

# Introduction: New Perspectives

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**Abstract** The introduction provides an overview of German science fiction (SF) and its position in a transcultural context. Mapping its historical trajectory from Kurd Laßwitz in the late 19th century to the early international SF success during the Weimar Republic, via its post-WWII decline and its renaissance since the 1990s, this chapter seeks to identify the specific and significant German contribution to the international project that is science fiction. An emphasis is placed on the transcultural fantastic in the 21st century and how German SF proves a valid and important voice, a counterpoint to Anglo-centric discourses on global issues such as the climate crisis, migration and refugees, transhumanism and technocracy, as well as challenges of social unrest and inequality.

This volume seeks to fill a gap in the adjacent fields of German Literature, Science Fiction Studies, and Futures Studies. Until very recently (Esselborn 2019, Cornils 2020), there had been no comprehensive studies of German science fiction (SF), while the significant growth and popularity of the genre in Germany in the last two decades has gone almost unnoticed outside specialist journals such as *Science Fiction Studies* or the *Zeitschrift für Fantastikforschung*. In the context of a growing interest in the ‘transcultural fantastic,’ and specifically in SF traditions outside the Anglophone ‘bubble’, we offer readers an overview of *contemporary* German SF<sup>1</sup> and critical analyses of its most important examples. As our contributors demonstrate, these texts, films, and TV series add their distinct voices to a global conversation about humanity’s techno-scientific advances, in terms of their impact on our planet, but also in terms of their deep and disturbing impact on the human psyche.

As with many genre discussions, the question of when and how German SF came to be has been the cause of dispute, differently skewed between Anglo-American and German scholarship. The former tends to locate the beginnings of SF with industrialization, the Enlightenment, and the Gothic novel’s rejection of supernatural explanations for scientific rationales, anachronistically claiming Mary Shelley’s

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<sup>1</sup> There is a debate around the issue of what to include in this category, depending on national or language-boundaries, further complicated in film by issues of production industries. We are opting to include SF originally created in German, no matter which nationality the author or film maker has.

*Frankenstein* (1818) as the first SF novel and, for Germany, extending the SF tradition back onto stories such as E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1816).<sup>2</sup> Most German scholarship, by contrast, seems in agreement that the genre became an established form around 1900, with the French novelist Jules Verne "becoming a key figure in the process of establishing SF in Germany" (Innerhofer 1996, 13). Writing similar stories, many German authors sought to cash in on the mass-appeal of Verne's technology-driven adventures, making Verne a "generic benchmark and synonym" (ibid.) of SF.<sup>3</sup> Stories in Vernian tradition thus strongly influenced the initial *Zukunftsromane* (novels of the future), the precursor terminology for SF used in Germany.<sup>4</sup>

What unites both views of German SF is that their trajectories into the 20th and 21st century are marked by a curious double absence. On the one hand, German literary history has elected to mostly ignore the genre, relegating it to "sit outside the established boundaries" (Cornils 2020, 3) of German literary studies and allowing Hans Esselborn (2019, 11) to claim that a "history of German science fiction is a novum"<sup>5</sup> as recently as two years ago. On the other hand, German SF does not register prominently in the history of SF either. Just consider Hugo Gernsback's famous editorial for the first issue of his *Amazing Stories*, in which he claimed Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells as the immortal forerunners of science fiction (cf. Westfahl 1992), without so much as mentioning Kurd Laßwitz and his seminal novel *Auf zwei Planeten* (*Two Planets*, 1897). Gernsback was fluent in German and must have read Laßwitz, as Everett Bleiler (1990, 422) notes: Gernsback's "theoretical position of technologically based liberalism and many of his little scientific crotchets resemble ideas in Lasswitz's work." Nonetheless, Laßwitz turns into an overlooked father of SF, only receiving an abridged translation into English as late as 1971. To this day, German contributions to the history of SF easily get lost next to French or British contributions, as Terry Harpold's recent entry on early European SF in the *Cambridge History of Science Fiction* makes clear: four German authors are named, only Laßwitz's novel getting a summary of half a paragraph.

