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Time is out of Joint:
Digital Domesticity and Magical Realism

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The country that is more developed industrially only shows,
to the less developed, the image of its own future.[1]

Architecture has often looked at science fiction to understand the way that new technologies have an effect on the buildings we create. Here we advocate for a broadening of the canon suggesting that there are other traditions and forms of speculative fiction that destabilizes the canon through which we imagine the future of buildings. Inspired by the recent coinage of "auto-theory" and the work of Feminist writers such as Donna Haraway, Eula Biss, Valeria Luiselli, and Selva Almada we write this essay in the form of a semi-fictional diary spanning six non-consecutive days during the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] As two Latin-American writers operating in English speaking academia, we draw on our own positionality to think through the consequences that the canon of speculative fiction has on our ability, as designers, to imagine. The paper is driven by the narrative of teaching "online" and turning our home into a 'smart' one while teaching design studios on speculative futures. Interspersed in the narrative are the conversations we had with student during this period and our collective readings of three works of speculative fiction — one proto-science fiction and two Latin American — which we use to try and make sense of our new forms of [technified] domesticity.

Day 1
Time is out of Joint

We keep talking about time.

The stage is a roadside café. PVC checkered tablecloths lay on top of a modest array of tables. The furniture is cheap, imitation wood chairs arranged haphazardly and, judging by the crockery scattered on the tables, it looks as if the diners have just left in a rush. A woman waits impatiently, fidgeting with her gloves. She is smartly dressed in black, with a pearl necklace and a black birdcage veil and hat that reminds us of Merle Oberon. A man walks in and her face turns radiant. "We did it," says the man as he flings his hands open to kiss her in the check. We know we are in Britain — the BBC accent is a giveaway, as is the bottle of HP sauce in each table. The man sits at the table and as the camera follows him, we see more of the cafe. An empty wood display case sits on top of the bar. "No one running this place today," he says jokingly. "Not since I came in," she lets out the words as if she has been holding her breath forever.

A second couple storms in. Unlike the first, they are dressed in nylon — an electric blue dress for her, a grey, two-piece suit for him. They talk to the other couple, "excuse me, could you tell me what year this is"? "It's 1948," replies the man in the other table. "Well then, we must be in the wrong time." The exchange turns weirder and we soon realize that this cafe is a trap. Oberon look-alike tells us as much. "This is the trap. This place, you see, this place is nowhere. And it's forever." As she and her companion disappear into thin air, we see the clues in the cafe. That coin register surely is late nineteenth century. The china cups look like they are circa 1920s and those bar stools

are definitely from the 1950s. The camera dollies out, framing our heroes in an Edward Hopper scene.

The scene is the season finale of *Sapphire & Steel*, a television series produced by ITV1 in the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1982 that follows a pair of inter-dimensional agents charged with guarding the continuity of time.[3] Fittingly the series finale shows them ultimately defeated, trapped in a time eddy. We didn't watch *Sapphire & Steel* growing up — our cultural references are closer to the *Twilight Zone* but we stumbled across the series via Mark Fisher. For him the scene is a metaphor for the state of popular culture in the early twenty-first century. If you think about music in the twentieth century for example, it's easy to distinguish a hardbop song from 1950s rock and roll, from 1970s glam rock, from 1980s hip hop. Each has their own texture and historical context. But music in the first decade of the twenty first century, observed Fisher, is anachronistic — not only do musicians pay tribute to their influences, but their music is made to sound as if it had been produced in the past, crackle and noise in post-production. Just as Saphire and Steele (characters in the eponymous television show) were trapped in a roadside cafe where time had ceased to flow, musical production of the twenty first century is anachronistic and repetitive. It is not so much that the past haunted the present. What haunts us is the slow cancellation of the future.[4]

We talk about *Sapphire & Steel* as we try to make sense of our own temporal malaise. It is May 2020 and to anyone reading this in a few months or years' time, the date will be significant. It has been eight weeks since the United Kingdom went into a national lockdown following the outbreak of a novel Coronavirus. We have been locked up at home for nine weeks.

