



Coexistent Perspectives AD7001

Themes: Posthumanism, Postcapitalism and Desire.

Karen Ann Mc Robbie 1805665

Critically analyse the late-capitalist post-human world of *The Electric State*, by Simon Ståhlénhag through the lens of dystopian Accelerationism.

Word Count: 4367

Table of Contents:

List of Figures:	3
Introduction:	5
Chapter 1: Understanding accelerationism and its relevance to science fiction.	6
Chapter 2: Transhumanism and science fiction.	7
Chapter 3: Meet Techno sapiens: Nick Land's accelerationist transhuman.	8
Chapter 4: Transhumanism and Landian accelerationism in the world of <i>The Electric State</i> .	9
Conclusion:	21
Referencing List:	23
Bibliography:	26

List of Figures:

Cover: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 60

Figure 1: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 26-27 10

Figure 2: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 4-5 10

Figure 3: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 8 11

Figure 4: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 22 12

Figure 5: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 82 13

Figure 6: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 32-33 14

Figure 7: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 37 15

Figure 8: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 34 16

Figure 9: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 95 17

Figure 10: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 98-99 18

Figure 11: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 128 19

Figure 12: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 105 20

Figure 13: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 114 - 115 21

Figure 14: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 91 22

Figure 15: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 138-139 24

There was no safe everyday life behind us, no normal zone to return to, and the only way out was forward. (Ståhlenhag, 2017 p.101)

Introduction:

One of the ethical dimensions defining science fiction is that of, 'Consequence - if we do this, what would the repercussions be and how would things change in accordance?' (Schmeink, 2016, p.19). Since 2014, author and artist Simon Ståhlenhag has released a series of large format illustrated novels depicting visions that encapsulate this very dimension.

In Ståhlenhag's *The Electric State* (2017), the focus of this essay, his detailed illustrations describe an alternate Northern America, set in 1997. The novel shows a post-apocalyptic country devastated by war, malfunctioning virtual reality and an emergent hybrid consciousness, fusing artificial intelligence with humans. Ståhlenhag depicts the country formerly known as the US in a state of collapse. Organised society, centralised government and policing is largely absent throughout the novel. Towns abandoned, social infrastructure is neglected and rundown in a country where capitalism is in a state of mortal decline.

The aim of this essay is to produce a close reading of *The Electric State*, analysing the text and imagery through the lens of accelerationist thought. Ståhlenhag's depiction of a post-war, self-imploding networked society is consumed by an addiction to the interminable relay of a spectacle fed to them via VR headsets called 'Neurocasters'. The world of *The Electric State* can be viewed as a projection, a possible consequence of Accelerationism, a transformative politics, implemented through intensifying and accelerating the machines of capitalism and technological evolution.

The provocative ideas of Nick Land, a key proponent of Accelerationist theories, posited ideas that envisioned dystopian futures for humanity as outcomes of these theories. Ståhlenhag's parallel universe can be viewed as one such outcome, illustrating chillingly a world wherein Land imagined that, 'Humanity recedes like a loathsome dream'. (Land, 2011 p.300)

Initially, the essay will discuss key ideas of accelerationist theory, its origins, and how these theories influence and frame works from the science fiction genre. By applying their key ideas such as accelerating technological advancement, accelerationist politics suggests both utopian and dystopian outcomes for society and humanity. As summarised by Schmeink,

Cyberpunk ... inserts itself into posthuman discourse by providing a science-fictional imaginary for both cyborg-enhanced and genetically engineered humanity and the social implications both technologies bring with them. (Schmeink, 2013, p.21)

A discussion of these concepts, outlining the main branches of accelerationist thought will contextualise a reading of Nick Land's ideas. The key text applied here to *The Electric State* will be Land's, *Fanged Noumena* (2011). Alongside this, an examination of transhumanism and its ideas

on the fusion of artificial intelligence and technology with the human will also converge in the analysis of the novel under scrutiny.

Chapter 1: Understanding Accelerationism and its relevance to science-fiction.

This chapter will discuss theories of accelerationism and their relevance to works of science fiction. Accelerationists postulate that accelerating the mechanisms of capitalism will bring about a post-capitalist society and a future full of possibilities. Futures enabling ‘maximal mastery over society and its environment ...[able to deal] with global problems [and] achieving victory over capital’ (Williams and Srnicek, 2013, 03, point 21).

Forecasting impacts of economic and environmental collapse or a technological singularity on posthuman and transhuman futures have been common central themes of science fiction. As accelerationist theories postulate futures transformed by technology, ‘[recovering] dreams...of the quest of Homo sapiens towards expansion beyond the limitations of the earth and our bodily forms’ (Williams and Srnicek, 2013, 03, point 22), accelerationist politics are often the setting of such narratives.

Accelerationists argue that technology, particularly computer technology and capitalism... should be massively sped up and intensified - either because this is the best way forward for humanity, or because there is no alternative (Beckett, 2017, para. 3).

Accelerationism has roots in philosopher, Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari’s theories of posthumanism. They recognised that economic systems of capitalism quickly incorporate all forms of labour and production, as affirmed by Shavero in his statement, ‘under a regime of real subsumption, every living person is transformed into a capital stock that must ... be profitably invested’ (Shavero, 2013). In *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari outline the idea that by harnessing and embracing economic, libidinal, cultural and social forces of capitalism an emancipatory potential from this system would be triggered and realised. Their solution is not to, ‘withdraw from the market, but to go in the opposite direction...To go still further...in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization...to “*accelerate the process*”’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p.260).

In *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek (2013) develop these ideas further, mapping out accelerationists’ intentions to ‘unleash latent productive forces’ (03, point 5) within society by ‘accelerat[ing] the process of technological evolution’ (03, point 7). This evolution, alongside socio-political action, ‘sophisticated economic modelling’ and a strategic use of technological tools present within capitalist society today will transform society. Tools such as the ‘technological and scientific advance[ments] made possible by capitalist society’,

as well as 'social network analysis [tools], agent-based modelling, big data analytics, and non-equilibrium economic models...[becoming the] necessary cognitive mediators for understanding complex systems' (03, point 9). To accelerationists transformation is fundamental to avoid 'a slow fragmentation towards primitivism, perpetual crisis, and planetary ecological collapse' (03, point 23).

In his article entitled, '*Accelerationism: how a fringe philosophy predicted the future we live in*', Andy Beckett explains that accelerationists focus on questions such as:

The rise of artificial intelligence; what it means to be human in an era of addictive intrusive electronic devices; the seemingly uncontrollable flows of global markets ... the power of capitalism as a network of desires...[favouring] the further merging of the digital and the human. (2017, para. 3)

Technological trends, such as computer technologies interfacing with the human, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, biotechnology and drone technology provide a rich source of inspiration for science fiction creators. These trends, coupled with notions of imminent economic and environmental collapse, the ineffectuality of governments to resolve climate change, exploitation and corruption as discussed in *#Accelerate Manifesto* (Williams and Srnicek, 2013, 01, point 1), frame societies in science fiction works. These works reflect current collective anxieties about the future, enumerating possibilities of worlds devastated by over-population, depleted resources, famine and pollution driven by capitalism's constant demand for growth. They play out accelerationist politics to both utopian and dystopian futures.

Chapter 2: Transhumanism and Science fiction.

For the cyberpunks... technology is visceral.... Certain central themes spring up repeatedly... body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery [and] genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry - techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self. (Sterling, 1986, preface xiii)

At the core of *The Electric State* we see Sterling's 'central themes' in the way Ståhlenhag has portrayed 'humanity' and 'the nature of the self'. Drone pilots interface with technology, becoming an 'enhanced joystick' (2017, p. 54). Throughout the novel, much of the population have become entrapped by virtual reality brain stimulation headsets. A dominant hybrid 'inter-cerebral intelligence' (2017, p. 54) emerges from this entrapment. Individual agency and free-will have been evaporated, and disconnection from the network is terminal. These aspects of the novel posit

expressions of the human beyond our current physical manifestation, exemplifying transhuman manifestations.