Partially this remoteness of German SF in international discourse is because of translation issues. German novels and short stories are largely absent in English translation, making it harder for non-German readers to explore their imaginative

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<sup>2</sup> Exemplary for this tradition is Brian Aldiss' study *Billion Year Spree* (1973), or famously Darko Suvin's (1979, 132) claim of Hoffmann as proto-SF. Roland Innerhofer (2006) has given a detailed account of the different generic traits, Gothic and SF, in Hoffmann's "The Sandman."

<sup>3</sup> See also Fritzsche (2006, 39) and Esselborn (2019, 56f.)

<sup>4</sup> Lastly, as with English language SF, it should be mentioned that even before 1800 and the Gothic, there have been stories that can be read as German proto-SF: Johannes Kepler's dream of living on the moon, *Somnium* (1634, written in Latin), elements in the picaresque novel *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (*Simplicius Simplicissimus*, 1668) by Hans J. C. von Grimmelshausen, or the utopian novels *Die schwarzen Brüder* (*The Black Brotherhood*, 1795) by Heinrich Zschokke and *Ini: Ein Roman aus dem 21. Jahrhundert* (*Ini: A Novel from the 21. Century*, 1810) by Julius von Voss (cf. Alpers 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Translations of texts originally written in German are ours, unless otherwise noted.

worlds. This, of course, also means that German contributions to the SF megatext go largely unnoticed and it will be one of the contributions of this volume to introduce some untranslated texts, allowing SF scholars to become aware of the interjection made into genre discourses by German texts.

Additionally, the translation issue also holds for scholarship itself, which is also largely available only in German, not in English, thus making it harder for international scholars to access this information. While German-language scholarship became established in the 1980s and flourishes today, only a handful of book-length works exist in English.<sup>6</sup> This lack of knowledge of German SF and its contribution to German literary and cultural studies and science fiction studies is, as Ingo Cornils (2020, 1) argues, “to the detriment of a richer, transcultural conversation.” Both in terms of cultures of canon and literary elitism and in terms of national cultures of SF, German SF brings forth new ideas—about climate change, social inequality, a repetition of history and many more—and adds “its distinctive voice [...] to the global discourse of the future” (ibid.). It is the express purpose of this volume of essays to facilitate just that, to explore recent German SF and challenge rigid discourses within both German Studies and Science Fiction Studies, to introduce new readers to the worlds created in the genre.

## 1. A Brief History of German SF

Unfortunately, the noted absence of German SF, in both German literary history and the history of SF, obscures the many ways in which German SF has evolved in a complex “*Gesamtzusammenhang* (a holistic context)” (Cornils 2020, 7) in relation with Anglophone SF and the impact it has had on culture in general. One of its ‘founding texts,’ *Auf zwei Planeten*, for example, is a novel about conflict with a Martian civilization which appeared at the same time as Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (1898) and similarly deals with questions of the Other and colonialism. Laßwitz, though, did not focus on critique of military Empire (as Wells did), but rather on a perceived Prussian smallness of mind and backward tendency in thinking about the future—Germans, Laßwitz can be interpreted to criticize, would have to “catch up quite a bit, if they meant to become capable to interact on the world stage or in space” (Dath 2020, 173). German SF here adds another layer, a transcultural reflection on the German failure to become a colonial power on a par with France or Great Britain, and to the complicated history of colonialism in SF, as John Rieder (2008) has described it. Moreover, Laßwitz engaged with sophisticated ethical questions that the encounter with the ‘other’ brought to the fore.

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<sup>6</sup> Specifically dedicated to German SF are William B. Fischer’s *The Empire Strikes Out* (1984), Sonja Fritzsche’s *Science Fiction Literature in East Germany* (2006), Bruce Campbell, Alison Günther-Pal and Vibeke Petersen’s *Detectives, Dystopias, and Poplit: Studies in Modern German Genre Fiction* (2014), and Ingo Cornils’ *Beyond Tomorrow: German Science Fiction and Utopian Thought in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (2020).

