan and Germany move towards the use of the English language in legal and commercial capacities” and *The Bangkok Post* article “Plan to make English 2nd language vetoed.” Interestingly, according to the report, the Thai government vetoed its own agency proposal for fear that outsiders would think Thailand had once been colonized.

20. On the diffusion of English-language teaching in China, see Hu.

21. See Krishnaswamy (10-13) on “imperiality.”

22. See French sf writer Aliette de Bodar’s “On the prevalence of US tropes in storytelling” on her blog.

23. See “Research into Barriers to Translation and Best Practices,” a study for the Global Translation Initiative conducted by Dalkey Archive Press (March 2011).

24. Film was another matter. Foreign sf films were almost invariably art-house projects (as indeed films such as Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* [1972], Godard’s *Alphaville* [1965], Laloux’s *Fantastic Planet* [1973], and Petri’s *The 10th Victim* [1965] were originally conceived to be), while sf cinema from the Eastern bloc was routinely cannibalized for Roger Corman fiascos. Foreign adaptations of television sf were nearly unheard of in the US—the American versions of Japanese TV anime series such as *Astro Boy* (1963-66), *Speed Racer* (1967-68), and *Star Blazers* (1979) were drastically altered for American audiences, though the visual style remained intact and distinctive enough to influence much of later children’s television sf.

25. On Del Toro’s and Iñárratu’s “Esperanto of Film,” see Smith.

26. On Sembene’s “linguistic turn” from literature to film, see Murphy (68).

27. On the cultural work of subtitling, see Rich; on the cognitive work, see Perego et al.

28. On appropriations of Hollywood tropes in Indian sf films, see Khan.

29. Jeffrey Herf’s notion of “reactionary modernism,” which he applied to Weimar and Nazi cultures, is an apt model for characterizing the new nationalisms among intellectuals and professionals. Although he does not use the term, the most careful study of the evolution of reactionary modernism in India is by Prakash; see also Nanda on the corresponding reactionary Indian postmodernism. See also Jayasuriya.

30. See “Matrix global release begins.”

31. See Rosenbaum’s famous pan of Verhoeven’s *Starship Troopers*.

32. See Scalzi.

33. See Hayes’s commentary on his blog *Khanya*; he notes the resemblance of the aliens to the giant crickets (nicknamed Parktown prawns) that infested Johannesburg, as well as the film’s attitude toward Nigerian immigrants in South Africa.

34. See Fisch.

35. See the two-part article on *The Host* on the blog of Gord Sellar, an American expatriate in South Korea who writes penetratingly on South Korean film.

36. Alvarez, Orellano, and Kaihu have all reportedly been offered major studio contracts following their viral short films; Blomkamp of course received a contract to expand *Alive in Joburg* into what became *District 9*.

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ABSTRACT

The economic and political transformations of the globalizing regime have undermined the conditions that have been used until the recent past for defining nations, cultures, and science fiction itself. No clear “global culture” has emerged, however, to take their place. SF remains bound up with the hegemony of Anglophone culture, which now includes the former colonies of the US and the UK. The notorious lack of interest in non-hegemonic cultures means that written sf that is not written or translated into English has a limited influence. SF cinema has access to transnational audiences, but it too is largely conditioned by the global power of the US film industry. Non-US sf cinema tends to reproduce the characteristics of the US-dominated international style, while supplementing it with messages directed to local audiences. The main breakthroughs of sf art in the future will probably arrive via internet artforms, but one cannot say for

certain whether these will be genuine alternatives to the Anglo hegemony or expansions of it.