In his essay *Transhumanist Values*, Nick Bostrom states that 'current humanity need not be the endpoint of evolution' (2003, para.3). He defines transhumanism as an, 'approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology' (2003, para.1). Augmentation and enhancement of the human brain and organism intended to extend life, eliminate diseases and genetic abnormalities, to improve our intellectual and cognitive abilities, as well as the performance of the physical body are all 'potential developments that could profoundly alter the human condition' (2003, para.2). This ushering in the transhuman to ever expanding dialogues on the posthuman.

Chapter 3: Meet Techno sapiens: Nick Land's accelerationist transhuman.

During the late 1990s Warwick University became a rich fomenting ground for accelerationist thought and ideas, culminating in the formation of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit. The CCRU, co-founded by Sadie Plant and Nick Land, was a group of thinkers from a diverse range of disciplines. Their ideas and experiments fused together wide ranging subjects, such as 'futurism, technoscience, philosophy, mysticism, numerology, complexity theory, and science fiction' (2011, monoscop.org).

Since his time at Warwick University Nick Land, a key thinker of British accelerationism has published prolifically. However, to many his writings have become divisive, propounding the most extreme, nihilistic trajectories of accelerationism. Fully unleashing capitalism's destructive forces on humanity to the point of its total destruction. To Land, left accelerationism's 'notion that self-propelling technology is separable from capitalism, is a deeply theoretical error' (Beckett, 2017, para.) thereby excluding any possibility of agency and control over its navigation. It is the machinic descendants of humanity that will own the future, reprogramming and redesigning all attempts at external control or opposition:

The high road to thinking no longer passes through a deepening of human cognition, but rather through a becoming inhuman of cognition, a migration of cognition out into the emerging planetary techno sentience reservoir, into 'dehumanised landscapes ... emptied spaces'! where human culture will be dissolved. (Land, 2011, p.293)

The 'sidelining of human intelligence by the coming *techno sapiens*' (Land, 2011, p.293), to Land is an inescapable inevitability. An idea also explored in a plethora of science fiction and cyberpunk works. The destructiveness of machinic desires of capitalism, coupled with cybernetic technics and

technological advancement proposes such futures where humanity has been overcome by technology:

Machinic desire [is] inhuman, as it rips up political cultures, deletes traditions, dissolves subjectivities, and hacks through security apparatuses, tracking a soulless tropism to zero control... what appears to humanity as the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy's resources. (Land, 2011, p.338)

It is precisely the darker dystopian nature of Land's ideas that bear relevance to the analysis of this novel.

The capitalized terminus of anthropoid civilization (,axiomatics') will come to be seen as the primitive trigger for a transglobal post-biological machinism, from a future that shall have still scarcely begun to explore the immensities of the cybercosm. Overman as cyborg, or disorganization upon the matrix. (Land, 2011, p.297)

The next chapter will discuss Ståhlenhag's conception of an evolving 'biological machinism' and 'overman as cyborg' within a society that seems to be at the 'capitalized terminus of anthropoid civilization' (Land, 2011, p. 297). Through the illustrations we will consider how the world of Electric State visualises a Landian dystopia, portraying a nihilistic, bleak outcome of accelerationist ideas. Analysing its effects on society and humanity through his concepts of the transhuman.

Chapter 4: Transhumanism and Landian Accelerationism in the World of *The Electric State*.

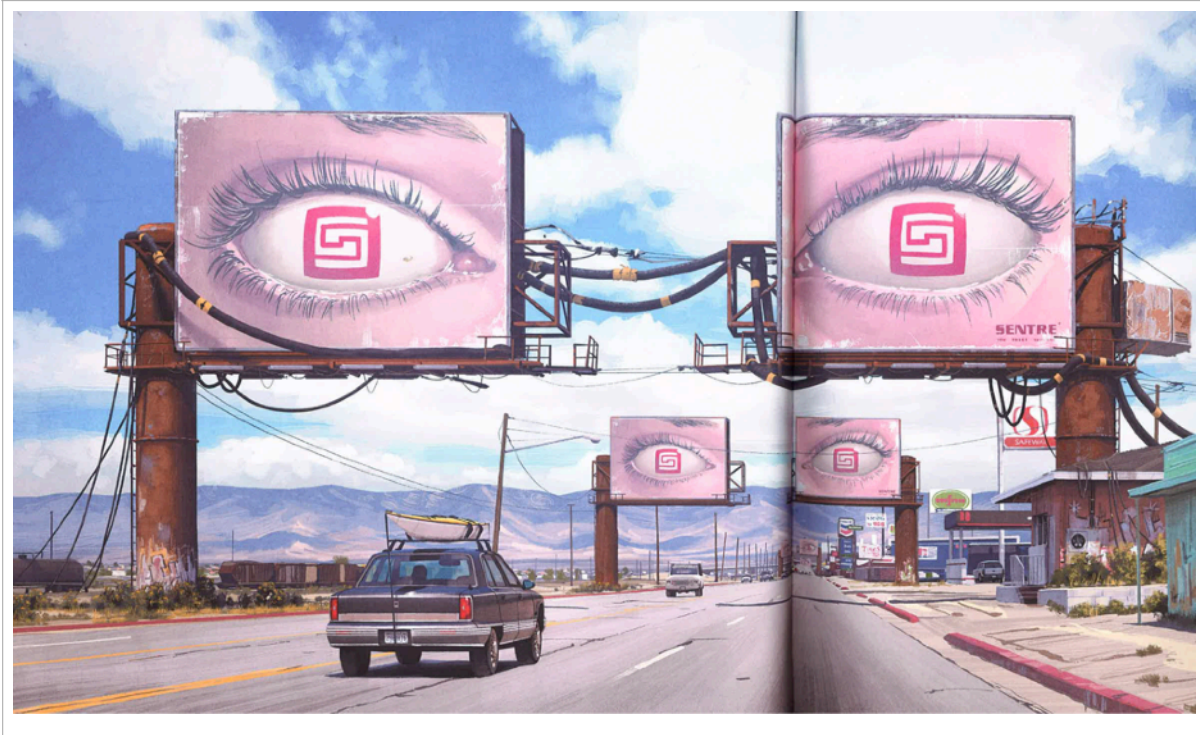


Figure 1: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 26-27

The narrative, set in 1997, follows the story of a girl called Michelle, and her mysterious robot companion Skip, undertaking a hazardous journey across a reimagined United States. A retro-futuristic road trip, it features an array of iconography and motifs emblematic of road trip genre works (<http://www.filmreference.com>). But this is a country devastated by a seven year war (Ståhlenhag, 2017 p.3), its battle scarred landscape is divided by exclusion zones, areas devastated by drought, a junkyard for abandoned war machines.