It might be the fatigue and "brain fog" but we have trouble making sense of how much time has passed in the last two months. Just like *Saphire and Steele*, we feel in a temporal limbo and the events of February feel like yesterday — but they also feel like a long time ago. Our difficulty in accounting for time can of course be explained by the way that our time markers have been suspended. Carolina has the daily grind of urban commute to keep her aware of the passing of time. Luis has his own "super commute," traveling to Sheffield by train on a Tuesday, staying a couple of nights and coming back home on a late Thursday train. The pandemic shackles us to our computers, teaching lectures and tutorials online, and the flow of time blurs.

Day 2
Digital Domesticity

To say that we are caught up in the past would be imprecise. It is more than time itself has collapsed and that past, present, and future all happen at the same time. As we are locked up, we keep talking about what it means to be at home — what does technology do to our sense of "homeliness"? Two weeks into our self-isolation we received reviews from a paper on "Digital Domesticity." The reviewers are positive and the good news are much needed but the timing is uncanny. One of the core points in our argument is that corporations have hi-jacked speculative fiction to sell the future as part of our current reality, a practice that can be traced back to mid-century American corporations. One of the most influential marketing campaigns of the era, "Live Better Electrically", helped General Electric and Westinghouse shape the way that Americans (and later the rest of the world) would come to think of domesticity. The main strategy of the campaign is the use of speculative scenarios, spatialized as TV sets and show homes, which invited Americans to witness the future that was theirs for the taking.[5] The narrative strategies of Live Better Electrically are refined by Silicon Valley, which has spent the last decade convincing us of the 'convenience' that their devices bring to our homes. One key difference between mid-century and new millennium narratives is the way temporality is crafted. The advertisements of "Live Better Electrically," narrated by the silky voice of Ronald Reagan, sells us an aspiration: a vision of the future we can buy into one washing machine/fridge/TV-set at the time. Silicon Valley, instead, sell us the present.

The sophisticated, care-free world we see in glossy magazine spreads and swish online videos is already here. It is enjoyed "by thousands of our valued costumers". We have been left out but don't worry — all we need to do is order an Amazon Echo, an Apple HomePod, a Google Nest.[6]

Home for us is a 29 square meter (312 square foot) flat in North London. We know because we made a survey. We ordered a laser tape measure and diligently measured every wall and corner, only to realize that although the estate agents had waxed lyrical over 35 square meters of bliss — conveniently located in the vibrant, edgy neighborhood of Stoke Newington — the figure had been optimistically calculated. This home was the future once though. The flat is in a row of terraced houses built at the end of the nineteenth century, the so-called "Victorian" era in Britain, and left to rot during the slow but steady decline of Stoke Newington after the second world war. From the local history we can piece together, the first few houses in our street were bought by a housing association, the Peabody Trust, in the 1990s to reconvert into smaller flats. Adjacent houses were merged into one building and divided again to create five flats of varying and odd shapes.[7] Four of these flats were added to the rent portfolio of the housing association and one, the smallest, sold in the private market. The property speculation that boomed later in the decade meant that our flat was bought and put straight to rent. It was initially rented as a studio flat and later, buoyed by the rising prices of an "up-and-coming" gentrified area, extended a few meters towards the back garden to squeeze in a just-about big enough bedroom. A bathroom was inserted between the living room and the bedroom, posing a challenge to Neufert's dimensions of minimal living ("does the job though," in the words of the grinning estate agent).

When we moved from North-East England to London the flat made sense — it was within budget and a bus ride away from the university Carolina was starting a fixed contract at. It was also close to King's Cross, from where Luis would be commuting to his job to Newcastle and, later, to Sheffield. The space felt small but we were often out and about "taking the city in," or busy at work, returning late and going out again the next morning. As the pandemic broke out and self-isolated, we had to rethink the space to fit two "home-offices" — one of us sitting at a desk (built by us to fit in the chimney breast), and the other in the bedroom, using the only internal wall as sound buffer.