Hans Dominik is another German SF writer who is virtually unknown outside of his native country. His books, sold in more than 5 million copies, portray German engineers literally moving mountains to achieve world domination. Banned for his nationalistic tendencies in the former GDR, his works, like those of Robert Heinlein, continue to divide opinions. While his jingoistic style is hard to stomach (Fischer 1984), recent research has shown him to have kept his distance to the National Socialists (Brandt 2007). In West Germany, the *Perry Rhodan* space opera series of weekly novellas achieved remarkable success, becoming one of the world's longest running pulp series—going strong to this day—that aims to chart the ‘future history of mankind.’ East Germany's SF is more serious and tends towards more literary fare with a socialist and utopian outlook. Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller are probably the most iconic names of East German SF, with a career spanning both the GDR and a unified Germany, starting in 1982 with the novel *Andymon: Eine Weltraum Utopie (A Space Utopia)*, which follows a generation starship's voyage and explores “the viability of coexistent political systems” (Fritzsche 2006, 231; Esselborn 2019, 280–85; Cornils 2020, 118–20).

In another area of SF, cinema owes many of its iconic images to the Weimar Republic's early film movement. While most German SF has been internationally overlooked, this is not true of individual films, such as the SF of the Weimar period—though film production from the 1920s is usually summarily grouped into this one historic category. Thea von Harbou's and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), for example, has single-handedly influenced the filmic representation of future cities, depicting its breathtaking vertical spatial dimension as metaphor for the inequality and divide of the classes. The dark dystopian megacities of cyberpunk films such as *Blade Runner* (1982), *Minority Report* (2002) or *Total Recall* (2012) all owe their visual make-up to *Metropolis*. Beyond the cultural sphere, von Harbou's and Lang's film *Frau im Mond (Woman in the Moon, 1929)* introduced a rocket ship and several technological details that became inspirational to NASA engineers in the 1960s space race and are now staples of designing rockets. And yet, aside from honorary mentions of Lang in the context of the film history of the Weimar' Golden Age of German film, there is little effort to argue for an SF tradition in Germany extending forward from his work. This is true for all “cinematic genres with a dubious reputation”, as Steffen Hantke (2007, vii-viii) has claimed for the horror film, but which is certainly also the case for SF film: “Critical consensus among historians of German film concedes that there may be postwar German horror *films* but insists that there is no postwar German horror *film*.”

For a long time, the German participation in audio-visual SF has been low-key, registering only via exceptional entries such as the TV series *Raumpatrouille* (1966) that premiered within weeks of the original *Star Trek* series, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Welt am Draht* (1973), which is a prime example of the transcultural dimension of German SF. This TV two-parter is an adaptation of the US-novel *Simulacron-3* (1964) by Daniel F. Galouye and later, in turn, inspired the Wachowski siblings' *The Matrix* (1999), as well as being adapted again as *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) by John Rusnack.

*The Thirteenth Floor* was produced by Roland Emmerich, who symbolizes the complex relationship of German SF film with its US counterpart like no other. After his debut film, *Das Arche Noah Prinzip* (*The Noah's Arc Principle*, 1984) he switched to direct his films in English, to better gain acceptance with worldwide audiences, before leaving for the greener pastures of Hollywood altogether and getting his international break-through with *Stargate* (1994) and *Independence Day* (1996). Similarly, German director Tom Tykwer has turned towards the international film community. While his *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998)—an experimental time-loop film—has received many accolades and put German film back on the global SF map, he has subsequently become more international in his productions, moving on to co-direct the CGI-heavy, English-language, SF-epic *Cloud Atlas* (2012) with the Wachowski siblings. German SF filmmakers, if they are seeking international recognition, need to deal with the German tendency to sideline the genre and inevitably move towards more friendly international industries.

