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British science fiction and the Cold War, 1945-1969

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Abstract

This thesis examines British Science Fiction between 1945 and 1969 and considers its response to the Cold War. It investigates the generic progression of British SF in the post-war years, assessing the legacy of the pre-war style of scientific romance in selected works from the late 1940s, before exploring its re-engagement with the tradition of disaster fiction in works by John Wyndham and John Christopher in the 1950s. The thesis then moves on to contemplate the writings of the British New Wave and the experimentations with form in the fiction of J.G. Ballard and Brian Aldiss as well as the stories and articles incorporated within *New Worlds* magazine during Michael Moorcock's period as editor. Following on from this is a consideration of the emergence of SF film and television in Britain, marking out its convergence with literary works as well as its own distinctive reactions to the changing contexts of the Cold War.

This thesis therefore diverges from existing literary histories of post-war British writing, which have largely focused on the numerous crises affecting the literary novel. Such examinations have tended to represent the Cold War as an ancillary theme – despite Britain being the third nation to acquire nuclear weapons – and have generally overlooked Science Fiction as a suitable mode for engaging with the major transformations taking place in post-war British society. Reacting to such assumptions, this thesis argues that British SF was not only a form that responded to the vast technological changes facilitated by the Cold War, but equally, that cultural life during the Cold War presented considerable challenges to Science Fiction itself – with visions of nuclear war and authoritarianism no longer the exclusive property of the speculative imagination but part of everyday life. Additionally, by concentrating on overtly British responses to the Cold War this thesis aims to further illuminate an area of cultural history that has otherwise received limited attention.

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Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

In his 1999 book *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, David Seed notes how the start of the Cold War constituted an important moment – for critics and writers alike – in elevating Science Fiction to a more prominent position in the literature of the time:

> The unique urgencies of the Cold War, and particularly fear of nuclear war, affected writers' perceptions of the changed status of science fiction. Asimov dated the shift precisely: 'The dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945 made science fiction respectable'. Similarly James Gunn: 'from that moment on thoughtful men and women recognised that we were living in a science fiction world'. Indeed by the mid-1960s news reports of rockets and nuclear weapons had become so routine that for James Blish they challenged the novelist's imagination. (8)

Not only was, then, SF emerging as perhaps *the* most appropriate form for representing the vast technological changes of the Cold War, but the Cold War era was *itself*, as Seed notes, inventing the kinds of technology previously only imagined in SF writing – space flight, satellites, the potential for global technological destruction. As such, it is important to study SF as a genre already well suited in its existing forms to examining the changes in cultural life after 1945 – indeed, atomic war had itself already been imagined speculatively, most notably in H.G. Wells's *The World Set Free* (1914) – but also as a form of representation that was challenged *by* the Cold War, in a historical moment in which speculations previously confined to SF were themselves becoming part of everyday reality in the post-war world.

In political terms, the Cold War has been generally characterised as a period of antagonism between the two superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union who embarked, particularly during the fifties and sixties, on a series of technological 'races' as a means of projecting their supposed cultural, political and military superiority. Consequently, criticism of Cold War SF has invariably examined the responses of American writers to perceived Soviet threat. David Seed's book (1999) provides what is no doubt the most comprehensive assessment of the ways in which American writers between the 1940s and mid-eighties engaged with not only the prospect of nuclear war but also surveillance cultures, nationalism and computerisation. One could also cite here Bruce H. Franklin's *War Stars: The*

Superweapon and the American Imagination (1988), which, while not solely focused on the Cold War, devotes large sections to the representation of nuclear conflict by American SF writers after 1945. Similarly, Paul Brians's extensive survey *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984* (1987) maps a vast field of predominantly American narratives, which is continued in David Dowling's *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster* (1987). Each of these texts have provided valuable contributions to assessing how the Cold War and the nuclear arms race shaped the American imagination. Yet, it is curious that similar studies have not as yet been carried out in relation to British Cold War SF. Britain would, of course, occupy an increasingly peripheral position as the Cold War reached its most distinctly 'hot' moments, but was, nonetheless, the third nation to develop its own 'independent' nuclear weapon at the beginning of the 1950s. At the same time, geo-politically, it sat uncomfortably between the two superpowers, allied to America and reliant on its military support, while also constituting a likely prime target in the event of Soviet nuclear attack. Furthermore, domestically, the construction of the welfare state (alongside the 'warfare' state) following the election of Clement Atlee's Labour government in 1945 would prompt ancillary debates about authoritarianism and the nature of Britain's social structure, just as the break-up of the British Empire in the fifties would also intensify anxieties about Britain's place in the Cold War geo-political hierarchy.

This thesis will therefore look to British SF to uncover a new series of perspectives on the first part of the Cold War between 1945 and the end of the sixties. The relation of such SF to the existing indigenous genre of scientific romance will begin the discussion, looking at how its pre-war, Wellsian legacy would influence early speculations about the nature of a post-Hiroshima world. This will subsequently lead into an examination of the British disaster tradition, which would see its most recognisable Cold War formulations in the fiction of John Wyndham and John Christopher. The second half of the thesis concentrates on the British New Wave's attempts to distort the 'cosy' prescriptions of fifties narratives through a psychologising of the conditions of nuclear build-up, before concluding by assessing the convergences and divergences between these literary representations and those of British film and television SF. However, it is first important to clarify how SF, and

particularly British SF, has been defined in more general terms, whilst also explaining the precise ways in which the Cold War is incorporated into this thesis.

Defining Science Fiction

The task of defining SF as a genre is complex and often contradictory. A series of competing definitions have emerged amongst critics who identify differing starting points and varying stylistic features. At a historical level, Seed (2008) notes that it is difficult to fully pin down the roots of the genre, citing how 'arguments continue about its origin, some critics even dating SF back into classical antiquity' (2). Nonetheless, there are two competing histories that are particularly prominent and which are significant, in different ways, for the broader aims of this thesis.

The first of these is exemplified by Brian Aldiss's (1988) tracing of the history of SF back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), identifying the form as emerging out of a gothic tradition that coincided with the industrial revolution. Aldiss thus defines SF as 'the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode' (30). This points to a specifically British location for SF's initial development, which is extended by Brian Stableford in his book *Scientific Romance in Britain, 1890-1950* (1985), where he marks the germination of scientific romance in the late nineteenth century as the moment when a distinctive British form of SF writing would crystallise. Stableford's precise definition of scientific romance will be examined in Chapter One, however it is important to note that Stableford (1985) sees this tradition of speculative writing as sitting 'quite separately' (3) from an American history of SF.

A second history of SF would, however, look to the genealogy of the term 'Science Fiction' itself. This leads us, outside of Aldiss's and Stableford's essentially British tradition, to American pulp magazines and the first issue of Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* in April 1926. In the editorial, Gernsback outlines what he calls

'scientifiction' (3), which he would later reword to 'science fiction' in 1929.[1] Gernsback saw the genre as incorporating the writings of Wells, Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe as they offered 'a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision' (3), while, crucially, Gernsback also emphasised the practical role assumed by this new form of writing: 'Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading – they are also always instructive. They supply knowledge that we might not otherwise obtain – and they supply it in a very palatable form' (3). This didacticism and sense of duty in disseminating scientific knowledge would infuse much American SF between the 1920s and 1940s, something that Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (2008) picks up on in his outline of the Gernsbackian tradition:

> ... the American conditions for writing fiction were dramatically different than in the UK and Europe. A rapid democratization of culture attended the even more rapid industrialization of American society and the assimilation of millions of immigrants whose education in the language and whose reading tastes were not connected with the literary language of English elite education. For these – and out of these – hopeful new readers, in a new culture where social advancement had much more to do with technical skills than classical learning, and where great feats of engineering and invention had created an American sublime unimaginable in the rest of the world, the model for SF was not the writer Wells, but the inventor-entrepreneur Thomas Edison. It was under these conditions that Hugo Gernsback founded *Amazing Stories*, and the institution of the SF pulps. (46-47)

As this thesis will focus solely on British SF, such evocations of national sociological conditions that facilitated the rise of particular 'types' of SF are important, and indeed, as the next two chapters will demonstrate, the work of a number of post-war British writers was informed by an understanding of writing within a particular national SF tradition. Yet, this is not to suggest that British SF was hermetically sealed off from a parallel American style and as we will see – particularly through the examination of the New Wave – certain British works were responding as much to an American pulp SF history as they were to native forms.

These histories therefore assist in broadly marking out territory and identifying varying national styles. However, it also leads to the problem of defining, at the level

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[1] See Luckhurst (2005): 64.

of form, exactly what SF in general looks like. Whilst there is no overriding consensus, Darko Suvin's definition from his 1972 essay 'On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre' has probably proved to be both the most enduring and controversial. Suvin succinctly characterises SF as 'a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment' (375). It is this combination of cognition and estrangement which, according to Suvin, then differentiates SF from other generic forms, notably fantasy:

> The estrangement differentiates it from the 'realistic' literary mainstream of 18th to 20th century. The cognition differentiates it not only from myth, but also from the fairy tale and the fantasy. The fairy tale also doubts the laws of the author's empirical world, but it escapes out of its horizons and into a closed collateral world indifferent toward cognitive possibilities. It does not use imagination as a means to understand the tendencies in reality, but as an end sufficient unto itself and cut off from the real contingencies. (375)

Suvin's definition is powerful in so far as it illustrates what many SF works *do* in that they extrapolate from our own 'empirical environment' (373) yet concurrently make that locale estranged through the creation of what Suvin calls 'a novum' (373) – a new thing such as a spacecraft or time travel – which allows for potentially radical reconsiderations of our own contemporary conditions. And, in fact, the analysis of SF works in this thesis invariably follows – if, at times, only implicitly – this broad pattern of identification; assessing how through the process of 'cognitive estrangement' (Suvin, 372) the texts in question produced unique readings of Cold War culture.