But the future is here — we spend a whole morning on the phone speaking to our Internet Service Provider to increase our broadband package to the highest speed in our area. We buy a Google Wi-Fi with one additional station to make sure coverage was even. The sound reverberates freely in the drywall and we have a long conversation about the voice level that is acceptable to use in our lectures (Carolina insists Luis 'shouts' every time he is in front of the camera). We buy sound-cancelling headphones and condenser USB microphones. We experiment with different ways to frame our 'screen space' — the cameras in our computers, we realize, are quite wide so they capture more than we are prepared to show of our home. In the corners of our video feed, you can see one of us walking past the kitchen to brew tea. We download a virtual camera software and use digital zoom to frame ourselves in a neutral background; we download yet another app to turn our phones into virtual 'webcams' with higher resolution and control over focal length.

Home is a continuously reconfiguring machine; it shifts everyday with slight permutations of where and how we set up our working spaces. It expands and contracts with the focal length of web cameras, it speeds up or grinds to a halt depending on the highly volatile latency, jitter and packet loss of our internet connection. Our ISP assures us our area has one of the best performance standard in the country and that although some latency is to be expected due in a DOCSIS protocol connection, the latency we experiment is below their acceptable threshold. Their power is in jargon; they suggest we look at our router installation. We write to Google and after going through the diagnostics they send us, they conclude the latency in our Wi-Fi network is relatively low. They suggest we speak to our ISP. Our home pulsates, expands and contracts.

Day 3
Literature and Temporality

Luis teaches a lecture on *Futures*. He starts with the basics; what is time? Physicists tell us that time is a dimension alongside the three that make up space. But time is difficult to locate. We can measure it as we speak of seconds, minutes and months, but these are only arbitrary units. We need to look elsewhere to define time. Object Oriented Ontology tells us that time is what keeps things from happening all at once. If all events took place right now, we would have no way of telling them apart so time is the distance that separates them. Time is what allows us to tell that something is happening now, that it happened before or that it will happen later.[8]

The lecture is part of the studio that that Luis runs on *Digital Domesticity*. Carolina teaches a similar lecture as part of the *Design Futures* pathway she leads at the Royal College of Art. Just as we keep hearing each other teach through a poorly insulated drywall, our lectures have seeped through the edges of each other. We like to think of them as two halves of a longer talk that will never be taught. Both our lectures start by defining time and then consider the way that the idea of future has different meanings in different cultures. This is where our lectures branch out. Carolina speaks about the tradition of speculative thinking in design, explaining the work of Anthony Dune and Fiona Raby followed by a survey of practitioners working on "futuring." Luis speaks about the architectural tradition of paper architecture and speculative drawing beginning with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Jean-Jacques Lequeu, Étienne-Louis Boulleé, all the way to Brodsky and Utkin, Lebbeus Woods, the Smithsons and culminating in Haus Rucker Co, Antfarm, Archigram and the "Italian Radicals."[9] Our lectures align again as we consider the way that designers can integrate speculation in their practice. We talk about the connections with literary fiction and design speculation, discussing the references that practitioners often make to different writers and genres. We talk about science fiction and the way that different writers craft utopias and dystopias and we delve into "world-building" and the delineation of characters and narrative.

This year the lecture is different though. Our social media is awash with predictions; *What is the Future of our cities after COVID? How will COVID transform our workspaces? Here's how COVID will change education*. We both decide to discuss this with our students and, inspired by a tweet Carolina catches the morning of her lecture, we start the conversation by reading an excerpt from *Eyes of Darkness* by Dean Koontz — the same quote that has been doing its rounds on Twitter:

> It was around then that a Chinese scientist named Li Chen defected to the United States, carrying a diskette record of China's most important and dangerous new biological weapon in a decade. They call the stuff "Wuhan-400" because it was developed at their RDNA labs outside the city of Wuhan (…) Wuhan-400 is a perfect weapon.[10]

We speak about conspiracy theories and the way that the future is often politicized and written from a specific point of view. About the cold war and situate the novel in the context of the 1980s and reference historian David A. Wilson to understand prophecies and predictions as a diagnostic of the fears, hopes, and desires of the people who imagine them.[11] But our idea of the future is inevitably bound to divination and foretelling, which influences the way we often think of imagining the future as holding up a crystal ball to "see" what is destined to happen.