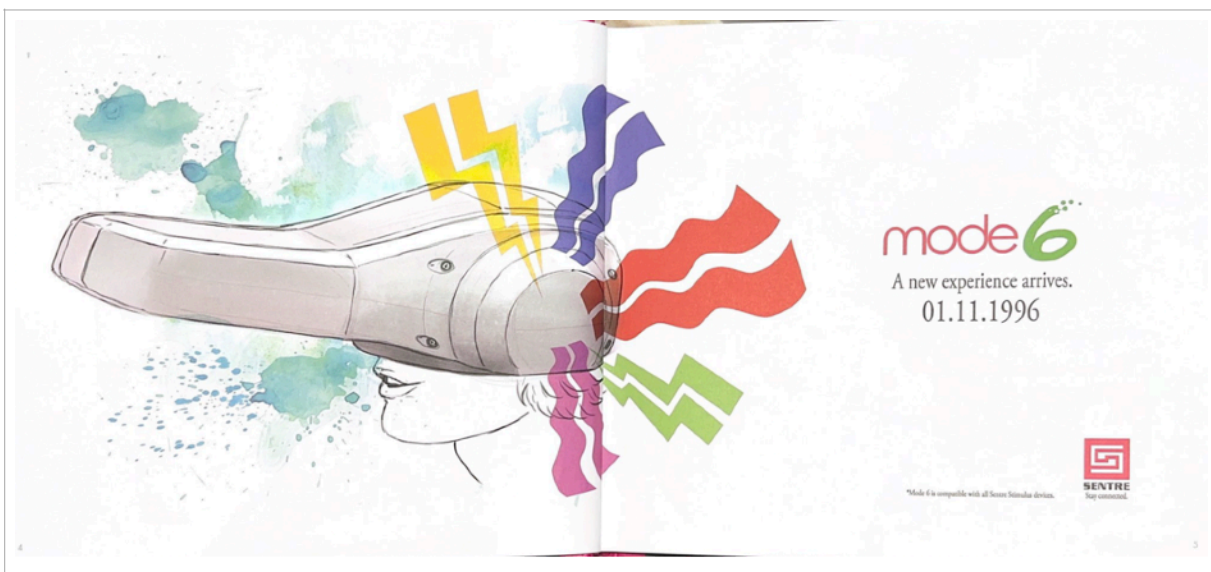


Figure 2: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 4-5

Throughout the novel, Ståhlenhag's illustrations incrementally reveal the transhuman entity that developed from the fusion of '*Sentre's stimulus devices*' with human consciousness. At the outset, a slick, graphic illustration in the style of an advertisement, hails the arrival of '*Mode 6*' of a virtual reality headset. It boasts the spectacular tag-line, '*A new experience arrives*' (Ståhlenhag, 2017, pp. 4-5). Bright saturated colours and bold graphic parallel lines emanate from the figure wearing the neurocaster headset. These lines, emulating waves and thunderbolts, signify the audio-visual stimulation transmitted from networking with '*Sentre*'. The wearer's expression is one of awe and enjoyment, and the lively colours suggest thrill and excitement, as the wearer's limbic system is activated by the experience.

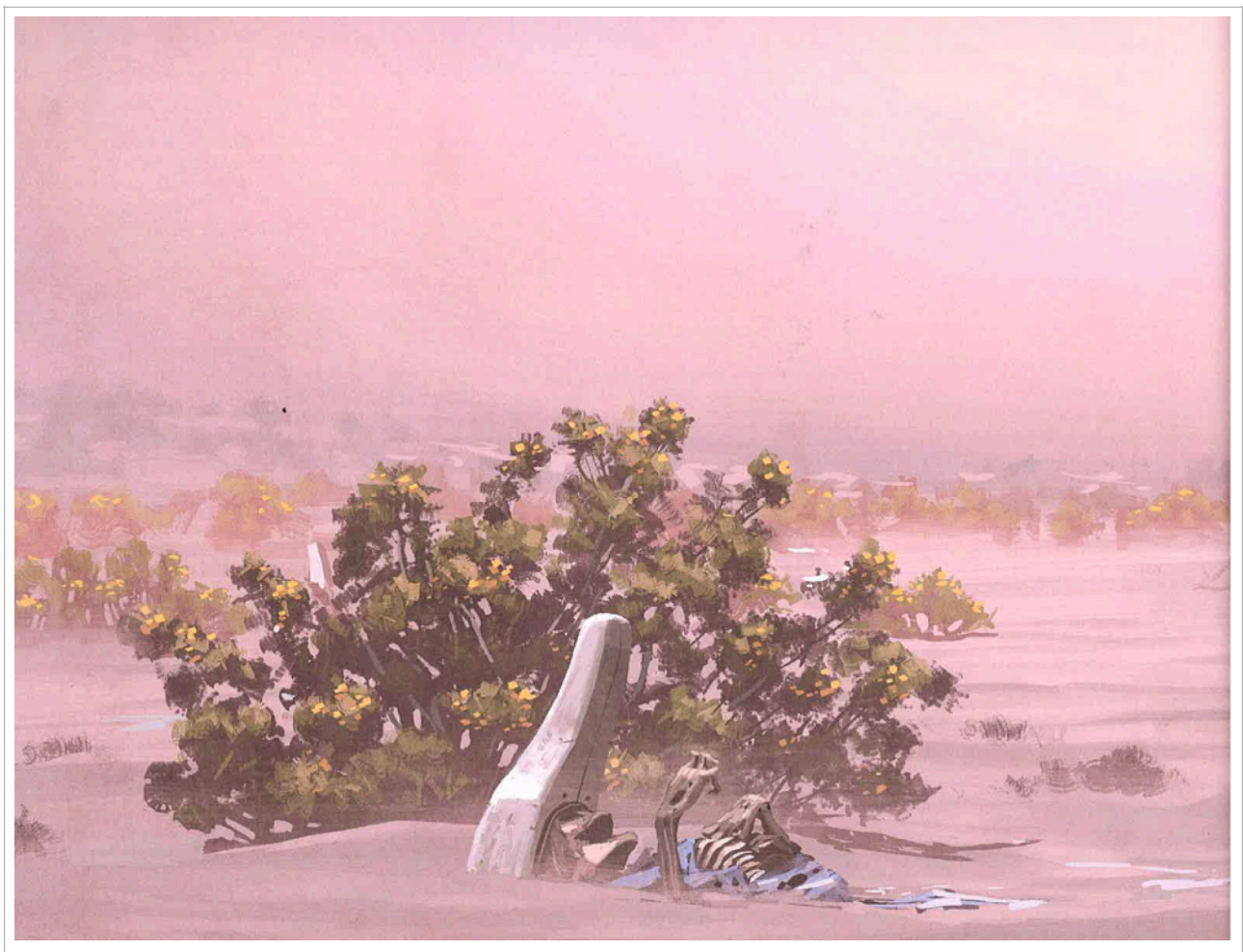


Figure 3: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 8

As the narrative progresses, the stark reality of this fusion with '*Sentre*' is revealed. The aforementioned celebratory hailing of '*Mode 6*' cannot be more starkly undermined than by the double-page spread seen on pages 8 and 9. It elicits a burgeoning understanding that society here has taken a dark dystopian turn (Figure 3: Ståhlenhag, 2017, p. 8). Skeletal human remains and withered husks of corpses litter the landscape of the arid Mojave desert; tinted pink by passing dust storms. Each skull, still encased in a neurocaster headset. Ståhlenhag's colour palette here is

muted, utilising largely mid-tones, thus evoking the low-visibility of the dust storm. Dimly rendered shapes in the background suggest a multitude of bodies strewn in the desert, still wearing their headsets. Dust erasing the gory details, clouding all sense of depth.