While, however, Suvin's definition is appealing in that it demarcates seemingly clear criteria which differentiate SF from rival genres, it is also extremely restrictive and leads to the exclusion of texts that do not meet a very particular set of conventions. As Roger Luckhurst (2005), for example, argues:

> Suvin's definition is, however, a profoundly prescriptive and judgemental formulation that often berates SF works for failing to measure up. Books are policed for the rigour of their cognition: they must avoid tropes of the Gothic or Fantasy, which was termed a 'sub-literature of mystification'. [...] Even within SF, apparently, 80 per cent are 'debilitating confectionery' and Suvin warned that the genre must be rescued from the low intelligence of its average reader. (7)

Furthermore, as Luckhurst also notes, Suvin's analysis is profoundly ahistorical in that it fails to recognise the ways in which 'empirical environments' shift over time and, accordingly, how the genre changes in line with these wider historical movements.[2] This, then, becomes problematic when used in relation to certain SF texts selected for examination within the very specific historical context of this thesis. For example, the television and film productions studied here often utilise a variety of cinematic or televisual genres, meaning they are not solely SF, but an amalgamation of popular visual forms. Suvin's definition does not account for such forms of hybridisation that emerged due to a complex set of contextual issues surrounding new ways of broadcasting SF narratives. At the same time, the Suvinian concept of 'cognitive estrangement' breaks down when looking at the fiction of writers such as J.G. Ballard, and other members of the New Wave, whose style of SF seeks to subvert traditional genre conventions precisely in order to highlight the ways in which the 'empirical environment' has itself become 'always already' estranged within late twentieth-century societies.

In searching for a definition of SF, Suvin's account is therefore helpful in its identification of generally expected tropes, supplying readers and critics with, in Luckhurst's (2005) terms, 'a working conceptual hypothesis about the genre' (7). However, to the extent that this thesis aims to be, in part, a cultural history of how SF proliferated within the social imagination of Cold War Britain, Suvin's prescription also appears too rigid and exclusive to recognise the infiltration of SF imagery and ideas within popular culture more broadly. It is thus necessary to turn to a couple of rather less restrictive definitions of the genre. Developing Aldiss's argument that SF emerged out of industrialisation in the form of the Gothic or post-Gothic, Luckhurst (2005) notes how SF might be seen, culturally, as 'a literature of technologically saturated societies. A genre that can therefore emerge only relatively late in modernity, it is a popular literature that concerns the impact of Mechanism

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[2] This is emphasised by Luckhurst (2005) in relation to Suvin's book *Victorian Science Fiction in the UK* (1983). Luckhurst criticises Suvin for jumping 'into that archive using a rigid and ahistorical definition to divide up hundreds of fantasy, Gothic and scientific romances. There is little sense that the categories of popular literature and notions of what scientific cognition might be were both undergoing transformation in the nineteenth century, and that SF itself is the very product of this change' (8).

[...] on cultural life and human subjectivity' (3). Adam Roberts (2007) adds to this definition by elaborating on the precise philosophical nature of such an encounter:

> My conclusion is that SF is better defined as 'technology fiction' provided we take 'technology' not as a synonym for 'gadgetry' but in a Heideggerean sense as a mode of 'enframing' the world, a manifestation of a fundamentally philosophical outlook. [...] To the extent that SF enters into the discourse of 'science' (as it frequently does) the best way of theorising this is as a Feyerabendian proliferation of theories rather than a notional uniformity or 'truth'. (18)

In this way, SF might be seen as a genre that does not fetishise technology, but rather imagines how the world may be seen from a particular technological or scientific perspective. Such a description moves us closer to identifying how SF is conceived within this thesis. The myriad of technological changes during the Cold War made it increasingly difficult to imagine a world that was not fundamentally framed through a particular technological outlook. Thus, SF would not only present itself as the most appropriate form to examine these changes in the structure of society, but its method of unpacking the interaction between technology, society and the individual would also disseminate amongst other modes of representation not exclusively categorised as 'SF.'

It has therefore been necessary, at times, to employ the contested term 'speculative fiction' when discussing selected texts within this thesis. The term is used, in part, as a form of categorisation that reflects the near-future setting of many of the works analysed, which tend to extrapolate directly from their immediate contexts to offer an account of seemingly imminent sociological developments. By identifying particular works as 'speculative' there is therefore a degree of correlation with Margaret Atwood's (2011) definition of speculative fiction as works about 'things that really could happen' (6) given the continuation or slight alteration of already observable social conditions. However, speculative fiction also has a wider use within this thesis, which aligns with a desire to recognise, as discussed above, the increasingly science fictional aspects of contemporary existence. The term is therefore especially relevant to New Wave SF, which deliberately set itself against what Michael Moorcock (1983) called the 'worn-out, cliché-ridden, laborious' (13) naturalistic fiction of the fifties and sixties in favour of artworks that speculated on the potentialities or underlying implications of late twentieth century phenomena.

To move towards a more flexible historical account of British SF during the early years of the Cold War, it is thus important to recognise how the genre sits within both a national tradition as well as evolving in line with wider social, political, technological and scientific paradigms emerging in post-war Britain. It is for this reason that Fredric Jameson's (2007) account of SF's inherent intertextuality is also helpful in defining the type of SF history supplied by this study:

> … what uniquely characterizes the genre is its explicit intertextuality: few other literary forms have so brazenly affirmed themselves as argument and counterargument. Few others have so openly required cross-reference and debate within each new variant: who can read Morris without Bellamy? or indeed Bellamy with Morris? So it is that the individual text carries with it a whole tradition, reconstructed and modified with each new addition, and threatening to become a mere cipher within an immense hyper-organism, like Stapledon's minded swarm of sentient beings. (2)

The texts examined here are recognised, in line with this, as part of an evolving tradition of SF writing in Britain. For example, in analysing 1950s disaster narratives it is necessary to assert their connection and development from the disasters of Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war scientific romances, while J.G. Ballard's ecological catastrophe novels of the early sixties determine a reading that accounts for their interaction with the disasters of Wyndham and others during the preceding decade. Additionally, in exposing the Cold War contexts of post-war British SF, this thesis aims to highlight the dialogue between SF and wider culture. This will not result in an analysis that merely demonstrates how the political events of the Cold War prompted certain types of SF narrative, but will highlight instead the uniqueness of individual texts so as to grasp their multifaceted communication with both genre history and their social contexts.

The cultural history of British SF contained within this thesis does not therefore offer anything like a general survey of all available literature, a style characteristic of many 'genre' studies that take an essentially 'encyclopaedic' form. Instead, it seeks to avoid many of the broader difficulties that Jonathan Culler (2000) associates with the fusion between cultural studies and literary criticism in much work of the last two decades or so:

> Freed from the principle that has long governed literary studies – that the main point is the distinctive complexity of individual works – cultural studies could easily become a kind of non-quantitative sociology, treating

works as instances or symptoms of something else rather than of interest in themselves, and succumbing to other temptations. (49-50)

As against this, the analysis contained here has resisted picking out a collection of Cold War themes and generating a list of SF works that are seemingly symptomatic of a particular historical moment. Instead, the focus is on specific works that produce both intriguing contributions to the British SF tradition while also being active agents in the formation of certain historical moods or attitudes. The strategic approach to British SF in this thesis is thus based upon an acknowledgement of the Suvinian definition of SF, as a guide for pinpointing the recurrent features of the genre, but, through a concurrent interrogation of the Cold War and the cultural history of post-war Britain, looks also to go beyond such restrictive guidelines where the material itself demands it. The focus is accordingly not only SF texts themselves, but the imagery and comment they produced, which became a critical mechanism for articulating the lived experience of the Cold War.

Defining the Cold War

The Cold War's framing as a political stand-off between East and West, and as what John Erickson (1999) describes as 'the global competition and confrontation short of all-out war between the two superpowers' (135-36), has led to historians assuming distinctly ideological stances in examining the era. Early histories of the Cold War's origins often coalesced around the political status-quo, and, as Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad (2004) argue, 'orthodox' scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s thus often 'explained the Cold War as essentially a result of the Western need to defend itself against the onslaught of Soviet aggression' (ix). However, forming out of the Vietnam War, the late sixties and early seventies saw a series of 'revisionist' histories which contemplated American rather than Soviet aggression as the possible cause of the Cold War, with historians such as Walter LaFeber arguing that a thrust for global economic hegemony had led the United States to threaten Soviet security.[3]

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[3] In a review of LaFeber's *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006*, 10th edition, (2008), Robert P. Hager, Jr. (2012) argues that LaFeber viewed the start of the Cold War as centring around 'the desire of US officialdom to have an economic "open door" in Eastern Europe and thereby needlessly treading on Soviet security concerns' (109).

More recent histories (from the late seventies onwards) have sought to combine these two positions, with John Lewis Gaddis's essay 'The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War' (1983) articulating how a less politicised 'synthesis of previously antagonistic viewpoints' (171) may provide a more accurate account of the Cold War's formation. This 'post-revisionist' perspective is prominent in many contemporary histories, with works such as Gaddis's *The Cold War* (2005) representing the conflict in terms of political personality and the intricacies of US-Soviet relations at a largely diplomatic level. While these geo-political histories are useful in revealing the decision-making process behind the major events of the Cold War, what is often missing or peripheral to these accounts, however, is any examination of the parallel cultural phenomena that emerged out of such political and military tensions.