Luis follows up with a reading group on *The Machine Stops* by E.M. Forster, written in 1909.[12] We spend a fair amount of the session analyzing how telecommunication technologies are described — Forster writes about a "Machine" that allows humans to "see" others who are across the world. The image, however, "*did not transmit nuances of expression. It only gave a general idea of people — an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes.*"[13] The discussion moves on to the

conditions of living. Forster imagines humans living in underground cells where they spend their time working with "ideas" while having all their needs cared for. "*There were buttons and switches everywhere — buttons to call for food for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button… . There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature. And there were of course the buttons by which she communicated with her friends*."[14] The description is uncanny as it might well be one of our own rooms — or at least, how we are told they should be. One student suggests there is a hint of proto-modernism in the way Forster describes the interior of each cells. Wehn Vashti, the main character, travels across the world to meet with her son in person only to find that his room "*exactly resembled her own. She might well declare that the visit was superfluous. The buttons, the kenos, the reading-desk with the Book, the temperature, the atmosphere, the illumination were exactly the same.*"[15] The house as a machine of living indeed.

That E.M. Forster would only write this one science fiction story, Luis tells the students, is also important to point out. The distance it has with the technologies allows Forster to create a warning of social disintegration and the perils of techno-centrism. Foster reflects of how "*humanity, in its desire for comfort, had over-reached itself. It has exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine.*"[16] Forster's understanding of technology is bound up to that of the human body and to its relationship to space, a fact Luis' group finds exciting. But convenience has a price, a fact that Foster dwells on in the story: "*We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, … it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it*."[17] Forster writes a cautionary tale. The Machine slowly deteriorates, gradually producing worse living conditions until it grinds to a halt. Ventilation to individual cells stops, forcing inhabitants to flee through underground tunnels that will become their communal graves. What is less clear to us is, what specifically Forster is cautioning us against. The irony is not lost on us. We sit in front of Machines seeing an image of each other that doesn't capture our expressions but that is just good enough to discuss the story together. But we have no alternative.

Day 4
Science Fiction

The definition of science fiction is often contested. Thacker defines science fiction as the intersection of science, technology and society. Phillip K. Dick does so through the 'shock of dysrecognition': a fictitious world that shares some elements but is dislocated from ours through a fundamental event.[19] The genre has often been seen as the patron saint of architectural speculation. Amy Butt argues that architecture is a forward-looking activity "*foreseeing the near future and expressing an intention of how this future world should be remade.*"[18] She suggests that given the inherently utopian nature of designs, architects should read science fiction to develop tools that helps to "*make the familiar strange, to reveal fears about the future, to confront us with ourselves, and to shape the world we inhabit."*[20] Contemporary acolytes of science fiction are part of a genealogy that stretches to the groups of radical and experimental architecture in the 1960s and 1970s. Archigram, for example, created overt science fiction narratives in their pulp publications as well as in imagining walking cities presented in bold aesthetics that took colors, shapes, and narrative strategies from science fiction. The famous *Amazing Archigram 4: Zoom,* featured a cover drawn by Warren Chalk and following the aesthetics of Jack Kirby and Carmine Infantino for DC Comics.[21]

It is perhaps no surprise that when Archigram founding member Peter Cook took the leadership of the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, he consolidated its reputation as a hotbed of a speculative avant-garde that drew heavily on science fiction. Bernard Tschumi had a similar effect on his lead of the Architectural Association where, in collaboration with Nigel Coates, developed

briefs that asked students to use literary texts (from Franz Kafka or Italo Calvino, for example) to turn events and settings into architectural design. This connection between literature and architecture would open the doors at other London institutions to experiment with different genre, including science fiction as the starting point for architectural imaginings. The network of former students and like-minded faculty reached to places like the Royal College of Art and the University of Greenwich, consolidating into a narrative tradition that made explicit use of literary references and structure to inform the design process and the dramatic quality of architecture as a form of stage.[22]