## 2. A Renaissance of German SF

Beginning with the mid-1990s, but really coming together in the 21st century, there has been a renaissance of German SF activity. Leading the charge is a new generation of authors such as Andreas Eschbach, whose *Die Haarteppichknüpfer* (*The Carpet Makers*, 1995) and *Jesus Video* (1998) have changed the perception of SF in Germany, or Frank Schätzing, whose SF thrillers such as *Der Schwarm* (*The Swarm*, 2004) or *[Limit]* (2009) have garnered international attention—both authors have been successfully translated into several languages, thus allowing them to engage international audiences and help build a reputation for the unique contributions of German SF.

Adding to this increase in creative output from German authors and directors is a growing interest in the transcultural fantastic both in academia and fandom alike. For example, several major publishers now have series that publish research on the transcultural fantastic.<sup>7</sup> Further, the increase of production in SF, and its growing importance in commenting on transcultural topics, has brought with it an interest in research and scholarship on SF in Germany as well. In 2010, the first German-language academic association dedicated to the study of the fantastic, the *Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung*, was inaugurated and has since grown to 130 members, organizing large international conferences each year. The association's *Zeitschrift für Fantastikforschung* provides a German-language outlet for research in this field and

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<sup>7</sup> This volume appears in the *Studies in Global Science Fiction* by Palgrave, which gathers research on SF from such diverse places as China, Canada, Italy, and the Arabian countries. In addition, there are also *Studies in Global Genre Fiction* by Routledge, *World Science Fiction* by Peter Lang, *New Dimensions of Science Fiction* at the University of Wales Press, and the long-running series *Liverpool Science Fiction Text and Studies* by Liverpool University Press.

has recently moved to the Open Library of the Humanities as the first German-language journal hosted there. Lastly, science fiction and the fantastic have found recognition within the German academic and literary mainstream, not only noticeable in the publication of *Phantastik: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch (The Fantastic: An Interdisciplinary Handbook; cf. Brittnacher and May 2013)* by renowned literary studies publisher J. B. Metzler, but also the first ever special issue on the fantastic by one of the oldest cultural publications in Europe, the *Neue Rundschau* (cf. Riffel 2019).

Increasingly, the Anglo-American cultural hegemony in the field of the fantastic is being challenged by writers and film makers from a diversity of backgrounds and new SF emerges from many regions of the globe, such as China, Nigeria, Cuba, Finland, Russia and India. With an increasing number of works translated into major world languages, German SF of the post-2000 era is claiming its place in this new and transcultural movement, in prose fiction, in cinematic form, and in scholarship.<sup>8</sup> *New Perspectives in Contemporary German Science Fiction* addresses this interest in scholarship on new forms of SF by analyzing the post-2000 science fiction produced in German and introduces its themes and motifs, its authors and film-makers, to a broader international public.

### 3. The German Contribution to SF

German SF makes an important contribution to the genre. It builds on national historical experiences as well as a diversity of theoretical approaches that originated here: Karl Marx's writings on capitalism and labor established a tradition of anti-capitalist critique, Ernst Bloch's utopianism invigorated the idea of human creative output expressing 'the principle of hope,' and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critical theory focused on ideas of mass consumption and their ideological trappings. Their works, as this volume shows, continue to influence the thinking of German SF in the 21st century.

Germany is also distinct for having straddled the cultural divide between East and West in the heart of Europe, between two political and ideological systems. Its cultural production builds on the experience and rejection of totalitarianism, both the horror of National Socialism and the continued guilt over it, and the trauma of division in two Germanies, as well as the surveillance state of the GDR. In this sense, German SF is concerned with the weight of history on the individual, with the liminality that comes with change and upheaval, and the ever-vigilant eye to criticize that which threatens our freedoms.

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<sup>8</sup> An important translation of German SF stories has been an early example of this internationalization trend: Franz Rottensteiner's edition of *The Black Mirror and Other Stories: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Germany and Austria* (2006), translated by Mike Mitchell.