The prominence of historical accounts that view the Cold War solely in terms of international relations has been picked up on by Patrick Major and Rana Mitter (2004) who argue that 'any newcomer opening a book at random from the Cold War shelf will, nine times out of ten, find that it deals with foreign policy' (2). They continue by stressing the need to 'de-centre the focus of attention [...] away from government and diplomacy, towards society and culture as autonomous spheres of historical interest, and to establish the Cold War "Home Front" as a sub-field in its own right' (3). Whilst Major and Mitter's desire to move historical discourse on the Cold War away from international power politics is commendable, their aim to open 'autonomous spheres' is perhaps problematic given the interconnection between governmental and military policy and parallel forms of Cold War cultural production. The SF works considered in this thesis, for example, are in some respects interesting cultural and artistic contemplations of Cold War society that allow us to move away from the narrow focus on diplomatic relations, but they are also conceived as being, in part, a result of such political decisions. Furthermore, as we now know, certain forms of cultural expression were directly, if covertly, funded by branches of the Cold War state; a fact that has been emphasised in a number of histories which argue that Cold War cultural life was not an entirely organic response to an age of nuclear tension, but, on occasions, manufactured and manipulated by the institutions of the state and its ancillary organisations. This idea

is particularly prominent in, for example, Stephen J. Whitfield's *The Culture of the Cold War* (1991) where he examines how the 'spectre of communism' (1) was used in 1950s America by 'legislators and judges, union officials and movie studio bosses, policemen and generals, university presidents and corporation executives, clergymen and journalists, Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals' (1). In Whitfield's account, it is not just the state, then, but American culture in general that was co-opted by the ideological discourse of anti-communism. Frances Stonor Saunders's work *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (2000), following up on the French critic Serge Guilbaut's 1985 book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, additionally supplies a thorough account of the US government's clandestine investment in 'cultural propaganda' (1) through its covert support for artistic movements such as Abstract Expressionism as well as the British literary magazine *Encounter*. These texts highlight how in formulating a cultural history of British SF during the Cold War it is thus crucial to recognise the intersections between the apparent autonomy of artistic production and the increasing reach of Cold War states.

The majority of both political and cultural histories of the Cold War focus predominantly, as has been seen, on the United States. Indeed, there have been very few extended examinations of the effect of the Cold War on British culture. There are, however, some notable exceptions that should be acknowledged here. Robert Hewison's *In Anger: Culture and the Cold War 1945-60* (1988) focuses, for the most part, on the ways in which domestic and international politics impacted upon the British intelligentsia. In literary and cultural studies, Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (1997) devotes a chapter to examining George Orwell and Stephen Spender through their engagement with emerging Cold War political structures, while Tony Shaw's *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (2006) considers the 'evolution of a distinct British Cold War cinema' (4). Although not solely focused on Britain, David Crowley and Jane Pavitt's edited collection *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* (2008), which accompanied an exhibition of the same name at the Victoria and Albert museum, also supplies a selection of chapters that concentrate on British film and fiction as well as looking at the Cold War's broader influence on international

architecture and design. More recently, a special issue of *The British Journal for the History of Science* (Volume 45, Issue 4, 2012) has looked to map the terrain of 'British nuclear culture' through articles focused on varying cultural and social perspectives including newspapers, film, literature and family life. Importantly, the issue aims to 'shift away from "top-down" nuclear history' (Hogg and Laucht, 2012: 493) and recognises instead that 'approaches to the nuclear past must adopt a conceptually flexible lens in an attempt to understand and historicize the complex and varied ways in which nuclear technology contributes to, interacts with and influences human life' (493). The journal issue therefore echoes, in some ways, a 1984 edition of *Diacritics* which set out to define what it labelled as the developing academic terrain of 'nuclear criticism'. However, whereas *Diacritics*'s focus rested solely on the ways in which critical theory might respond to nuclear themes, with occasional nods toward the literary canon and contemporary media, *The British Journal for the History of Science* has looked at the impact of nuclear issues on nationally specific phenomena in order to articulate a particularly British reaction to nuclear science, weapons and technology.

Unlike post-war histories of the United States, which invariably define the Cold War internationally through the arms race and domestically through McCarthyism and anti-communism, histories of mid-century Britain often struggle to pinpoint the Cold War's specific functions within British society. Hewison (1988) describes the Cold War in relation to Britain as 'a climate affecting states of mind, rather than a series of events' (x), which is helpful when considering the conflict's general significance in facilitating certain national 'moods'. However, these broad definitions have often led to the Cold War being subsumed within wider historical accounts of post-war Britain, which emphasise the declining status of the nation as a global force. Indeed, Bernard Bergonzi (1970) suggests Britain's supposedly minimal contribution to global events in the 1950s and 1960s as one reason for an introspective tone amongst British post-war 'literary' novelists in general:

> For complex historical and cultural reasons, English literature in the fifties and sixties has been both backward- and inward-looking, with rather little to say that can be instantly translated into universal statements about the human condition. [...] Such conversations might be painful for the Englishman, but they are salutary, in so far as they remind one that in

literary terms, as in political ones, Britain is not a very important part of the world today. (56-57)

As a consequence of such conceptions, literary histories of post-war Britain – focused on 'The Movement' in poetry, the Angry Young Men, and a return to a provincial realism in the literary novel – have tended to move away from directly confronting the Cold War and emphasise instead what Andrzej Gasiorek (1995) calls the 'perceived crisis of fiction' (1) in the aftermath of the Second World War as the nation retreated from the global stage. This is a position also taken, for example, by Lyndsey Stonebridge and Marina MacKay in their introduction to *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (2007) where they chart the breakdown of modernism and note a general malaise which led writers to feel that they 'had little left to push against, let alone experiment with' (1). While Stonebridge and MacKay do go on to recognise the Cold War as a significant factor in perpetuating an anxious form of realism that was 'written self-consciously "after" modernism' (7), it is nonetheless noticeable that nowhere do they interrogate British SF as a genre that very purposefully responded to the technological and social changes that arose from the Cold War world, or indeed acknowledge how pre-existing forms of genre fiction were re-energised by the newly established post-war political terrain and subsequently fed both the popular and intellectual imagination.

Similarly, wider historical studies of British fiction in the latter part of the twentieth century have tended only casually to mention the Cold War as aiding the general tension between decline and renewal during the period. In his work *The English Novel in History, 1950-1995*, Steven Connor (1996), for example, writes:

> ... the development of the Welfare State was followed by its dramatic erosion from the mid-1970s onwards. These were also the years of the definitive stripping away of Empire, and, as effect and cause of this from the 1950s onwards, the loss of British power and influence in the world in political, military and economic terms. (2)

While the Cold War is not directly mentioned here, it is implied that the geo-political conflict might indeed have been a contributing factor to the type of anxious style characteristic of post-war literary fiction in Britain. This should not be dismissed, as it is certainly correct to argue that the Cold War, the threat of nuclear conflict, and the break-up of Empire encouraged a generalised mood of apprehension, dread or

helplessness within much post-war fiction, including SF. However, what is strikingly missing from these studies is both any sustained account of British SF itself, as offering a rather different development of the novel or short story from that found in mainstream literary fiction, and, more specifically, any interrogation of the Cold War contexts that influenced the genre's speculations. Adam Piette's book *The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam* (2009) partially addresses this imbalance through an examination of a selection of British and American writers whose work draws specific attention to Cold War contexts. Nonetheless, Piette's focus is on solely 'literary' writers – notably, Graham Greene, Storm Jameson, Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes – with SF only receiving passing reference.

This thesis will therefore take, as a starting point, general historical arguments that articulate Britain's position in the new international order of the Cold War. However, by focusing on British SF the aim is to not only break away from the dominant trends in histories of post-war British writing, which focus, largely, on 'literary' fiction, but also to examine a form of writing that would produce a sustained engagement with the Cold War and, consequently, articulate a uniquely British response to a conflict that it was both part of and curiously estranged from. The combination of literary analysis with cultural history will, in this manner, seek to consider the ways in which British popular culture entered into a more sustained dialogue with the Cold War than is often recognised.

Structure

As has already been indicated, this thesis does not aim to be a comprehensive survey of every British SF work produced between 1945 and 1969 that has engaged, at some level, with Cold War themes. Instead, a selection of specific novels, stories, magazine editions, films and television programmes have been chosen according to the ways in which each encourage sustained readings of Cold War politics, domestic cultural life and their place within genre history. In doing so, this thesis seeks to place texts sufficiently within their social contexts whilst, at the same time, continuing to explore how each work supplies a distinctive response to their historical moment of production. As Luckhurst (2005) states in spelling out his own

methodology for writing a cultural history of SF, the texts on display will be viewed as 'rich and overdetermined objects' (3) rather than passive symptoms of particular socio-historical conditions.

The selection of 1969 as the closing year for this analysis marks simply a conventional point of demarcation between decades, rather than representing a singularly significant date in itself. The only text that falls outside of this date boundary is Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which was published in 1970. However, each section contained within Ballard's novel had previously been published, in short story form, during the sixties and is accordingly analysed in relation to the literary and social contexts of that decade. While, of course, it might be argued that the 'sixties' represented a cultural moment rather than a specific chronological period, which extended some years into the 1970s, in Britain at least, I do not believe that the arguments of this thesis would be significantly altered by the inclusion of further SF texts from the early seventies. Additionally, as the title of this work indicates, the focus is on British SF, yet it has been necessary, at times, to speak of 'Englishness' in relation to specific forms of writing. There has been an attempt throughout to use the term British when discussing government policy or broad-ranging aspects of social history. However, as is seen in the analysis of writers such as John Wyndham and John Christopher, it has proved appropriate, on occasions, to articulate the specifically 'English' aspects of their narratives and characterisations. This has been in order to differentiate between the political idea of Britain – as a national territory and governmental entity – and a particular cultural ideas of 'England', which evokes a particular 'way of life' and permeates the writings of certain post-war SF writers.

The first chapter examines the legacies of scientific romance through, initially, an exploration of H.G. Wells's non-fiction work *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945) alongside two novels – Gerald Heard's *Doppelgangers* (1947) and Olaf Stapledon's *The Flames* (1947) – which both attempt to re-work the genre to offer potentially utopian solutions to a world emerging from 'total war' and into a period of possible nuclear catastrophe. However, these broadly hopeful texts are offset by a consideration of Aldous Huxley's grim satire of a post-apocalyptic world, *Ape and*

Essence (1948), which supplies a forceful rebuttal to the idealism implicit within Heard's and Stapledon's visions of human transcendence. There is a notable omission from this chapter in the form of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which is nonetheless mentioned in Chapter Four's account of Nigel Kneale's television adaptation of the novel. Orwell is discussed in Chapter One through an examination of his 1945 essay 'You and the Atom Bomb', however, as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* sits within a specific dystopian tradition, and has of course been discussed extensively elsewhere, it was decided that the novel would not quite fit within the parameters of discussion surrounding scientific romance, or indeed, Huxley's account of nuclear devastation.