Science Fiction is for us an "acquired taste," to borrow a phrase from our adoptive tongue. We remember arriving to the United Kingdom to begin our masters in architecture, wide-eyed and dazzled by the discovery of a discourse addressing narrative, futures and technology. Although we shared an interest in the way that architecture could intersect with all these, we lacked the knowledge of a science fiction canon that was constantly invoked. Latin America doesn't have a strong tradition of science fiction literature and popular culture. We have no Hugo or Nebula Award nor an equivalent to Amazing Stories and although there is precedent of well-known Latin American writers dipping their toes in the pond, we have no equivalent of an Ursula K. Le Guin or Phillip K. Dick. We do have Hugo Correa, the Chilean writer included in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (the only Latin American) and whose science fiction work has often been neglected or altogether overseen by the Latin-American literary establishment and the reading public. There is nothing in romance languages that prevents them from articulating tales of interplanetary travel, alien civilizations or technological leaps. Science fiction simply doesn't feel "ours."[23]

One of the best descriptions of Latin America's often tortuous relationship with science fiction comes from Roberto Bolaño in his posthumous *The Spirit of Science Fiction*.[24] In the story, two young Chileans, Remo Morán and Jan Schrella, flee Chile fearing political persecution and seek refuge in a chaotic 1970s Mexico City. Jan, an aspiring science fiction writer, rarely leaves their room, a ramshackle rooftop flat. He spends his days reading books stolen from public libraries and writing letters to American science fiction writers. He addresses a fictional James Hauer, who reportedly intends to create a "*committee of American science fiction writers in support of the Third World.*"[25] Jan wants to clarify what support means. Will the committee award a prize to the Latin-American writer who best describes a robot? Or will they testify on behalf of the region on the political stage? Jan prefaces the ambush by telling the story of his first attempts at writing science fiction. He shows a story to a teacher who, after making sure Jan hasn't been smoking marijuana, sighs: "*but Jan (...) those things are so remote.*"[26]

Bolaño's description coincides with recent scholarship that links the genre with imperialist and colonialist projects. John Rieder argues that early Anglo-American science fiction is intertwined with the history, discourse and ideologies of colonialism. Jessica Langer goes further in suggesting that contemporary science fiction continues to align with colonialist ideology, which helps explain the lack of voices of color. Langer joins others who have started to look at the genre from a postcolonial perspective, pointing out for example that science fiction often thrives in former and current colonizer societies. Patricia Kerslake suggests, for example, that one of the main roles of science fiction is to 'experiment with empire', providing both a valve to vent imperialist fantasies while also providing pleasure from imagining it in detail.[27]

Day 5
Magical Realism

The colonizing force of science fiction has become more evident in the last two decades with the emergence of a '*science fiction of technoscience*'.[28] Eugene Thacker argues that science fiction has a critical role in society through the combination of what he considers to be the two foundational

methodologies of the genre: extrapolation and speculation. By combining imaginative extensions of present conditions (extrapolation) with visions of a reality decisively different to ours (speculation), science fiction is able to diagnose the society which brought it into existence. Drawing on Frederic Jameson, Thacker interprets "*science fiction as a way of understanding the historical present, and as a cultural indicator of culture's ability or inability to imagine possible futures*" (156) before arguing that science fiction no longer exists, co-opted by techno science as internal narrative and a means to promote its product. In a close reading of Jean Baudrillard, Thacker argues that the most problematic aspect of the erosion of science fiction is the fact that present and future collapse into one, leaving no space to differentiate fiction from reality. For him the technologies of the so-called "information society" are focused on simulacra that approximate the real, perfecting its methods and becoming so convincing that there is no room left for imaginative future world building.[29]

An erosion of science fiction helps to explain the hopelessness we felt in reading *The Machine Stops*. It's not that E. M. Forster hasn't written a deeply affecting vision and warned us of the perils of technological enhancement of bodies, but that we can no longer differentiate it from our present, speculation from reality. Pieces of Forster's vision are now part of our everyday life, fragments of the vision that Silicon Valley sells to us as our domestic bliss. But if we accept the possibility of an erosion of science fiction, what are the consequences for architecture using the genre as a sort of patron saint of speculative thinking?