United Germany has become a leading political force in Europe and the world in general. With the rise of nationalist tendencies worldwide and the (temporary) retreat of the United States as global power, Germany has uneasily grown into its new role shaping policy in Europe on the major challenges for the future. On the one hand, Germany has played a key role in migration politics, both in the humanitarian aid given in the 2015 crisis and the subsequent clampdown of inward migration in the Mediterranean, the enforcement of border controls and the reestablishment of national interests over global solidarity. On the other hand, Germany has taken a leading role in environmental issues with its decision to shut down both its nuclear and coal power plants and embark on the ‘*Energiewende*’ (energy transition). *New Perspectives* argues that speculative fictions and explorations of the fantastic provide a critical lens for studying the possibilities and limitations of such paradigm shifts. These explorations are influential in political, philosophical, and cultural discourses, through a range of media (literature, cinema, television). In a world where space and place are increasingly perceived in terms of the global and the local, a broader understanding of the transcultural fantastic, and the German contribution to it, is thus more important than ever.

As *New Perspectives* makes abundantly clear, German SF needs to be transcultural as it is both global and local. Authors can neither separate from the conventions and generic forms of international SF, nor can they completely adhere to them, having to address the above-mentioned positions of Germany and its particularities in the past, present and future. German SF is thus balanced between internationally dominant forms and German realities, constantly struggling with the exclusion from the Anglophone market (due to a lack of interest in translations) and yet, always in communication with the global SF genre. Marc-Uwe Kling’s *QualityLand* (2017) or Dirk Fleck’s Maeva trilogy (2008–15), for example, explore the generic boundaries of dystopia and utopia respectively. While Kling’s satirical humor and light-heartedness has won him an English translation, Fleck’s driven and intense prose, has only had cultural impact in Germany itself, even though his goal to change political realities in the face of climate change is on par with that of Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020).

Netflix’s serial sensation *Dark* (2017–20) finds a new spin on the well-worn theme of time-travel by connecting it to the claustrophobia of the German concept of ‘Heimat.’ But German SF also makes a distinctive contribution to SF, addressing contemporary issues in ways that Anglophone SF does not: Karen Duve’s novel *Macht* (2016) or films such as Tim Fehlbaum’s *Hell* (2011) address the climate catastrophe and its social repercussions, tying them to structural misogyny or racialized ideologies, while Damir Lukacevic’s *Transfer* (2010) or Krystof Zlatnik’s *Immigration Game* (2017) discuss the European failure to manage refugees and changing demographics.

What is currently missing from the discussion of German SF in international scholarship is a detailed analysis of its status in the 21st century. *New Perspectives in Contemporary German Science Fiction* aims to address this gap in scholarship in contemporary German SF, both literary and audio-visual. The editors have sought

out scholarship that addresses the transcultural potential of German SF produced from 2000 onwards, some texts available in English translation, others not. Yet as the essays show in providing new and unique perspectives on the specific contribution of German SF to world literature and cinema, all of the discussed texts add to the discourses of the transcultural fantastic.

#### 4. *New Perspectives Explained*

*New Perspectives* is divided into four parts that each addresses a specific aspect of contemporary German SF production. Part I, New Inspirations, explores recent contributions to screen media and how they engage with audiences' international genre expectations and specifically German viewpoints and topics, each chapter here teasing out in audio-visual media the larger discussions taken up in Parts II–IV, which focus on literature.

In her chapter “Going Round in Cycles: Time Travel and Determinism in *Dark* (2017–20),” Juliane Blank analyzes the SF parabola of time travel in the Netflix series *Dark*, German SF's internationally successful TV series. *Dark* reverberates with generic expectations and comments on the time travel staples of determinism and fate, while at the same linking the experience to a rural small town setting in Germany and breaking down the philosophical context into an intergenerational family narrative. Time travel, in *Dark*, is similarly used to connect to the larger SF megatext and push its current boundaries with the help of a uniquely German experience.