Chapter Two begins by examining Arthur C. Clarke's early novel *Prelude to Space* (1951) as a more scientifically-plausible counterpart to the utopian desires of Stapledon and Heard. Clarke's visions of a regenerated South Bank of the Thames and the emergence of Britain as a 'third force' promoting science and technology for peaceful purposes are considered as aligning with the scientific idealism connected with the 1951 Festival of Britain. As with the previous chapter however, this is then challenged by a lengthy examination of three 1950s disaster narratives. In John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), as well as John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956), we see fifties Britain represented in a more anxious or fearful light. At the same time, these texts have also been selected for their contribution to the evolution of post-war British SF. This section will therefore consider Brian Aldiss's definitions of 'the cosy' (as attached to Wyndham) and the 'semi-cosy' (as attached to Christopher), which will lead into a contemplation of how these writings supplied fertile ground for the emergence of the New Wave in the 1960s.

Chapter Three will begin by looking at J.G. Ballard's first two novels – *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962) and *The Drowned World* (1962) – to assess their divergences and notable convergences with fifties 'cosy' catastrophes. This will be followed by an examination of Ballard's mid-sixties nuclear testing story 'The Terminal Beach' (1964) as well as an assessment of two issues of *New Worlds* magazine during Michael Moorcock's editorship. The chapter will conclude by evaluating another

catastrophe novel – Brian Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* (1969) – in order to once more assess the development of disaster writing at the decade's close. This chapter will also emphasise the New Wave's considerable revision of form, noting Ballard's essay 'Which Way to Inner Space?' (1962) and the content of *New Worlds* under Moorcock as indicative of the movement's conscious shift away from certain expectations within popular SF and towards 'speculative' forms of avant-garde writing.

Chapters Four and Five consider British film and television from the beginning of the fifties until the end of the sixties. Despite the fact that television broadcasting only resumed in Britain in June 1946, and many programmes failed to be recorded until the late sixties, it has nonetheless been possible to gather together a collection of works that continually engage with Cold War themes. Chapter Four begins by examining the film *Seven Days to Noon* (1950), which usefully combines speculation on Britain's nuclear weapons projects with a detailed exploration of contemporary social attitudes. This is followed by an assessment of Nigel Kneale's controversial television adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which not only comments on Britain's susceptibility to authoritarianism, but also sparked debates regarding the purpose and role of television in society. The second half of the chapter deals with the three *Quatermass* television serials running between 1953 and 1959. The serials are looked at in terms of their complex engagement with nuclear technology and state control, with the final serial, *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-59), offering a notable affront to civil defence policy.

This leads in to Chapter Five which notes a further breakdown in deferential attitudes within early sixties films such as *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961), in which a group of journalists display anger at government incompetence in handling an apocalyptic crisis, before the film later shows the loss of social order as Beatniks riot in the streets. This is taken to absurd satirical lengths in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), which represents the madness of those dictating defence policy whilst also, through the character Lionel Mandrake, commenting on the anachronistic nature of British officialdom in the thermonuclear era. The SF television programmes examined in this chapter also function in a polemical mode, with Peter Watkins's *The War Game*

(1965) incorporating the speculative imagination into his docu-drama to expose the hopelessness of civil defence in the event of even small-scale nuclear conflagration. The rarely watched television series *Out of the Unknown* follows, focusing on two particular episodes. The first of these is the 1965 adaptation of John Brunner's 'Some Lapse of Time', which examines the psychological angst of living in anticipation of nuclear attack. The second episode discussed is J.B. Priestley's 1966 screenplay of Mordecai Roshwald's novel *Level 7* (1959), which, similarly to Kneale's earlier rewriting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, considers the sources for authoritarianism within Cold War Britain. The final part of this chapter considers Richard Lester's surreal post-apocalyptic comedy *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969), assessing it in terms of its overthrow of conventional tropes in disaster narratives whilst, at the same time, engaging with the aesthetics of pop art and surrealism. Again, this chapter contains a noticeable omission – *Doctor Who*. Whilst there are undoubtedly Cold War themes running through the serials broadcast during the 1960s – largely embodied through the fictional organisation United Nations Intelligence Taskforce (UNIT) in their role as an international police force – it has however proved difficult to incorporate it within the distinctly 'adult' content of the other selected SF productions. An area for future research would certainly be to explore the ways in which the Cold War was codified within family-orientated and juvenile SF during the 1950s and 1960s.

The conclusion uses Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) to contemplate the position of British SF at the end of the sixties. It goes back to analyse how post-war SF writing in Britain emerged out of the pre-war model of scientific romance to supply uniquely British works that nonetheless provided sustained commentary on the early stages of the Cold War. The New Wave is analysed as continuing this evolution, producing works that subverted the content and politics of fifties disaster writing, but succeeded only in remodelling the sub-genre rather than completely overthrowing it. *The Atrocity Exhibition* is acknowledged as the pinnacle of this subversion and experimentation, but in seeking to express the underlying psychologies of late sixties society, the novel maintains interesting connections to the disasters of Wyndham and Christopher, from which it ostensibly sought to break away.

Chapter One: 1945 – 1949

In his recent history of modern Europe, *Postwar* (2010), Tony Judt grimly remarks that following the Second World War Europe 'offered a prospect of misery and desolation' (13). Judt comments on film footage and photographs showing 'streams of helpless civilians trekking through a blasted landscape of broken cities and barren fields' (13), along with disturbing scenes of 'concentration camp inmates in striped pyjamas' who 'stare listlessly at the camera, starving and diseased' (13). For Judt, these images signify a continent where 'everyone and everything [...] seems worn out, without resources, exhausted' (13). Certainly, the total war inflicted upon the European populace between 1939 and 1945 had caused unprecedented structural, social and psychological damage, and the emerging threat of nuclear conflagration following the atomic attacks on Japan in August 1945 added to the general apocalyptic atmosphere of the period. Europe would be forced to rebuild after a cataclysmic war with the prospect of renewed and greater destruction overshadowing the beginnings of regeneration.

Britain was also in a precarious position after the war. The decision to stand 'alone' against Nazism in 1940 had proudly marked popular consciousness, yet by the end of the war the nation was exhausted and in a difficult finance position. Hugh Thomas (1986) supplies a succinct overview of the economic predicament facing the country in 1945:

> During the war, Britain had lost a quarter of her pre-war wealth (£7,300 million). She was now the world's largest debtor nation. Capital assets abroad of £1,300 million ($8 billion) had been sold, cutting income from this source by a half. Britain's losses in merchant ships totalled 11.5 million tons. That fleet was down to 70 per cent of its figure for 1939. (214)

Faced with such debt, Britain would subsequently acquire a loan of $4.4 billion[4] from the United States, illustrating the shifting economic and political status of the old imperial giant and its emerging superpower ally. Whilst the loan from the US may have symbolised the slow demise of Britain as a global force, it did assist Clement Attlee's freshly elected Labour government in implementing the welfare

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[4] Figure from Judt (2010): 90.

reforms advocated, most famously, by William Beveridge in his 1942 report.[5] These social transformations would aim to modernise Britain and supply genuine hope for the future. Yet, alongside this, the nation would continue to experience austerity equivalent to wartime hardships well into the 1950s – with rationing continuing and occasionally tightening[6] - while the physical scars of war remained visible through bomb sites that littered many major cities.

Britain was therefore seeking to negotiate the divergences between its wartime identity and the realities and reorganisations of the post-war world. Added to this, the use of atomic weapons by the United States, which brought a conclusive end to the Second World War, generated additional geo-political anxieties for Britain as it attempted to re-build after the financial and material exertions of war. George Orwell in his article 'You and the Atom Bomb', published in the *Tribune* on 19th October 1945, declared that the immense complexity and expense of nuclear weaponry provided the conditions for stand-off between a select group of abundantly resourced and wealthy nations. For Orwell ([1945] 1968), 'the great age of democracy and of national self-determination was the age of the musket and the rifle' (7), but the growth of complex weapons systems by 1939 had led to there being 'only five states capable of waging war on the grand scale, and now there are only three – ultimately, perhaps, only two' (8). The essay concludes by asserting that these states will use their nuclear arsenal to intimidate smaller nations and ultimately 'continue ruling the world between them' (9) while existing together in a 'permanent state of "cold war"' (9). Whilst Orwell does not explicitly mention Britain's role in this new order, his representation of the nation as the imperial outpost 'Airstrip One' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) suggests that he did not envisage Britain as a major independent force in such a 'war'. As will be explored in subsequent chapters, Britain would trail significantly behind both the United States and the Soviet Union in the nuclear arms race, whilst also struggling with the fragmentation of Empire in the late forties and throughout the fifties. After the triumph over Nazism, Britain would have to sharply reconsider its political, diplomatic and military role in the post-war world.

[5]The *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942) advised on how to tackle 'Want [...] Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness' (6) through government funded welfare provision.
[6]Bread, which had not been rationed during wartime, was rationed between July 1946 and July 1948. See Ina Zweiniger–Bargielowska (2003).

If Orwell expresses general anxiety towards the Bomb's destructive potential in 'You and the Atom Bomb', he also notes a lack of serious discussion about such deadly weaponry: 'considering how likely we all are to be blown to pieces by it within the next five years, the atomic bomb has not roused so much discussion as might have been expected' (6). The article subsequently placates these initial apocalyptic concerns, but towards the end of the piece returns to speculate on mankind's enthusiasm for self-destruction:

> For forty or fifty years past, Mr. H. G. Wells and others have been warning us that man is in danger of destroying himself with his own weapons, leaving the ants or some other gregarious species to take over. Anyone who has seen the ruined cities of Germany will find this notion at least thinkable. Nevertheless, looking at the world as a whole, the drift for many decades has been not towards anarchy but towards the reimposition of slavery. (9)

As such, although Orwell, with the events of August 1945 in mind, does not rule out the atom bomb's future use, he ultimately anticipates its primary function as that of a political tool rather than a practical weapon, arguing that such a 'complex weapon makes the strong stronger' (7) and thus facilitates state authoritarianism, the central concern of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* published four years later.