The thrilling promise of mode 6 , and the gruesome reality of these headsets succinctly illustrated a warning in Land's, *Fanged Noumena*, on the pursuit of uninhibited pleasure: 'Uninhibited pleasure does not tend to the benefit of the organism, but rather, to its immolation. Or, more precisely, the enhancement of life is intrinsically bound to its abolition.' (2011, p.128)

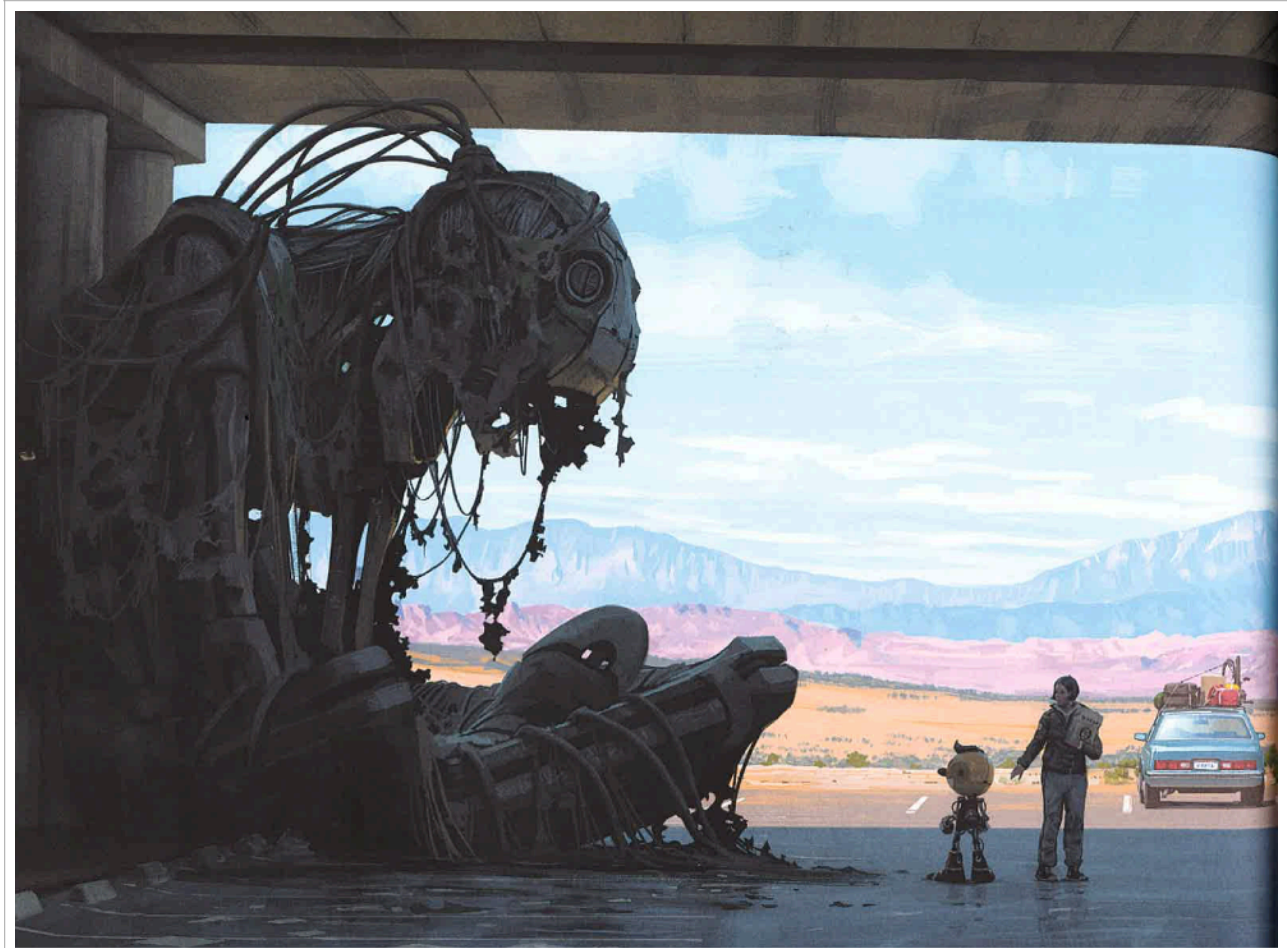


Figure 4: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 22

As the narrative progresses the protagonist encounters a country scattered with abandoned wrecks of surreal robots and drone ships. Their hulls riddled with the impact of bullets and bombs, or eviscerated; reveal entanglements of wiring dangling from their decaying skeletal frames (Ståhlenhag, 2017, p. 22).



Figure 5: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 82

These abandoned machine husks instil an uneasiness within us. They are the detritus from a war of gigantic proportions fought by drone pilots (Stahlenhäg, 2017, p.3). Gargantuan abandoned drone ships convey the severity of the war. Some have been reclaimed, repurposed as dwellings (p.75), whilst other robots seem isolated and lonely, cut off from their troops (Figure 5: Ståhlenhag, 2017, p.82). This feeling of loneliness is tempered with an eeriness, with Stahlenhag depicting robot faces frozen in inane artificial smiles that plunge us into the uncanny valley (Mori, 2012).

Although this is a vision of the past, determined by decisions made in an alternate timeline, the world of *Electric State* is recognisable but distinctly different. It has a ‘*used future*’ aesthetic popularised in films such as *Blade Runner* and *Star Wars*. Ståhlenhag’s illustrations of battle scarred rusting abandoned battle droids are retro-futuristic in design, a style depicting science fiction futures and alternative timelines imbued with nostalgia. ‘Put simply, retro-futurism is a half-nostalgic, half-sentimental memorialising of popular futurism’.(Guffey, 2014, p.254)

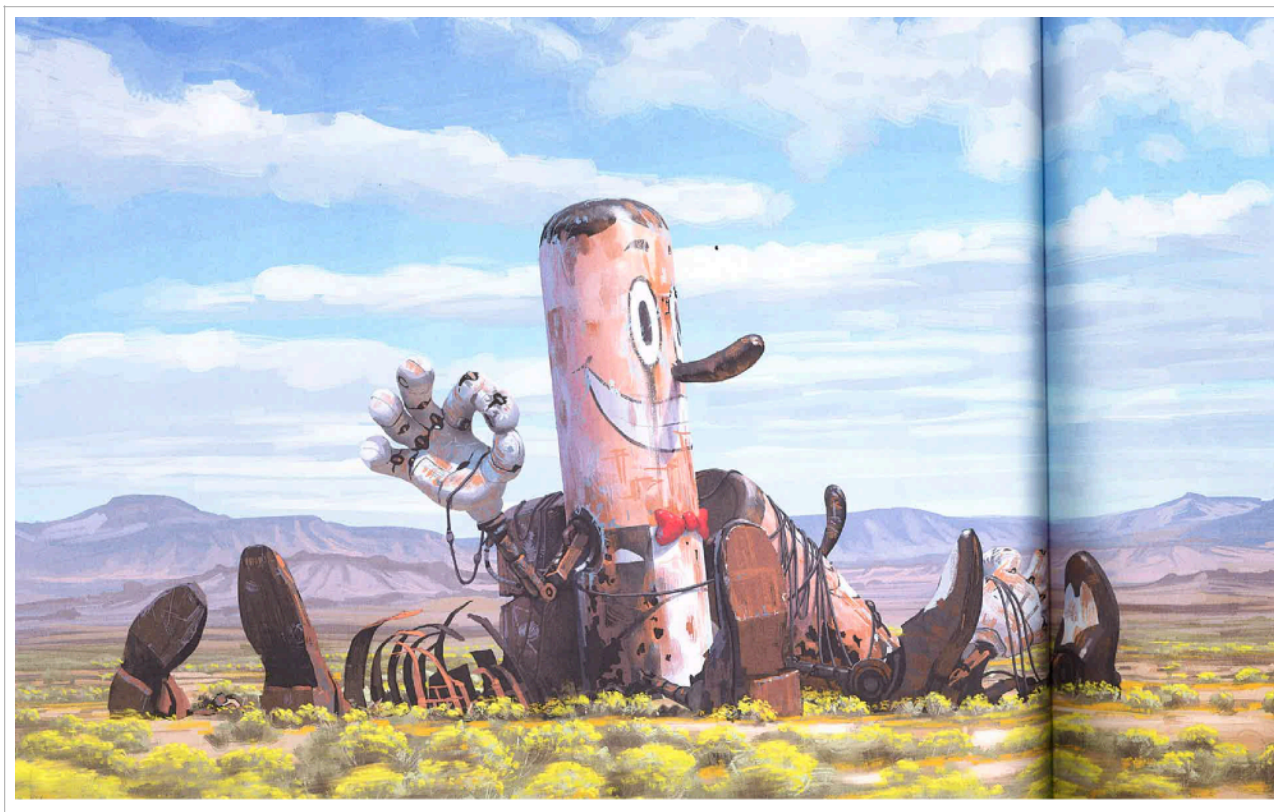


Figure 6: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 32-33

This retro-futuristic style can be seen in the facial design and styling of the droids and cyborgs the protagonist encounters. Military fighting machines incongruously combine mascot-like elements, conjuring characters such as *Bob's Big Boy* mascot (<https://bobs.net/>) or animated characters such as Pat Sullivan's Felix the cat (<https://felixthecat.com/nonflash.html>). Even the protagonist's companion, Skip has cartoon-like features, adding to the retro-futuristic style of the novel.