Germany, as one of the central political actors in Europe, is at the heart of global flows of migration and their impact is a key topic for German public discourses. Consequently, German SF film makers have used speculation in cinema and TV to explore the complex issues at stake for migrants and their host societies. In “Popular German Science Fiction Film and European Migration,” Gabriele Müller analyzes three contemporary German SF films, *Volt* (2016), *Immigration Game* (2017) and *Aufbruch ins Ungewisse* (2017) and connects their transcultural criticism with contemporary public debates in Germany and all over the world as national interests clash with globally induced challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and worldwide migration.

And lastly in this part, Evan Torner's “White German Agency in *Transfer* (2010), *Hell* (2011) and *Die kommenden Tage* (2010)” opens up discussions of German identity and comments on the question of white agency in the face of uncertain futures after the financial crisis of 2008–09. By exploring how white German SF film uses and portrays Black characters (or leaves them out of the represented futures altogether), Torner is able to show each film as an example of a specific political stance representative of future visions of how white Germans fear the future will overtake them.



The texts discussed in Part II, New Criticism, address issues of climate change and a shifting ecology, with German SF providing a rather gloomy outlook into the future of our planet and the role that we are playing in its demise. Solvejg Nitzke opens this part with her essay “Apocalyptic Greeneries: Climate, Vegetation and the End of the World,” in which she turns towards the idea of human-plant relations as representations of climate change. She analyzes Christoph Ransmayr’s *Morbus Kitahara* (1995), Christian Kracht’s *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* (2008) and Valerie Fritsch’s *Winters Garten* (2015) as they describe our futures through our interactions with vegetation, conjuring up images of apocalypse and dystopia.

Similarly dark is the analytic exploration undertaken by Matteo Gallo Stampino in his essay “The Language of Ice in the Anthropocene: German Science Fiction and Eco-Literature,” which turns towards ice as representative of nature and an indicator of our struggle with climate change. Concentrating on Wilhelm Wulf’s *Eiszeit in Europa?* (2004), Ilija Trojanow’s *EisTau* (2011), and Cornelia Franz’ *Ins Nordlicht blicken* (2012), Gallo Stampino sees the use of anthropomorphization as central in their discussion of the human-nature divide, analyzing each of the novel’s different uses of the technique to get across political messages.

The third essay in New Criticism, “Misogyny and Climate Change in Karen Duve’s *Macht*” by Clarisa Novello, then moves away from metaphoric imagery to discuss climate change and instead links capitalist exploitation of nature with the social systemic ill of misogyny. In Karen Duve’s *Macht*, Novello is able to show how the historical identification of nature as female, that confers to women and nature a status of passivity, is still tangible in contemporary German society and effects its disengagement with issues of climate change.

While Part II dealt with texts that pushed uncomfortable criticisms of ecological issues in German society, Part III, New Identities, turns towards texts that move beyond the concept of humanism to engage in issues of identity formation, health, and posthumanism. Opening this part is Mylène Branco’s essay “The Paradoxes of Illness and Health in Juli Zeh’s *Corpus Delicti*,” which reads Zeh’s novel through the lens of the medical humanities and its discourse of narrative ethics. Branco highlights how Zeh critiques the totalitarian state by drawing on different illness narratives and how they position disease versus control.

In “Coming to Terms with the Present: Critical Theory and Critical Posthumanism in Contemporary German Science Fiction,” Hanna Schumacher analyzes posthumanist explorations in Reinhard Jirgl’s *Nichts von euch auf Erden* (2012) and Dietmar Dath’s *Die Abschaffung der Arten* (2008) through the lens of Frankfurt School-driven critical theory. Both novels, Schumacher argues, discuss the idea of the eternal return of the same and that we are caught in a repetition of the past. Through investigating posthumanist notions of a future beyond the scope of the human, the novels find different positions towards the inescapability of structural violence within German society.