H.G. Wells, who Orwell briefly acknowledges here, also published his final work in 1945 in which he offers his own verdict on the fate of humanity. *Mind at the End of its Tether* ([1945] 2006) is a non-fiction pamphlet which proclaims the immanency of societal collapse, with an elderly Wells writing in broad and often ill-defined terms about the numerous shifts that have led to what he presents as a seeming end-point for civilisation. As R.D. Mullen (1977) points out, *Mind at the End of its Tether* 'was published several months before the existence of the atomic bomb became common knowledge' (124), yet Wells nonetheless pre-empts certain themes that would subsequently emerge during the Cold War. Similarly to Orwell, Wells is troubled by the extent of destruction during the Second World War, even if he does not allude to any particular incidents in the pamphlet, and remarks upon 'a frightful queerness' (Wells: 45) along with 'a shrinking and fugitive sense that something is happening so that life will never be quite the same again' (45). Wells, whose previous speculations, most notably those contained in *Anticipations* (1901),

had been, in large part, hopeful, is instead drawn here to a depiction of the contemporary world as one in which there is nowhere left for civilisation to turn: 'there is no way out or round or through the impasse' (45). One could dismiss these comments as the words of a dying man confronting his own personal apocalypse (Wells was suffering from terminal cancer), yet the fragmented statements articulate a feeling of malaise which may well have seemed especially apt to an audience emerging from total war.

Whilst Wells ([1945] 2006) was rash in declaring so conclusively that 'it is the end' (45), he does qualify his statements by assessing the diminishing sense of coherence in the modern world:

> The limit to the orderly secular development of life had seemed to be a definitely fixed one, so that it was possible to sketch out the pattern of things to come. But that limit was reached and passed into a hitherto incredible chaos. [...] Events now follow one another in an entirely untrustworthy sequence. (45-6)

For Wells, the 'assumption of an ultimate restoration of rationality' (45) no longer holds and one must therefore accept that the prevalent forces of the contemporary world are those of chaos. If Wells reflects in this a general mood of discordant, apocalyptic anxiety brought about by the devastation and atrocities of World War Two, and later the nuclear arms race, which resulted in a consequent loss of faith in ideologies of 'progress', he also alludes to the issues raised by parallel cultural and technological developments. At the end of the pamphlet he notes, for example, that 'our everyday reality is no more than a more or less entertaining or distressful story thrown upon a cinema screen' (50); an intriguing pre-emption of ideas surrounding the unreality of post-war consumer society expressed most clearly in the later writings of Jean Baudrillard, and which, in the context of British SF, would find its most concentrated literary expression in J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970). Read together, then, the essays by Orwell and Wells provide a clear insight into central cultural and political dimensions of the immediate post-war situation. Orwell outlines not only the Bomb's ability to cause immense physical damage but also predicts the rise of the militarised, authoritarian Cold War state, while Wells's attempt at framing a particular social mood at the end of the Second World War is,

as will be seen, helpful when exploring the nature of several SF works produced in the late forties.

In the wake of 1945, British SF conjured up a series of dystopias or 'negative' utopias throughout the late forties which drew inspiration from the social malaise of the immediate post-war world, which Orwell and Wells reflected, while writers of catastrophe narratives also mused on mankind's evolutionary status and its risk of overthrow or extinction.[7] In assessing British Science Fiction after 1945, Luckhurst (2005) points to a series of conflicting outlooks that dominated national discourse in the post-war years and contemplates the type of SF that would materialise from within this landscape:

> What kinds of SF could flourish in this climate? A literary historian might note the backward-looking expressions of melancholy for passing traditions, lost authority or diminished expectations (Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* or Philip Larkin's *The Less Deceived*), yet the immediate post-war moment was also driven by promise. The Labour government committed itself to the Welfare State aimed, in William Beveridge's words, to declare war on Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. New institutions for industry, health, housing, education and social security were shaped by ideas of rational planning and scientific management. (121-22)

With this uneven terrain in mind, Luckhurst notes that 'British discourse about futuristic modernity was less confident than America's' (122), but, nonetheless, this situation also assisted in the creation of a number of ambiguous and complex SF texts that stood, in some ways, apart from the demagoguery of superpower politics. As will be examined in this and future chapters, British SF during the Cold War era was not only tussling with a series of domestic questions emerging from the development of the welfare state and the dismantling of Empire, but was also haunted by the atomic bomb and the realisation that Britain occupied a relatively minor place in the new world order. Focusing on three novels, Gerald Heard's *Doppelgangers* (1947), Olaf Stapledon's *The Flames* (1947) and Aldous Huxley's

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[7] Anticipating some similar concerns in the SF of the post-war period, Wells ([1945] 2006) continues his life-long fascination with evolutionary theory in *Mind at the End of its Tether*, but predicts a fruitless end for humanity: 'A series of events has forced upon the intelligent observer the realization that the human story has already come to an end and *Homo sapiens*, as he has been pleased to call himself, is in his present form played out. The stars in their courses have turned against him and he has to give place to some other animal better adapted to face the fate that closes in more and more swiftly on mankind' (54).

Ape and Essence (1948), this chapter will seek, in this light, to evaluate how British SF evolved from pre-war models of scientific romance and consider how the embryonic moments of the Cold War inspired the dystopian imagination during the immediate post-war period.

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The Legacy of Scientific Romance: Gerald Heard's *Doppelgangers* (1947) and Olaf Stapledon's *The Flames* (1947)

Emerging, most prominently, from the writings of H.G. Wells, the sub-genre of scientific romance has a recognisably British heritage. Brian Stableford, in his comprehensive history of the genre *Scientific Romance in Britain 1890–1950* (1985), rightly notes that Wells was the inspirational figure who 'helped to create the niche' (4) that would be seized upon by a generation of writers. As the historical span of Stableford's book (1985) indicates, the genre first flourished towards the end of the Victorian period alongside the burgeoning of speculative non-fiction amongst scientists, thus 'running parallel to the tradition of British scientific romance [...] is a tradition of essay-writing which is itself Romantic: always speculative, often futuristic, frequently blessed with an elegance of style and a delicate irony' (5). In fact, Wells himself began his career writing speculative scientific essays, while works such as Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (1893) would contribute to not only the intellectual content of scientific romance, but also inform its subsequent literary style.

Despite scientific romance's definable origins, it is, however, significantly tougher to pin down its precise literary characteristics. This is highlighted in Stableford's book where his chapter on literary ancestry contains six broad sub-sections: imaginary voyages, utopian fantasies, evolutionary fantasies, future wars, eschatological fantasies and metaphysical fantasy. Luckhurst (2005) adds to this list by noting that Wells's scientific romances emerged at the same time and alongside a variety of his own journalistic pieces, gothic narratives, fantasies and comedies, yet argues that this generic overlap was a corresponding feature of scientific romance itself:

It is important to emphasize the permeability between these different kinds of writing, the hybrid and 'impure' spaces from which the scientific romance appeared. Yet even so, it is from within this crucible of mixed elements that Wells was to forge a scientized framework for his fiction and political writings and the evolutionary paradigm that dominated the English scientific romance before, and to some extent after, 1945. (31)

Thus, scientific romance, from its formation, existed in relation to competing genres rather than in opposition to them. With this in mind, scientific romance may be broadly characterised as a style of writing that both predates and, latterly, stands aloof from the Gernsbackian tradition of SF, instead representing the fictional equivalent of speculative science writing. Stableford (1985) provides a succinct outline of the form:

A scientific romance is a story which is built around something glimpsed through a window of possibility from which scientific discovery has drawn back the curtain [...] The distinguishing characteristic is not that scientific romances *are* scientific, but that they pretend to be, and they pretend to be in order to serve some rhetorical purpose. (8)

British scientific romance is accordingly an interesting genre in relation to the concerns of this thesis to the extent that, as evidenced by the sub-sections of Stableford's chapter, it invariably expresses ambivalence and uncertainty towards technological modernity while, equally, and as a result of a close link to late nineteenth century biological science, continually speculates on the social and political implications of evolutionary theory in any thinking of human development.[8]

While, then, Stableford (1985) argues that after 1950 the genre slowly declined as a result of the increasing convergence between British writing and American forms,[9] part of my argument here will be precisely that its legacy and influence would in fact remain a distinguishing characteristic of British SF – particularly in the form of disaster fiction – up to and beyond the 1960s. Clearly, the distinctive style of scientific romance – centred on the Victorian or Edwardian gentleman scientist, as most clearly defined by Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) – would begin to fade in

[8]Stableford, David Langford and John Clute (2012), in their entry for scientific romance in *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, explain how the genre was noted for its 'long evolutionary perspectives.' Accessed online 16 March 2013:
http://www.SF-encyclopedia.com/entry/scientific_romance
[9]As Stableford (1985) notes: 'In theme, in style and in the manner of its marketing most of the speculative fiction after 1950 was shaped in accordance with the rather different tradition of American Science Fiction' (321).

post-war writings, but its thematic obsessions would prove far more persistent, particularly as Britain struggled to assert the same technological and political presence as it had in the late nineteenth century. The socio-biological anxieties of a text such as *The Time Machine* would seem all the more appealing in the years after the Second World War as the birth of the welfare state, the rise in living standards through the fifties and sixties, and the proliferation of consumer culture, provided an opportunity for Eloi-like abundance. Yet, this existed alongside the spectre of nuclear war and political authoritarianism, which not only represented, for those of a Darwinian persuasion, a reminder of humanity's underlying aggression, but also offered a cautionary counterpoint to glossy visions of post-war modernity characteristic of an emerging 'society of the spectacle' (see Debord ([1967] 1995): 12).