These cheerful features of mascot styled droids and cyborgs and the upbeat marketing style of the advertisements are repetitively juxtaposed with macabre subject matter, shown in disrepair and abandoned. This jarring, sharp emphasis indicates that these are the final days of capitalism. Such juxtapositions, as seen in the advert for 'Mode 6' contrasting with the desolate opening scenes in the desert are seen throughout the novel. An unsettling disparity is evident in the portrayal of the 'Sentre' corporation itself, manufacturing military headsets alongside headsets intended for personal entertainment. (Ståhlenhag, 2017, pp. 34-35 and p.46).



Figure 7: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 37

An illustration that encapsulates this juxtaposition most incisively, is that of a dilapidated three-dimensional billboard encountered in the desert (Figure 7, Ståhlenhag, 2017, p.37). The billboard takes the form of a 3D heart, advertising finance solutions for those needing heart transplants or serious corrective surgery for a 'terminal condition'. In a state of disrepair and semi collapse, its paint faded and discoloured, the heart's leering, sardonic smile and aggressive eyes convey the mercenary nature of the company, 'Lifebuddy', exploiting capital from the terminally ill.



Figure 8: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 34

As the narrative progresses we discover that the Neurocaster headsets, originally designed for military use malfunctioned. From this a collective cerebral hive mind emerged. This hybrid consciousness is called 'The Convergence'(p.54). Our propensity to succumb to the embrace of a machinic network is inferred by Land, in *Fanged Noumena*: 'At a signal from the software virus linking us to the matrix we cross over to the machinery, which is waiting to converge with our nervous systems'. (Land, DATE, p.292). Land also experienced a form of collective entity that emerged through the collaborative operations of the group he co-founded, the CCRU .

'Even today, former members of the CCRU are committed to the notion that the unit evolved into a hive-mind. To Land, "Ccru was an entity...irreducible to the agendas, or biographies of its component sub-agencies...utter submission to The Entity was key.'" (Beckett, 2017, para. 35)

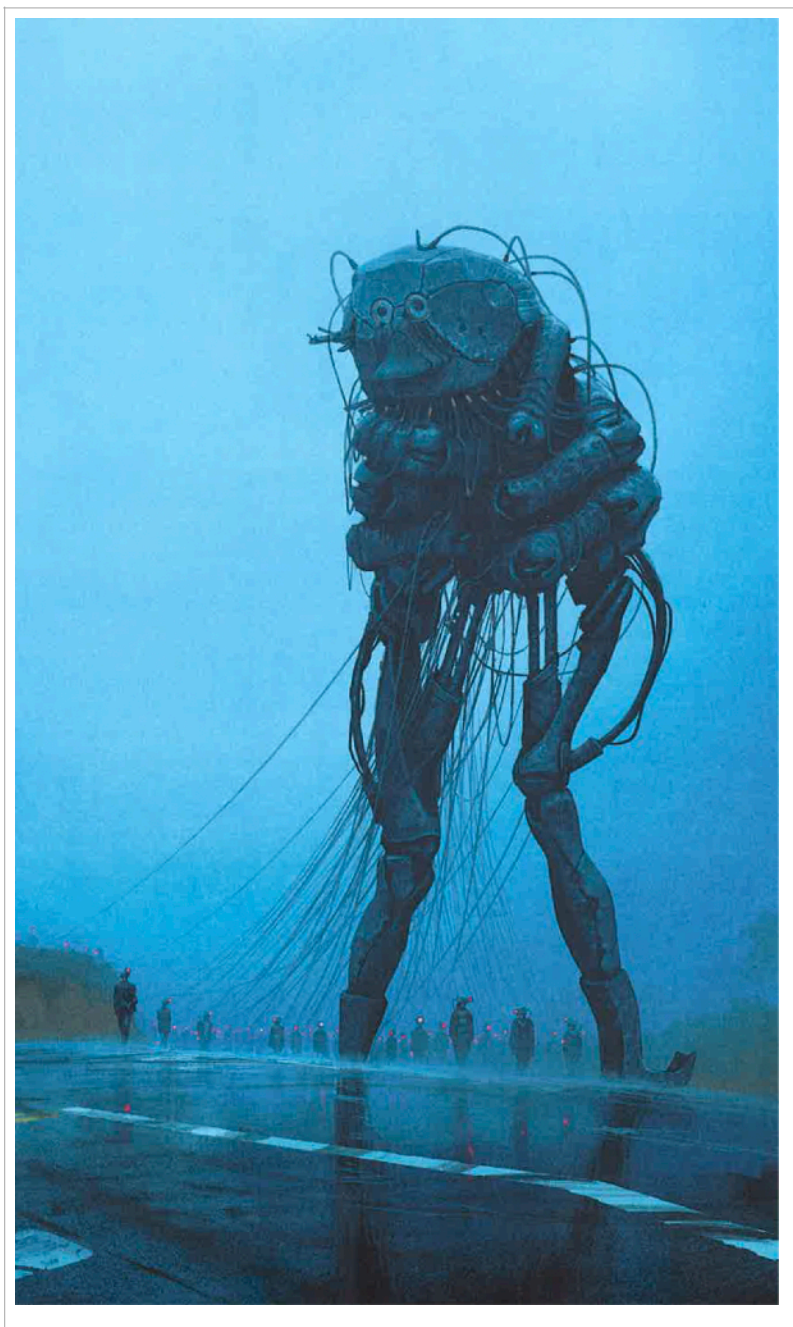


Figure 9: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 95

Ståhlenhag's dark, eldritch conception of a networked society shows zombified individuals devoid of free will, illustrating that very 'cross over' Land suggests. Their capture by the enrapture of the 'neurocasters' point to a loss of self-identity and individuality. They've succumbed to the platform's promise to satisfy each subject's desires, to a promise of wholeness, satisfying the insatiable drive for the Lacanian 'real' (1977), and its illusion of completeness. The neurocaster experience and its effect on those captured embody Debord's statement on the spectacle: 'When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings - dynamic figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behaviour' (Debord, 1970, p. 11).