Remaining with Dath, who can be considered one of German SF’s most intellectually challenging writers, Roland Innerhofer considers his novels *Die Abschaffung*

*der Arten* and *Venus Siegt* (2015) as Dath's foray into how artificial life can and will change the socio-political design of human society. In the essay "The End of Humanity's Monotony: Posthumanism and Artificial Life in Dietmar Dath's *The Abolition of Species* and *Venus' Victory*," Innerhofer claims both novels as posthumanist visions that explore how technology can help bring about a Marxist system change.

In the final essay of this part, "Optimizing the Human: A Posthuman Taxonomy in the Works of Theresa Hannig," Lars Schmeink investigates Hannig's two dystopian novels, *Die Optimierer* (2017) and *Die Unvollkommenen* (2019) with regard to their representation of posthumanism. Moving through different posthumanist positions, from transhumanist mind uploads to sentient and fully artificial humanity, Hannig leaves the ultimate decision on the ethical evaluation of posthumanism up to her readers.

Part IV of *New Perspectives, New Boundaries*, then picks up the question of German SF imagining futures as either utopian and dystopian by challenging the generic boundaries of these categories. In his essay, "Marc-Uwe Kling's *QualityLand*: 'Funny Dystopia' as Social and Political Commentary," Joscha Klüppel argues that Kling's novel *QualityLand* (2017) plays with the generic conventions of the dystopia, combining it with biting satire as a commentary on contemporary social and political issues to generate a form of dystopian discourse that Kling himself has called the "funny dystopia."

Kristina Mateescu similarly explores the idea of transgressing generic boundaries, in her case of the dystopian and apocalyptic forms and the well-known 'last man' trope, in her essay "Beyond the 'Last Man' Narrative: Notes on Thomas Glavinic's *Night Work* (2008). Reading Glavinic's novel, originally published as *Die Arbeit der Nacht* (2006), through Hannah Arendt's philosophy, and especially her thoughts on intersubjectivity, allows Mateescu an interpretation against the grain of typical apocalyptic SF and its common tropes.

Moving away from dystopia and towards the utopian imagination, Peter Seyferth's essay "A Utopianism that Transcends Books: Dirk C. Fleck's Ecological Science Fiction" explores the idea of novels as powerful social and political tools that spur to action. Arguing that Fleck's *Maeva*-trilogy (2007–15) is not fully understood as utopian literary explorations of possible futures, Seyferth sees them as utopian activism that is supposed to provide solutions to literal challenges in the face of climate change.

In the concluding chapter, "Dark Mirrors? German Science Fiction in the 21st Century," Ingo Cornils analyzes some of the most recent German-language SF novels, in particular Thomas von Steinaecker's *Die Verteidigung des Paradieses* and Sibylle Berg's *GRM: Brainfuck*. Building on a growing disillusionment with the expectation that 'critical dystopias' create social awareness and lead to positive action, he challenges the aesthetization of dystopian futures in these works and seeks to identify the green shoots of a more hopeful 'progressive fantastic' in Tom Hillenbrand's *Qube*, Andreas Brandhorst's *Die Eskalation*, Judith and Christian Vogt's *Wasteland* and Andreas Eschbach's *Eines Menschen Flügel*.

The contributions in this volume clearly demonstrate that German-language SF novels and TV series in the 21st century can easily compete on the global stage, taking up a transcultural position that simultaneously balances international audience expectations with nationally specific innovation. Their critical stance sets them apart from their generally more affirmative Anglophone cousins, tackling themes and issues that are gaining increasing social relevance, exploring the unsettling consequences of a complacent western position, while addressing issues of migration, climate change, and inequality. The scholarship in this volume takes account of the current state of German SF and explores its intellectual and cultural contribution, to German literary studies and to science fiction studies, and its relevance to our living in this world today. While German SF does not claim to have all the answers, at least it is beginning to ask the right questions.

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