Indeed, as will be explored further in later chapters, in the years immediately following the Second World War a number of works were published that attempted to revivify scientific romance as a contemporary genre, while the novels of writers such as John Wyndham and John Christopher in the 1950s presented post-war re-engagements with the dystopian strands of the genre. As outlined above, the problem for many SF writers emerging from the Second World War was in locating a suitable response to the shock of total war while also acquiring an appropriate speculative vocabulary to account for an era of rapid nuclear proliferation and political reorganisation. Much of the scientific romance published in the late forties thus reflected this broad sense of shock and uncertainty. According to Luckhurst (2005), rather than engaging in bold assertions about projected technological and scientific change, typically 'British writing of this period fused fantasy, Gothic and SF elements, offering refracted meditations on their historical moment' (124). This meditative quality is most clearly apparent in two scientific romances from 1947 that have largely escaped critical analysis: Gerald Heard's *Doppelgangers*, which imagines the emergence of an ostensibly benign dictator who has facilitated a worldwide psychological and spiritual revolution, and Olaf Stapledon's *The Flames*, which investigates the promise by an alien life form of a new consciousness for mankind. Both texts are intensely contemplative in form, acutely focusing on philosophical content rather than the coherence of their narrative development. As

with earlier scientific romances, the texts methodically outline their subject matter through a pseudo-scientific discourse, with each work agonising over civilisation's historical development and its possible future route, while seeking to elaborate on some form of transcendence, either spiritual or material, that might set humanity free from the traumas of recent history.

Gerald Heard (full name Henry Fitzgerald Heard) is largely unknown today, yet from the 1920s up until his death in 1971, Heard was a widely discussed public intellectual and writer. The majority of Heard's publications were philosophical, with works such as *The Ascent of Humanity* (1929), *The Emergence of Man* (1931) and *Pain, Sex and Time* (1939) presenting his own account of human historical development, each drawing heavily on evolutionary theory. But Heard was also a noted fiction writer, publishing the detective novel *A Taste for Honey* in 1941 before later tackling scientific romance and fantasy in *The Great Fog and Other Weird Tales* (1944), *Doppelgangers* (1947) and *The Lost Cavern and Other Tales of the Fantastic* (1948).

Heard's philosophy combines a curious mix of evolutionary psychology and spiritual investigation. Accordingly, Alison Falby (2008) cites him as an important figure in the formation of later 'New Age' ideas, seeking to 'reconcile science and religion by using the language and concepts of the physical, biological, and social sciences to explore religious ideas like salvation and the soul' (1). In the non-fiction work *Pain, Sex and Time* ([1939] 2004), for example, Heard outlines the historical stages of mankind as already developed in some of his earlier works, declaring that civilisation must enter into a new epoch, brought about by what he labels a 'psychological revolution' (xxiii), in order to prevent catastrophe.[10] Man, Heard writes, needs to 'find some psychological state in which he escapes from the torturing frustration which is experienced by a self-conscious individual faced with a universe which gives his consciousness no meaning' (xxiii–xxiv). To cure this problem and aid the conditions of personal spiritual fulfilment, Heard therefore calls

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[10]These ideas were originally detailed in *The Emergence of Man* (1931). Here, Heard outlined four historical steps – the Religious Revolution, the Political Revolution, the Economic Revolution and the Psychological Revolution – with the final one of these being the route to universal fulfilment that humanity must strive towards. See Stableford (1985): 300.

for the creation of a 'post- or supra-individual state' (xxiv) that neither promotes a neurotic brand of individualism nor leads to a retreat to dictatorship. In this respect, as Stableford (1985) notes, Heard's speculative philosophy correlates with the ideas of other scientific romance writers: 'Like Wells, Stapledon and so many others he believed that there was an important phase in the human story yet to come, which would bring into being a New Man' (300). Heard's hope for a further historical leap would, as a result, find a suitable platform after the Second World War in a moment when some redefinition of meaning and purpose seemed all the more pressing, and the question of which political apparatus could best implement such utopian revitalisation took on a corresponding importance.

Doppelgangers: An Episode of the Fourth, the Psychological, Revolution, 1997 ([1947] 1965) depicts a future world in which the 'psychological revolution' that Heard advocated has been achieved. The vast majority of the world's population are under the control of an outwardly benevolent dictator named Alpha, yet he is periodically challenged by an underground movement led by an elusive figure called the Mole. The narrative describes the journey of a member of the underground who is ordered to undergo reconstructive surgery to make him appear identical to Alpha. He is then sent by the Mole into mainstream society in the hope that the all-seeing Alpha will spot him and use him as a body double. The mission determines that the body double must then kill Alpha. Despite exhibiting sympathy for Alpha, the double finally carries out the assassination and places himself in charge. The novel concludes with the new ruler tussling with the demands of his underground allies and the advice of a mystical group known as the Elevators.

As is pointed out by John Clute in *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* (1979), the novel develops 'rather laboriously' (277) as Heard uses the figure of Alpha as a vehicle for lengthy explanations of the potential psychological transformation that dominates his non-fiction writing. Nonetheless, these extended descriptions of an emerging psycho-social terrain are interesting when placing the text in its post-war context. Unlike Orwell's contemporaneous dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which despairingly imagines a seemingly unconquerable totalitarian regime locked in an unceasing war of attrition, Heard's ([1947] 1965) world is more akin to the

ambiguous 'negative utopia' to be found in Aldous Huxley's pre-war *Brave New World* (1932), where the population are controlled by unending pleasure and self-fulfilment:

> Yes, it was simple, so simple and so successful that you couldn't think why someone who wanted power hadn't thought of it before! Of course, he beat all the grim puritans, the old nationalists, the old ideologists, the hard fanatics, the men who thought the masses wanted to be drilled, when all they wanted was the fun of going about in some uniform and some kind of performance a little less dreary than the utilitarianism mixed with the inhibitions of the gentleman, which had been the only alternative formula of the old liberalism. (*Doppelgangers*: 45)

The new state Heard depicts has not only disposed of political ideologies, it has also destroyed a particular brand of conformity represented by liberal adherences to meticulous patterns of work and leisure. Alpha instead creates a society where the ideas of the psychologist W.H. Sheldon have been put into practice and in which each physiological 'type' receives the appropriate level of support necessary to satisfy their particular needs and desires.

Correspondingly, *Doppelgangers*, with its world dominated by consumption, orgiastic leisure and untamed jollity, replicates Huxley's vision of 'soft' totalitarianism where new technologies and drugs are manipulated by those in power essentially to sedate the population and discourage political thought altogether. Unsurprisingly therefore, Harrison Smith (1947), writing in *The Saturday Review* interpreted Heard's novel as, first and foremost, a prescient warning about the potential trajectories of consumerism:

> Perhaps this country which excels the world in manufacturing the kind of euphoria that can delight a woman's soul with a new icebox will be the first to achieve this terrifying millennium. If this nightmare should have any actuality, let us prepare to go underground before long, we who feel ourselves free men, and consort with mad revolutionists and destroyers and with all of the devils of hell, rather than see our descendants turned into strutting and obscene manikins, the regimented slaves of the authoritarian machine. (14)

Perhaps expectedly considering the date of its publication, Smith's review concurrently hints at what would become, in the United States in particular, an increasing paranoia during the Cold War with regard to such form of creeping authoritarianism that had the ability to infiltrate everyday American life. Indeed,

Smith's analysis of the novel's political drive corresponds with the views of Orwell in 'You and the Atom Bomb', and, earlier, James Burnham in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), in so much as he suggests that the novel articulates the authoritarianism inherent within technocratic capitalist states rather than merely characterising it as a product of communism. Yet it is also important to note that *Doppelgangers* fits neatly into the tradition of British scientific romance, conforming to the general characteristics of the genre by indulging in broad pseudo-scientific accounts of human development before noting the final evolutionary step constituted by the 'psychological revolution'. The major protagonists, Alpha and his double, are also characterised as ambivalent figures rather than heroic pioneers. With this in mind, the structures of Alpha's dictatorship can be read against emerging models of political organisation in Britain as much as they can be seen as a critique or parody of American consumerism.[11]

Alpha describes his ostensibly benign autocracy as a model for distributing the supposedly objective requirements of a population without the inconvenience of political processes (eg. elections) or debate. While having dinner with his double, Alpha explains his role in relation to his subjects:

> I take care that not only should they not be troubled by questions they can't understand and problems which make them suffer for no purpose, but also that their pleasures should be rationed to them, always enough, always some little treat and change coming to them, but never a surfeit. (89)

Alpha goes on to remark that 'just making people comfortable has worked, while threatening them has failed' (99). Such paternalism is explored throughout the text and is not wholly dismissed, particularly by Alpha's double who grows increasingly sympathetic to his ideas. This near-future world may, in this sense, be said to reflect contemporaneous debates surrounding the development of welfare states in Britain and Europe, especially as the drive for welfare in the United Kingdom was envisaged by its architects as not only providing protection from hardship, but also facilitating the hope for future prosperity. Yet simultaneously, Alpha's desire to hide challenging questions from the populace comments on the emerging machinery of the Cold War state, which invests in clandestine scientific or military projects

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[11]Also, the precise geographical location of *Doppelgangers* is never articulated, with the only certainty being that it is set in a westernised city relatively close to a coast line.

without democratic consent. Alpha's state, controlled by an elite of technocrats, provides an early evocation of the tensions that would expand through the fifties and sixties between the outward post-war drive towards liberal democracy and prosperity and the increasingly secretive military-industrial complex that concurrently formed during the period.