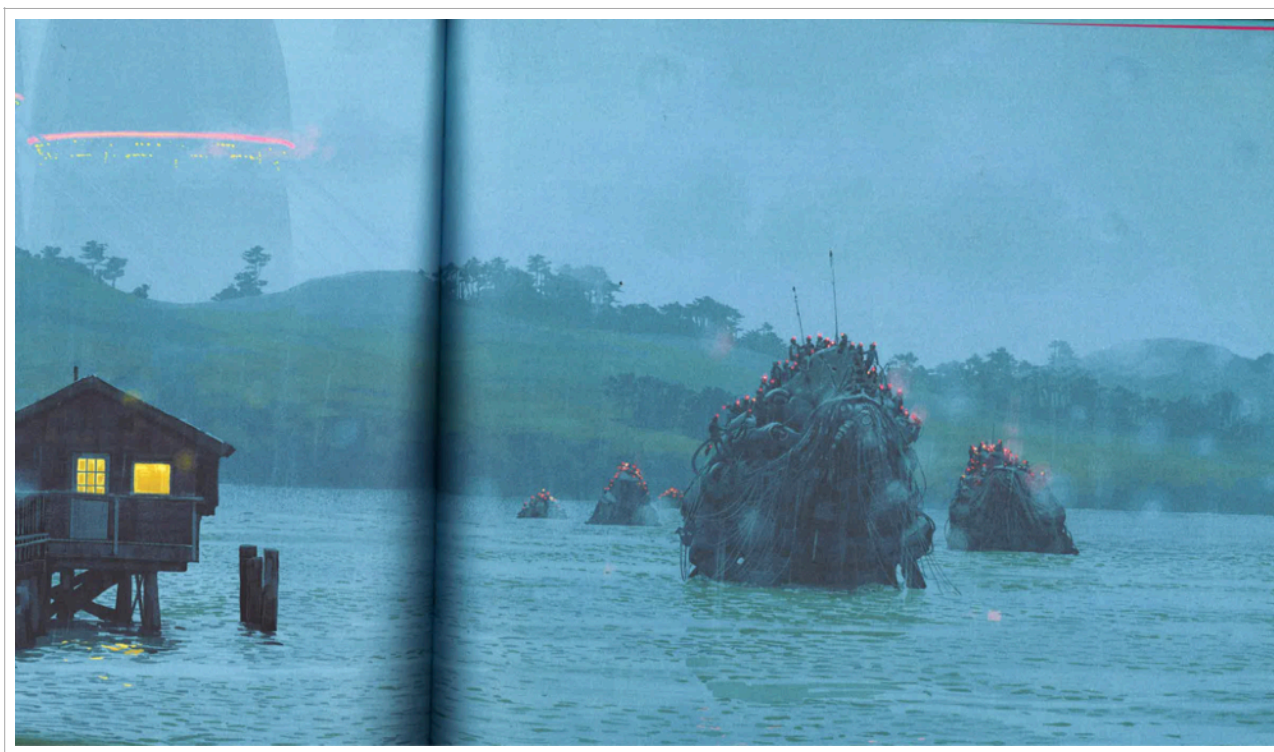


Figure 10: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 98-99

Within 'The Convergence' humans have been transformed to units of energy. Energy to be pathologically consumed, a node, a single neuron within this collective entity. As stated by Charles, 'humans have become "material nodes and connectors ...[a] physical manifestation of the "virtual" world" ', Charles, E. 2013 (www.emma-charles.com). The Convergence is malevolent, each transhuman 'node' enslaved to a 'tyrannical totalitarianism...a capricious emergent order beyond... control' (03, point 140 the very scenario that Williams and Srnicek aimed to avoid through their accelerationist manifesto.

Following the protagonist throughout the novel is a figure named, Walter. He differs marginally from those unable to extricate themselves from the neurocasters. Walter is able to network with 'The Convergence', detaching from it, retaining a sense of agency and independence, acting in service of it. This different mode of connection is subtly indicated on the neurocaster headset when he joins the network at roadside booths. Ståhlenhag uses a neon yellow for the headset's transmission light, rather than the red light seen on the headsets of the hoards captured by 'The Convergence'. This same subtle different coloured transmission light is also seen on Christopher's headset, Michelle's younger brother. This explains his ability to control Skip, mapping Michelle's journey across different territories, and their eventual escape from the country.



Figure 11: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 128

The illustrations of Walter communing with The Convergence at roadside Sentre booths (pp. 14-15 and pp. 104-105) are some of the most hauntingly bleak images of the novel. Cold green and warm orange lighting gives these urban settings a ghostly atmosphere, imbued with a desolate loneliness redolent of Edward Hopper's paintings. Walter's solitary figure seen in an empty parking lot, plugged into the Sentre VR connection point alongside a row of semi-functional street lights that stretch into the darkness recalls the lone female figure of Hopper's, *Automat* (1927). This empty parking lot illustration, encapsulates the post-human condition of this novel, and its late-capitalism setting. Even the figure of Walter, who cognitively is not present, points to a society where every aspect of the human has been subsumed and appropriated by The Convergence.



Figure 12: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 105

Michelle represents the Guattari and Deleuzian, 'schizorevolutionary type ...[following] the *lines of escape* of desire'. 'The Convergence' cyborg manifests more as an oedipal force, dependent on 'paranoiac territoriality', a fascisizing force : 'The paranoiac engineers masses, he is the artist of the large molar aggregates...the phenomena of organized crowds...Molar structures that subordinate the molecules' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, pp.308-309).



Figure 13: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 114 - 115

The hordes of neurocaster captured minds are controlled to the detriment of the health of their physical bodies. They seem unable to recognise their own physical needs or extricate themselves from the spectacle they're consuming. To be cut-off from this hybrid consciousness hive-mind leads to a secondary, ultimate death, the death of the corporeal body of the individual. Both the illustrations and the text explicitly emphasise this. Michelle relays the story of Birgitte, her foster mother, whose body is found at the bottom of a pool, still wearing her neurocaster headset, whilst throughout the novel, we encounter powerful images of wraith-like individuals, consumed by the hybrid mind. Ståhlenhag's double-page illustration on page 114 -115 (Figure 13, Ståhlenhag, 2017) powerfully illustrates this. A node of 'The Convergence', whose contorted body is slowly being reclaimed by nature. Moss grows over his atrophied legs, whilst the tendrils of bindweed clamber over his emaciated shoulders and his headset.

On page 78 the narrative finally enters a more recognisable territory, the suburbs of urban sprawl that seem operational. These streets are familiar, echoing our reality, but what is alien are the megalithic forms appearing through the mist, towering over the city streets below. These towering colossi are a nightmare of tangled wires, tethering the network of homes and captured minds to the grid. These hubs are monuments to a suffocating commercialism fed by desire.

Zombified crowds wander through the narrative, driven by some mysterious purpose of the hive mind, showing a technology reshaping and manipulating human behaviour. These are unconscious host vessels, directed by a parasitic collective consciousness. Humanity redefined by a pernicious

technology. The unblinking red eye of the neurocaster headsets indicates the assemblage of a new class of machine, piloted by a mysterious intelligence.