Bolano's *Spirit of Science Fiction* cannot be understood without contextualizing it in the literary tradition of Magical Realism. In Latin American literature, the term is used to define a historically specific movement of writers, working roughly from the 1940s to the 1970s, and that often includes Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Marquez, Julio Cortazar, Silvina Ocampo, and Jorge Luis Borges. The term is thought to have been imported from fine arts — coined by Franz Roh at the beginning of the twentieth century to describe a new tendency in European painting — and has been historically used indiscriminately to all Latin American literature that did not read like the production of the English-speaking world.[30] To many the term is controversial and often unhelpful. According to [cite author of quote], the term relegates the literature of a continent to the role of "*cute, exotic psychological fantasies — visions of the colonizer's ever more distant, desirable, and/or despised self-projected onto colonized others*."[31]

Despite the ongoing (and unending) debate on the term, an idea of Magical Realism is useful in framing the way that Latin American speculative fiction can help disrupt notions of time and reality. In an early definition of the movement, Angel Flores suggests that magical realism is an "*amalgamation of realism and fantasy*" resulting from a forced fusion of European and native American cultures.[32] For Ray Verzasconi, Magical Realism is "*an expression of the New World reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European super-civilization, and the irrational elements of a primitive America.*"[33] The combination of reality and fantasy, however, walks a tightrope. Magical Realism is not fantasy. It is set in the "real" world and its character broadly follows the world's natural laws. It is not fake news either, but a challenge to a dominant narrative, often through the introduction of small elements of the magical in an otherwise normal setting. For Lindsay Moore the movement aligns to post-colonialism, sharing themes of hybridity and change and exploring themes of borders, mixing and change as a way of suggesting a more fundamental reality than the one depicted by more conventional (often European) realist techniques.[34]

Magical Realism is not science fiction and there is little that both genres share in common. Although magical realism is difficult to define, there is little discussion in the way that it never (or very rarely) primarily deals with technology. Instead, authors are more interested in finding singularities in everyday life. A parallel reading of the genres, or an understanding from a Latin American perspective, might offer new strategies to negotiate reality, fiction, and time. In his

preface to the Spanish edition of *The Spirit of Science Fiction*, literary critic Christopher Dominguez Michael suggests that in writing the book, Bolaño offers a new interpretation of the genre: not as the premonition of technological leaps or space travel, but as a "moral frame," and an "inverted search of lost time."[35] For Dominguez Michael one must read Bolaño in parallel to the work of Ursula K. Le Guin or Phillip K. Dick whom, he argues, "moralized the future as a catastrophic extension of the twentieth century."[36] For Dominguez Michael, Bolaño's reading of science fiction amounts to a different understanding of time, one that alters its linearity.

Day 6
New Cartographies of Time

Magical realism offers tools to negotiate the erosion of science fiction. In *The Pursuer,* Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar describes Johnny Carter, saxophone virtuoso with a variety of manias, the worst of which is time.[37] Johnny's obsession is not an abstract concern, but a day-to-day drama he is constantly trying (and failing) to negotiate. He embodies a deep suspicion of a linear understanding of time, and his relationship with Bruno, the biographer who "writes" the short story, becomes a small-scale re-enactment of the tension between a western "rationality" and an "irrational," indigenous sensibility.[38] As they sit down to talk about time, Carter goes into a diatribe: time is "*weird, and really awful complicated*"(720). For him, music is a way of navigating the weirdness and shape-shifting nature of time and he is resolutely not interested in putting this complexity into words. He knocks on his head and declared there "*nothing inside here, Bruno, what they call, nothing. It doesn't think and don't understand nothing*"(724). Bruno tries to articulate Johnny's unusual experience of time by describing a recording session where, after a few initial notes, Johnny suddenly "*stopped playing and threw a punch at I don't know who and said, 'I'm playing this tomorrow (...) I already played this tomorrow, it's horrible, Miles, I already played this tomorrow.*"(725)

Despite his self-avowed inarticulate nature, Johnny sketches some alternative cartographies of time. For instance, he suggests that time is like a bag — imagine you can fit two suits and two pair of shoes. You take them out and try to put them back in only to find out you can only fit one suit and one shoe this time "*but that's not the best of it. The best is when you realize that you can put a whole store full of suits and shoes in there, in that suitcase, hundreds and hundreds of suits*." (727) Time, Johnny suggests, has a sort of elasticity, a "*sort of delayed stretch*". (720) The unusual dislocation of time is brought about by different forms of technology. Throughout his diatribes to Bruno, Carter describes feeling time altered as he takes an elevator. You step in an elevator and start talking to someone, and you can hardly finish a sentence before you realize you're fifty-two floors up and have. left the city beneath you. Reality — the mortgage, religion, and his suits — are simply put away and suspended from consciousness. Paris' Metro also acts as a sort of portal to an altered perception of time. It expands time and allows him to dwell in his childhood memories, observing them in painful detail that would take at least fifteen minutes to describe "*if I economized on details*" (729) even when the car had only traveled from Saint-Michel to Odéon, a two-minute stretch.