Consequently, running alongside the novel's examination of the operations of a paternalistic dictatorship is a concern that individual rights may be overlooked, paving the way for what are represented as forms of atrocious maltreatment in the novel. Alpha, in the same dinner conversation with his double, explains the role of his personal servants named 'trusties' who pledge absolute commitment to their ruler through a mixture of sedatives and periods of isolation, with Alpha subsequently commenting that 'we castrate the mind' (96). In attempting to imagine a world after a 'psychological revolution', Heard thus confronts the dilemma of what form of political organisation is best suited to complete the transformation of society and prevent a lapse into totalitarianism or atavistic regression to the old order. In seeking a solution, the novel again turns to lengthy expositions that are comparable to the speculations to be found in Heard's non-fiction. In *Pain, Sex and Time* ([1939] 2004), for example, Heard calls for the creation of a 'supra-individual state' (xxiv) as a response to a world where all that is offered is either 'individual neurosis' (xxiii) or 'mass neurosis' (xxiii). Similarly, *Doppelgangers* ([1947] 1965) depicts a world at a tipping point where mass hysteria surrounding the messianic status of Alpha threatens to distract from administering universal psychical evolution. Following the assassination of Alpha by his double, a sage-like figure known as 'the man in saffron' (221) visits to proclaim that 'your society has reached a crisis' (220) and pleads with the new ruler to let the revolution play out and 'let things develop and to cease pushing them to and fro' (220). The novel's conclusion descends, at times, into incoherency,[12] yet there appears to be narrated here an agreement between the numerous factions which hope to restore the initial purpose of the revolution and allow the subsequent psychological evolution to be completed.

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[12]Stableford (1985) argues that 'the forceful rhetoric we find in the last three chapters of *Doppelgangers* is really pure nonsense' (309).

Commenting on the political and philosophical legacy of Heard, Falby (2008) remarks that this search for a new system that neither resorts to authoritarianism or untamed individualism forms an important part of his work:

> Some libertarians, like Heard and his followers, retained certain liberal religious notions. They believed in the importance of individual mystical experience, and thought science reflected human divinity. At the same time, they argued against the efficacy of welfare states, claiming that people will only build moral, equitable societies if they can first attain a sustainable level of religious experience. (2)

Doppelgangers, through its lengthy speeches and explications, seeks to find this spiritual centre, with Alpha recognising, while talking of the 'spaceless energy' (145) which exists within the natural world, that humanity is 'bonded together by the very pressure of these unsuspected forces' (145). Ultimately, the overweening paternalism of the Alpha dictatorship is seen as insufficient for producing the fertile ground from which psychological evolution can be accomplished, yet the amicability of the novel's conclusion demonstrates an uncommon optimism in scientific romance writing of the period whereby all parties agree to a continued pursuit of psychic and spiritual enlightenment.

The largely optimistic ending to *Doppelgangers* marks it, in many ways, as uncharacteristic of British SF written during the Cold War, which is broadly typified by a tone of, at best, anxiety, and, at worst, of despair. However, it does maintain similarities with a certain strain of SF in Britain that would speculate on the overcoming of nationalism and the eruption of a utopian urge assisted by technological and psychological shifts. Stapledon's *The Flames* (1947), which will be addressed shortly, finds, for example, a potential source for peace in transcendent galactic entities who seek to free humanity from destructive urges, while Arthur C. Clarke's fiction, a topic for the next chapter, finds solace in scientific advancement, which has the potential to lift civilisation from the petty conflicts of earth and out into the solar system. Indeed, *Doppelgangers* assumes that the forces of militarism will be successfully overcome as scientists recognise the absurdity of nuclear stand-off. Hence Alpha explains how, during the revolution, physicists who had previously been controlled by 'politicos' (112) soon realised that should they continue supporting the nationalism of the old regime then 'people wouldn't live in the towns,

and the bombed places' (113) which would supply only 'cancer and diseases of the central nervous system' (113). Correspondingly, Alpha proclaims that he 'didn't have much difficultly in bringing all the researchers, specialists, technicians, on my side' (113). In this way Heard offers a contrasting vision of Cold War developments to Orwell's predictions in 'You and the Atom Bomb' and later *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with Heard's near-future being one where 'militarism was as out of date as democracy' (*Doppelgangers*, 101) and the search for greater psychological fulfilment would override nationalistic rivalry.

Doppelgangers, despite its frustratingly lengthy postulations and hazy calls for spiritual awakening, does then usefully articulate a set of questions facing the immediate post-war world. Stableford (1985) argues that scientific romance was largely ineffectual in prescribing solutions to societal problems, but he nonetheless identifies how it asked and speculated on those broad topics which embodied 'an attitude to the *possibility* of their being answered' (309). Viewed from this perspective, *Doppelgangers* is a historically interesting text insofar as it asks a series of appropriate questions about welfarism, totalitarianism and individual agency at an early moment of the Cold War's development. While the solutions offered are founded upon the often intangible concept of mystical consciousness, the novel nonetheless contemplates competing models of political organisation at a time when the world was recovering from a destructive war and entering a new conflict centred around radically opposing ideologies.

While Heard's scientific romances have often been overlooked, the fiction of Olaf Stapledon has attracted increasing attention. Novels such as *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Star Maker* (1937), which navigate the vast histories of the universe, have often been viewed as counterparts to the fiction of Wells, and, as Robert Crossley (1986) observes, led Stapledon's work to be classified as '"Wellsian romances"' (22). Yet Stapledon, like Heard, was also a professional philosopher who grappled with the prospect of psychological betterment beyond the confines of biological instinct. Just as Heard sought a 'psychological revolution' to overthrow the overbearing rationalism of the Enlightenment, Stapledon persistently seeks the reconnection of modern man with unifying ideas of spirituality. It is therefore

appropriate to compare Stapledon's 1947 novella *The Flames* with Heard's benevolent dictatorship in *Doppelgangers*, in so far as both speculate on potential solutions to the emergent impasse of Cold War tensions in the immediate post-war period.

The Flames ([1947] 1997) is an epistolary narrative set in the present. The novella consists of a lengthy letter from a character named Cass to the narrator Thos, who explains his experience with ancient sentient life forms who have existed in a dormant state within the earth following their exile from their home amongst the furnace of the sun. According to Cass, these gaseous entities have recently been awoken by the raging fires of the Second World War and re-established telepathic communication with fellow members of their diasporic race. They explain to Cass that they now require a permanent base on earth, which can only be obtained by mankind willingly forming a permanent fire on a certain part of the earth. In exchange, they offer humanity the possibility of greater spiritual wisdom and community that will safeguard against destruction:

> In return we offer you the salvation of mankind, if I may so put it. As I have already told you, though we are novices in physical science, our science of the spirit is far more developed than yours. And it convinces us that, without some kind of spiritual help from outside, your species is doomed. (104)

Through the establishment of telepathic techniques, flames, as Cass names them, have found no need for conflict, but only a desire to pursue 'the life of the mind' (88). They ascertain that humanity, with all its scientific knowledge but underdeveloped emotional capacities, will eventually find the key to peace and prosperity should it adopt their level of meditative understanding. However, Cass remains sceptical as to their plans for humanity, especially when they tell him of their ability to manipulate human thinking should co-operation fail. Ultimately, he is torn between a desire to embrace the utopian potentialities on offer and his hostility to an invading force who apparently wish to impose their will on earth.

Just as in *Doppelgangers*, where the protagonist remains troubled by a pleasure-driven world constructed through collective devotion to the words of Alpha, Cass is unsure that full submission to the telepathic guidance of the flames will offer a

suitable long-term remedy for mankind. He agrees that humanity requires 'a deep change of heart' (110) that may only be found through a force 'outside man' (110), yet wonders whether the alien race will ultimately achieve this through the repression of free choice:

> How could I be sure that my affection for the flame and my admiration for his race were spontaneous acts of my own personality? Might they not have been cunningly implanted in me by the flame himself? [...] And did not the flame race intend to exercise this hypnotic power over the whole race of men, so as to compel them, yes, compel them, to subject themselves for ever to the will of the flames? (110)

Cass, fearing the consequences of carrying out the wishes of the flames, kills the member of the species who confided in him before heading to a locomotive factory where he marvels at the triumphs of industrialised man, declaring that 'the flames couldn't do that, not with all their antiquity and their spirituality' (112). Yet, following his confinement to a mental institute, Cass claims to have re-established contact with the flames and discovers the full history and evolution of their race. He accordingly rethinks his initial mistrust and calls for human scientists and the flame species to co-operate together and form an 'agnostic faith' (123) that reconciles spiritual and scientific forces. Here, Stapledon's novella overlaps substantially with Heard's novel of the same year. The torturous negation of free will and individual agency is juxtaposed with the possibility of collective utopian transformation should western man abandon these Enlightenment ideals. Both Heard's 'psychological revolution' and the concept of 'metaphysical agnosticism' (122) in *The Flames* speculates on the next step of historical development for humanity, aiming to surpass the limitations of previous models of political order without succumbing to totalitarianism.

Like Heard, Stapledon's fictional solutions to the problems of civilisation and its discontents match the philosophical ideas articulated in his non-fiction. Stapledon published a series of political works, notably *New Hope for Britain* (1939), *Saints and Revolutionaries* (1939) and *Seven Pillars of Peace* (1944), which examined how humanity might acquire some form of cosmic transcendence beyond the scientific and rational. As Vincent Geoghegan (2005) puts it, Stapledon's philosophical contemplations offer 'a theoretical critique of the hyper-rationalism of post-

Enlightenment secularism whilst acknowledging and wishing to defend its vital achievements, and seeks to rescue the authentic dimension of the "religious" marginalised in the secular moment' (348). During the emerging moments of the Cold War, Stapledon's ideas found a sharper focus and he became an active campaigner for peace, attending a selection of international conferences in the late forties, including one in New York in 1949 which brought him temporary infamy in the United States.[13] In an essay published immediately after the war entitled 'Social Implications of Atomic Power' ([1945] 1997), Stapledon boldly declared that developing nuclear technologies offered such a grave threat to human existence that the only sensible solution was the establishment of some form of humanist consensus that identified itself with the overall health of humanity:

> To avoid self-destruction, I should say, any species that wins atomic power must have a firmer grasp of true values and, therefore, a stronger will for world-community, than mankind has to-day. Our only hope is that, just as the Battle of Britain wakened inhabitants of this island to a more vivid communal feeling, so the hideous danger of the prostitution of atomic power may force mankind to will world-community more earnestly than before. (207)

Just as *Doppelgangers* envisaged the withering away of militarism in reaction to the absurd power of nuclear weapons, Stapledon was also enthused by the notion that a global orthodoxy may form which acknowledges that 'the true way of life, for the individual and for the race as a whole, is to live for something other than the individual, and, in a sense, even other than the race' (210). In the wake of the Second World War, Stapledon thus conjures up a utopian route that potentially unites science with a wider mysticism and sense of spiritual community. It is unsurprising therefore that Stapledon was invited by a young Arthur C. Clarke to speak at the British Interplanetary Society in 1948 (as will be discussed in the following chapter, Clarke would also speculate on the erosion of nationalistic tendency through the unifying cause of space exploration). In his speech entitled 'Interplanetary Man?' ([1948] 1997) Stapledon lists the options for a civilisation faced with the Cold War, arguing that peace, prosperity and the exploration of space can only be reached through 'the founding of a new kind of human world, in which the Aladdin's map of science will be used wisely' (220). Stapledon later argues that once this state has

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[13]For a full account of Stapledon's visit the United States in 1949 see Robert Crossley (1994).

been achieved then interplanetary travel may pursue 'something over and above man' (230), with his speech implying, once more, that burgeoning technologies house utopian possibilities, yet that, in order for these to be achieved, humanity must embark on social and psychological reinvention.