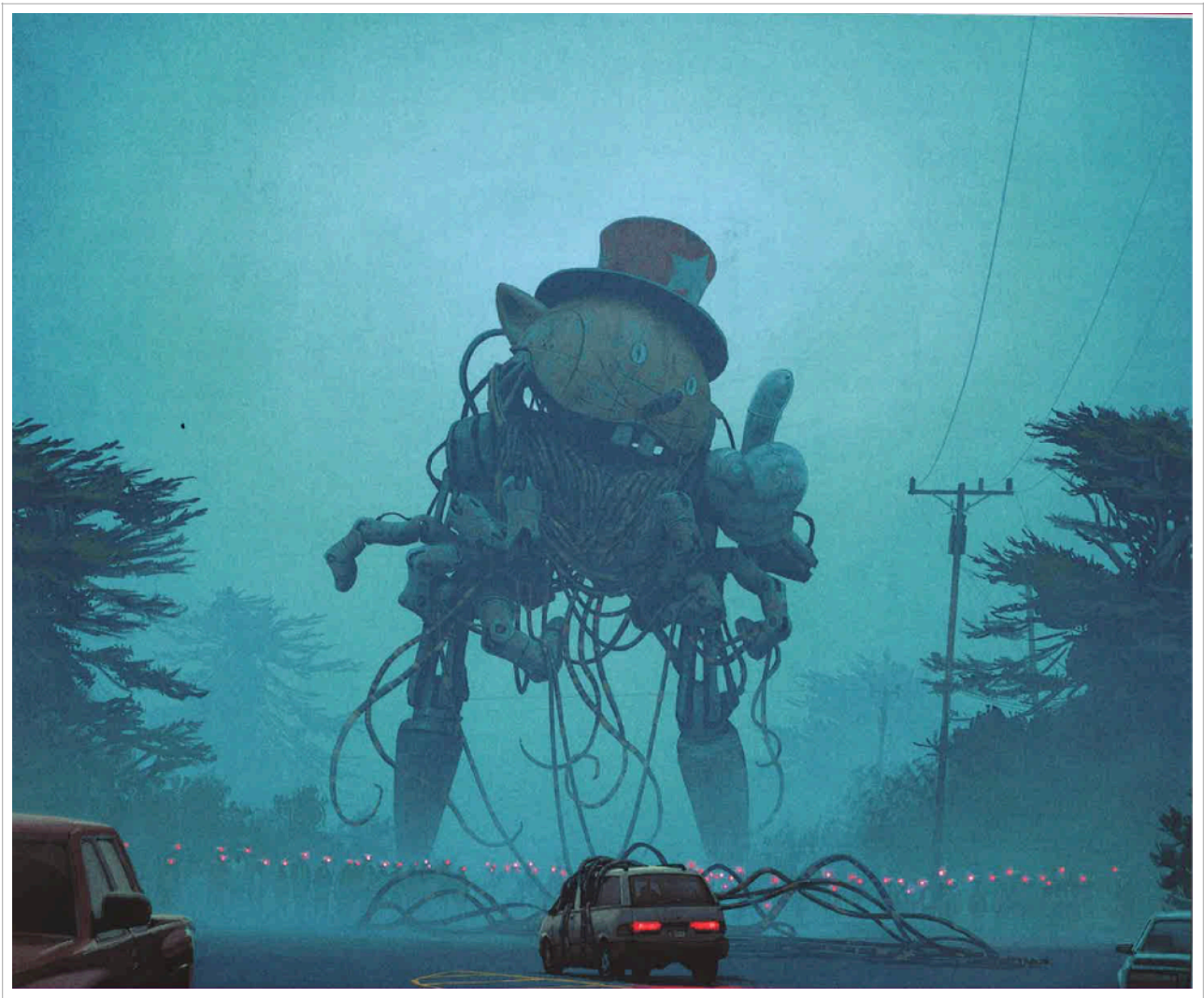


Figure 14: Ståhlenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, p. 91

In one illustration tentacular wires snake out from a robot that seems to be a conglomeration of different parts. They swarm into a parked vehicle whilst a horde of neurocaster wraiths assemble to witness some dark unnatural ritual. Cybernetic arms and prostheses become entwined reaching some climax that numbed figures 'consume' on a hyper-real level, libidinal desire channelled by a corruption of capitalism (Figure 14, Ståhlenhag, 2017, pp. 90-91). The misty lighting here, semi shrouding the scene conveys a chilling toxicity, with the blue-green hues of the mist tinting the mid-ground and background, and figures in the scene. The magenta lights of the car draw our attention, echoing the attention of the neurocaster wraiths gathered in the distance, focussed on a nightmarish transhuman sexual encounter.

Conclusion:

As an illustrator this analysis has been invaluable in understanding with a greater depth the common themes of science fiction and how narratives can be driven by philosophical ideas and politics. Essential to building complex societies with believable historical contexts, setting the scene of the fictional world of a narrative is essential, giving a story depth and plausibility. This makes a world more identifiable, giving the story a strong foundation, whilst also aiding the ability to connect to the characters and to the challenges that they face.

At the core of this novel we see an extreme outcome of accelerationist politics and concepts of the transhuman. The effects of war, an insidious fusion with technology, and how these have impacted the world of this novel, its country, culture and people are issues raised as forewarnings in accelerationist writing.

The scariest part of Ståhlenhag's world is that it is not impossible. The ideas of virtual reality, robotic warfare, and society run by electronics are already being found today. People today are escaping their gloomy days by going into the internet through social media, video games, and movies. The world outside is becoming scarier because we are avoiding what is real. That's what Ståhlenhag sees coming and more. (Malacarne, 2020)

Ståhlenhag explores different possibilities and outcomes for accelerationism and the transhuman, but through his retro-futuristic style he creates something new within science fiction. He engages our interest through his use of this nostalgic style. In his illustrations his fusion of drone technology and robots with cartoon-like elements and design trends from earlier decades prompts us to recollect similar characters and designs from our childhood and our experiences. This elicits a more enriching experience of the narrative than one where the audience is simply focussed on the outcome of the story or how events conclude for the protagonist. Even if, as Ståhlenhag does throughout the novel, these cheery images are juxtaposed eerily with the darker subject matter of the story.



Figure 15: Ståhlén, S. (2017) *The Electric State*, pp. 138-139

Although the novel has a dark dystopian nature the protagonist does represent an emancipated figure and at the conclusion there is a suggestion of an escape from this bleak trajectory of accelerationism. With the protagonist managing to flee the bleakness of 'Pacifica' by sea in a canoe with her brother. The technology of 'The Convergence' is symbolically discarded on the beach, as the waves advance (Figure 15, Ståhlén, 2017). This suggests the possibility of a future symbolically cleansed of the this corrupted technology and transhumanism, a future where humans have agency, full of possibility.

Referencing List:

Beckett, A. (2017) *Accelerationism: how a fringe philosophy predicted the future we live in*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/11/accelerationism-how-a-fringe-philosophy-predicted-the-future-we-live-in> (Accessed: 31 March 2023).

Bostrom, N. (2005) *Transhumanist Values*. Available at: <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/values> (Accessed: 15 April 2023).

Deleuze, G. And Guattari F. (1972) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.

Film Reference (No date) *Road Movies: Iconography, Style, and Themes*. Available at: <http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Road-Movies-ICONOGRAPHY-STYLE-AND-THEMES.html> (Accessed: 7 February 2023).

Land, N. (2011) *Fanged noumena*. Falmouth: Urbanomic.

Monoskop (2021) *Cybernetic Culture Research Unit*. Available at: https://monoskop.org/Cybernetic_Culture_Research_Unit (Accessed: 7 April 2023).

Schmeink, L. (2016) *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Shaviro, S. (2013) 'Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption', e-flux Journal, Issue #46. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60070/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/> (Accessed: 13 April 2023).

Srniecsek, N. And Williams, A. (2013) *#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics*. Available at: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/> (Accessed: 14 April 2023).

Stålenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*. London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd.

Sterling, B. (1986) *Mirrorshades*. Westminster: Arbor House Publishing.

Bibliography:

Armitage, J., Roberts, J. (2002) *Living with Cyberspace: Technology and Society in the 21st Century*. London: Continuum.

Article 19 (2021) *EU: Regulation of Recommender Systems in the Digital Services Act*. Available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/eu-regulation-of-recommender-systems-in-the-digital-services-act/>. (Accessed 2 January 2023).

Ayal, N., (2014) *Hooked: How to Build Habit Forming Products*. Available at: <https://passionatethinker.com/files/Hooked.pdf> (Accessed: 19 December 2022).

Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Beckett, A. (2017) *Accelerationism: how a fringe philosophy predicted the future we live in*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/11/accelerationism-how-a-fringe-philosophy-predicted-the-future-we-live-in> (Accessed: 31 March 2023).

Bell, D. (2001) *An Introduction to Cybercultures*. London: Routledge.

Beller, J. (2018) *The Message is Murder: Substrates of Computational Capital*. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/30759/642743.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Accessed: 31 March, 2023).