But the main device to trigger temporal dislocation is the saxophone. Playing means not only that Carter can abstract itself from the world, a common enough experience, but it puts him directly *in* time, able to witness and change its flow. Perhaps we are like Johnny every time we use one of the many devices that make us our houses of tomorrow. Not only are we able to embody the particular techno-utopia that Google/Apple/Amazon/Facebook has imagined for us, but we are also reliving the desires and anxieties of past eras.[39] Every time we speak to our smart assistant, we re-enact the dynamics of servant/master of the nineteenth and twentieth century — the electronic voice blasting off the smart speaker as the domestic servant ready to cater to our every whim and desire. As Thao

Phan reminds us, the dynamics of power at play in this smart encounters decontextualize and depoliticize — it is perhaps no wonder that so many of our smart companions are female.[40]

When we arrived to the UK, we felt we had *reached* the future — oh look, dish washer; we have central heating, and high speed broadband. The implication of course is that we came from the past, a place in the "developing world" that still needed to catch up, walked slowly along the timeline and reached the full potential of technological progress. William Gibson is credited with saying "*the future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed."*[41] Paired with our feeling of having arrived to the future, the phrase can be read as the pinnacle of what Bolivar Echeverría calls *blanquitud* or "whiteness:" the totalizing drive of an homogenous ideal of "modernity" that it is culturally white and euro-centric.[42] By assuming that the future *should* be distributed and even, we promote a linear cartography of time, one in which the global north is often ahead of and ethically bound to help those in the global south. One tactic that Magical Realism hands to us is irony — the ability to present the real as being equally material to the magical often requires a narrator who is detached, and often skeptical, of the existence of the marvellous.[43] These two strategies, ironic detachment and an appreciation for temporal fluidity, brings about different engagement with technologies and the future of the home.

Johnny's understanding of time, of its delayed stretch, might help us side-step the implications of these assumptions and admit that the future can take many forms, and that technology is not always the driver of time. We might also learn from Jan Scheller, our poet and science fiction aficionado who, after being told that the genre are things so "remote to us" replied, "*If you believe that we can't write about interplanetary travel, for example, you leave us at the mercy of the dreams — and amusements — of others, in specula saeculorum.*"[44] We need more imaginaries of technology, a more diverse way of understanding the future and the way that our homes integrate with our smart devices. We might also learn from Jan's teacher: perhaps our dreams should be of other kind?

Endnotes

1. The quote is from the preface of the German edition of Capital by Karl Marx.
2. We are inspired by practices of auto-ethnography in feminist scholarship in writing this essay, and from other writers and practices that it has inspired: Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective". *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066; Biss, Eula. *On Immunity: An Inoculation* (London: Text Publishing Company, 2015); Luiselli, Valeria. *Lost Children Archive*. (London: HarperCollins UK, 2019); Almada, S., and A. McDermott. *Dead Girls*. (London: Charco Press, 2020).
3. Peter J. Hammond, *Saphire & Steel*, Series, Sci-Fi (London: ITV1, 1982).
4. Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (London: Zero Books, 2014).
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continent. She mentions Elvio E. Gandolfo, Elsa Drucaroff, and Pablo Capanna as representative. For a fuller description, see Joanna Page, *Science Fiction in Argentina: Technologies of the Text in a Material Multiverse* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2016): 2.

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27. John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2012); Jessica Langer, *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction*. (London: Springer, 2011); Kerslake, Patricia. *Science Fiction and Empire*. Liverpool University Press, 2011; Hoagland, Ericka, and Reema Sarwal. *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2014).
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39. Luiza Prado and Pedrio Oliveira, 'Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On Anachronistic Design', *Modes of Criticism*, 2014, http://modesofcriticism.org/futuristic-gizmos-conservative-ideals/
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