Bostrom, N. (2005) *Transhumanist Values*. Available at: <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/values> (Accessed: 15 April 2023)

Bojic, L. (2022) 'Metaverse through the prism of power and addiction: what will happen when the virtual world becomes more attractive than reality?'. *Eur J Futures Res* **10**, 22 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40309-022-00208-4> Available at: <https://eujournalfuturesresearch.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40309-022-00208-4> (Accessed 2 January 2023).

Browning, O. (2022) 'Alex Jones mocks Sandy Hook parents and calls them 'crisis actors' in video shown to jury'. *Independent tv*, October, 2023. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/news/alex-jones-infowars-sandy-hook-b2168269.html> (Accessed: 13 December 2022).

Charles, E. (2022) *Fragments on Machines*. Available at: <http://www.emma-charles.com/fragments-on-machines> (Accessed: 21 February 2023).

Citron, D.K. (2020) 'Cyber Mobs, Disinformation, and Death Videos: The Internet as It Is (and as It Should Be)'. *Michigan Law Review*, **118**(6), pp. 1073-1093,1073A. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2401318818/fulltext/CCEC89BD97D94630PQ/1?accountid=130472> (Accessed: 24 November 2022).

Debord, G. (1970) *The Society of the Spectacle*. London: Rebel Press.

Deleuze, G. (1992) *Postscript on the Societies of Control*. *October*, vol. 59, 1992, pp. 3–7. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828> (Accessed 25 March 2023).

Deleuze, G. And Guattari F. (1972) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.

Drnas, N. (2018) *Sabrina*. London: Granta Publications.

Federal Trade Commission (2019) *Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Rohit Chopra, In re Facebook, Inc. Commission File No. 1823109, July 24, 2019*. Available at: https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/public_statements/1536911/chopra_dissenting_statement_on_facebook_7-24-19.pdf (Accessed: 2 January 2023).

Franks, M. A. (2018) 'Justice Beyond Dispute', *University of Miami School of Law Institutional Repository*. Available at: https://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1571&context=fac_articles (Accessed: 2 January 2023).

Guffey, E. (2014) 'Crafting Yesterday's Tomorrows: Retro-Futurism, Steampunk, and the Problem of Making in the Twenty-First Century', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 7:3, 249-266, Available at: <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/epdf/10.2752/174967714X14111311182767?needAccess=true&role=button> (Accessed: 20 December 2022).

Film Reference (No date) *Road Movies: Iconography, Style, and Themes*. Available at: <http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Road-Movies-ICONOGRAPHY-STYLE-AND-THEMES.html> (Accessed: 7 February 2023).

Hinds, J., Williams, E.J. and Joinson, A. N. (2020) "It wouldn't happen to me": Privacy concerns and perspectives following the Cambridge Analytica scandal', *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, Volume 143, 2020,102498, ISSN 1071-5819, Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1071581920301002> (Accessed 2 January 2023).

Hsu, J. (2012) 'Why "Uncanny Valley" Human Look-Alikes Put Us on Edge', *Scientific American: Innovation News Daily*, April 3, 2012. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-uncanny-valley-human-look-alikes-put-us-on-edge/> (Accessed: 13 February, 2023).

Kantrowitz, A. (2017) *Violence On Facebook Live Is Worse Than You Thought*. Available at: <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/alexkantrowitz/heres-how-bad-facebook-lives-violence-problem-is> (Accessed: 2 January 2023).

Kastranakes, J. (2020) *Simon Stålenhag puts a darker twist on his nostalgic sci-fi worlds*. Available at: <https://www.theverge.com/21539093/simon-stalenhag-the-labyrinth-kickstarter-post-apocalyptic-paintings-book> (Accessed: 24 November 2022).

Lacan, J. (1977) *Écrits: A Selection*. London: Routledge.

Land, N. (2011) *Fanged noumena*. Falmouth: Urbanomic.

Malacarne, A. (2020) "'The Electric State" by Simon Stalenhag - Blog by Andrew Malacarne', *Open Sesame Gallery*, 29 December. Available at: <https://opensesamegallerybooks.com/blog/the-electric-state-simon-stalenhag> (Accessed: 16 April 2023)

Marcuse, H. (1966) *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Beacon Press, Boston. Available at: https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Marcuse_Eros_and_Thanatos.pdf (Accessed: 12 December 2022)

Mehrstam, C., Joyce, S., Schubart, R. and Wille, J.I., From the Edge of the Rift: Editorial for Imagining the Impossible Issue 1 2022, *Gender & Genre. Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media*, 1(1). Available at: https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=critical+theory+on+stalenhag&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar (Accessed 21 February 2023).

Monoskop (2021) *Cybernetic Culture Research Unit*. Available at: https://monoskop.org/Cybernetic_Culture_Research_Unit (Accessed 7 April 2023)

Mori, M. (2012) 'The Uncanny Valley: The Original Essay by Masahiro Mori > "The Uncanny Valley" by Masahiro Mori is an influential essay in robotics. This is the first English translation authorized by Mori'. *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine*, June 2012. Available at: <https://spectrum.ieee.org/the-uncanny-valley> (Accessed: 13 February, 2023).

Moulier Boutang, Y. (2011) *Cognitive Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Available at: https://e-tcs.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/MoulierBoutangYann_WhatIsCognitiveCapitalis_51368.pdf (Accessed: 6 April, 2023).

Nelson, M. (2011) *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning*. London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd.

Reuters (2022) *Infowars host Alex Jones ordered to pay \$473m more to Sandy Hook families*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/10/alex-jones-conspiracy-theorist-sandy-hook-victims-hoax> (Accessed: 12 December 2022).

Schmeink, L. (2016) *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Shaviro, S. (2013) 'Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption', e-flux Journal, Issue #46. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60070/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/> (Accessed: 13 April 2023)

Sheehan, J. (2018) 'Futuristic Dreams Turn To Nightmare In 'Electric State' '. Review of The Electric State, by Jason Sheehan. *NPR*, October 21, 2018 Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/21/658921379/futuristic-dreams-turn-to-nightmare-in-electric-state> (Accessed: 24 November 2022)

Simons, J. (2004) *Contemporary Critical Theorists: From Lacan to Said*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Srniecek, N. And Williams, A. (2013) *#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics*. Available at: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/> (Accessed: 14 April 2023)

Stålenhag, S. (2017) *The Electric State*. London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd.

Sterling, B. (1986) *Mirrorshades*. Westminster: Arbor House Publishing.

The Dangerous Maybe (2019) *Lacan's Concept of the Object-Cause of Desire (objet petit a)*. Available at: <https://thedangerousmaybe.medium.com/lacans-concept-of-the-object-cause-of-desire-objet-petit-a-bd17b8f84e69> (Accessed: 2 December 2022).

The Social Dilemma (2020) Exposure Labs, Agent Pictures, Argent Pictures, The Space Program. Available at: Netflix (Accessed: 2 January 2023).

Turkle, S. (2005) *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Urbanomic (2014). *Publication: #Accelerate. The Accelerationist Reader Robin Mackay, Armen Avanessian (Editors)*. Available at: <https://www.urbanomic.com/book/accelerate/> (Accessed: 4 April 2023).

Wilson, S. (2020) *The Era of Antisocial Social Media*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2020/02/the-era-of-antisocial-social-media> (Accessed: 2 January 2023).

Woolgar, S. (2002) *Virtual society? : Technology, Cyberbole, Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wordsworth, W. (1800) *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. Available at: <https://faculty.csbsju.edu/dbeach/beautytruth/Wordsworth-PrefaceLB.pdf> (Accessed: 13 December 2022).

Žižek, S. (2022) 'Three fragments on suicide as a political factor', *Crisi and Critique*, Volume 9, issue 2, pp. 414-425. Available at: <https://www.crisiscritique.org/storage/app/media/nov-25/slavoj-zizek.pdf> (Accessed: 4 December 2022).