The largely realist visualisation of the post-war condition in *The Flames* ([1947] 1997), and its condensed focus, reflects the urgency of Stapledon's political statements and speeches. Through the words of Cass, Thos, and the observations of the flame race, one perceives a familiarly conflicted world, facing crossroads leading to either annihilation or the prospect of renewal. Cass's letter opens with an account of his time in Germany, where he tells of a 'partitioned and tragic country' (74) suffering food shortages and social deprivation following defeat in the war. The situation makes Cass uneasy, rhetorically stating: 'we're all human, aren't we, all equally persons? Surely persons ought to be able to feel their fundamental kinship whatever their race' (74). Stapledon's protagonist echoes his own political calls as he shuns nationalism and seeks the unification of humanity following the horrors of the immediate past. The flame that speaks to Cass articulates how he has witnessed both the fires of war and the development of atomic technologies. He states that civilisation, as currently formed, will ultimately produce global destruction, noting that 'even if by good luck the end is postponed for some time, you will merely continue to drift along in mutual hate and slaughter' (105). Stableford (1985) marks this as a specifically British response to the emerging geo-political structures of the late forties, arguing that 'although the atom bomb was in the hands of an ally, it was still in other hands, and there was a long-standing anxiety in the land whose flames only needed a little fanning to make them flare up to apocalyptic magnitude' (279). *The Flames* is accordingly readable as a cautionary narrative with a utopian impulse. Stapledon does not overlook the significant challenges facing civilisation following total war; indeed, he accepts in both *The Flames* and his accompanying non-fiction that the combination of atomic weapons and human aggression points to the inevitability of disaster. Yet he explicitly resists despair, instead considering the alternative path should humanity search for a 'third way' that ameliorates both dogmatic forms of rationalism as well as untamed emotion.

These two novels demonstrate the richness and adaptability of scientific romance in the late forties. Many critics have, understandably, looked to Orwell's desolate vision of unceasing totalitarian toil in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as exemplary of a particularly British reaction to a geo-political terrain of which it was no longer a major part. Yet, the works of Heard and Stapledon from the same period reveal that despite living in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a certain style of British SF still looked to feed the utopian imagination. Heard's 'psychological revolution' emerges from his speculation as to the natural ebbing away of militarism and nationalism once the absurd power of atomic technology registers with the scientific community, while the insertion of the flame race into Stapledon's text provides – in line with Darko Suvin's classic account of Science Fiction's characteristic forms of 'cognitive estrangement' – a voice outside of humanity that scrutinises social structures and offers a seemingly more peaceful path forward centred on spiritual community. Whilst Heard is exceedingly optimistic in his assumption that nationalistic tension will fade away, Stapledon's desire for a similar outcome acknowledges the near insurmountable hurdles that stand in the way of social and political transformation. Nonetheless, the value of these two works is found in the way they overturn the assumption that British SF in the late forties was dominated by the Orwellian mode, with each speculating on the ways out from the apparently grim trajectories of the atomic age.

From Utopian Urges to Bleak Satire: Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948)

Unlike Heard in particular, the fiction of Aldous Huxley has received consistent attention from literary scholars. Famously remembered for his 1932 dystopia *Brave New World* as well as his later explorations of mysticism and drug use in works such as *The Doors of Perception* (1954), Huxley stands as a significant twentieth-century novelist and intellectual. Yet, his 1948 novel *Ape and Essence* ([1948] 2005) has been routinely overlooked or, when noticed, criticised as one of his least successful works. The narrative opens on the day of Gandhi's assassination in January 1948 and initially depicts, with some scorn, the daily duties of two Hollywood studio executives. Upon discovering an intriguing film script entitled 'Ape and Essence', that falls from a lorry loaded with rejected manuscripts, the two characters decide to

locate the author, William Tallis. They subsequently find that he has recently died and the remainder of the novel is then handed over to the Tallis script, which is presented 'without change and without comment' (23).

The script itself is a brutal satire of not only the atomic age, but also of modern human development. Although largely set in California a number of years after atomic and biological warfare, the opening sequences of the script metaphorically visualises contemporary Cold War enemies as two baboon societies primed to attack each other with the assistance of enslaved scientists. This lurid fantasy begins with an audience consisting of baboon housewives and financiers gleefully singing to a popular song as performed by a celebrated singer:

> *Love, Love, Love –*
> *Love's the very essence*
> *Of everything I think, of everything I do.*
> *Give me, give me, give me,*
> *Give me detumescence.*
> *That means you.*   (26)

Tied to the singer is the beleaguered figure of the nineteenth-century scientist Michael Faraday who weeps during the performance, yet his tears are then greeted with a violent reaction from his captor who broadcasts 'a cry of rage and starts to beat him, blow after savage blow, while the audience applauds tumultuously' (27). The supposedly cultured sound of the singer is thus juxtaposed with a descent into carnal aggression, a sight that is also mirrored on the battlefield, to which the script cuts away. Here, the two warring societies chant nationalistic anthems before forcing their captured Einstein figures to press the button that launches atomic missiles:

> Huge paws hoist the Einsteins to their feet and, in a close-up, seize their wrists. Ape-guided, those fingers, which have written equations and played the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, close on the master switches and, with a horrified reluctance, slowly press them down. (33-4)

Following this fantastical re-enactment of the Third World War, the script then transports us to 2108 and the New Zealand Re-Discovery Expedition who, guided by the parodic figure of the Botanist Dr. Poole, locate a satanic cult living amongst the ruins of Los Angeles. Poole is soon captured by the Belial worshipping tribe and is introduced to not only their practices, but also to their re-interpretation of history

following nuclear atrocity. The script ends with Poole fleeing the cult alongside his lover Loola in search of a less repressive micro-society.

Whilst the novel is set in America and is, in part, a lampoon of Hollywood attempts at post-apocalyptic drama,[14] the text's unflinching satire and anxious portrayal of human behaviour aligns it with a peculiarly British view of the early years of the Cold War. Just as Wells's final piece of non-fiction warned of impending apocalypse and Orwell's political and imaginative writing feared the rise of global authoritarianism, Huxley's novel also envisions a grim spectacle for civilisation if the nationalism of previous wars continues into the atomic age. Additionally, the didacticism of the Tallis script – which has frequent moralising interruptions by an omnipotent narrator – creates a political urgency that also resonates in Stapledon's *The Flames*. Similarly to Stapledon's novella, the political situation following the Second World War is characterised as in need of immediate remedial treatment, with Huxley's caricature of the late forties (metaphorically represented by the baboon society) comparable to the exposition of post-war Europe by the flame race in Stapledon's earlier novel. As Stableford (1985) argues, this form of anxiety can be seen as more prominent in British texts of the late forties than in those of American authors. The latter 'after all, could rest content for a while with the idea that they had the bomb and no one else did' (279). For this reason, that caution present in even the largely hopeful works of British writers in the late forties can perhaps be traced to an unease about Britain lagging behind the two superpowers in terms of atomic research, which simultaneously fed wider uncertainty regarding Britain's ability to influence global politics. At the same time, alongside these broad contemporary political concerns, the text also continues British scientific romances's anxious relationship with evolutionary theory, apparent from Wells onwards, through its consideration of how carnal forces may influence and interrupt ethical discourse. In line with this, Keith Leslie Johnson (2009) argues, at times convincingly, that *Ape and Essence* is more than a mere atomic era fable, suggesting that the text is instead primarily a response to the ideas expressed by Huxley's grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley – the biologist invariably referred to as 'Darwin's

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[14]Poole's romance with Loola is represented through a collection of sentimental sequences that offer a hopeful conclusion to an otherwise bleak narrative.

Bulldog'. For Johnson, *Ape and Essence* is, above all, 'troubled by the absence of a robust ethical distinction between humans and animals in the Darwinian model, an absence the novel assumes and subsequently satirizes' (574). This consequently leads the novel to question the 'magical quantum of sympathy' (574) that differentiates human co-operative behaviour from the functional co-operation seen amongst other animals. Johnson is no doubt correct to argue that Huxley's novel interrogates T.H. Huxley's Victorian definitions of ethical behaviour as pronounced in *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), which, in Johnson's (2009) words, situates 'socioethical evolution' (577) as wholly distinct from natural evolutionary steps. *Ape and Essence* instead demonstrates that rather than being removed from each other, 'animal' instinct maintains a residual and destructive presence within modern society. This is largely articulated in the text through the monologues of the narrator, whose instructive messages muse upon the way in which 'ends are ape-chosen; only means are man's' (32). Johnson (2009) therefore argues that *Ape and Essence* supplies a satire of civilised pretensions by exhibiting how 'life – human, animal, or mutant – is [...] a homogeneous state of creaturely abjection in the face of sovereign power' (587). Through this definition, *Ape and Essence* intentionally problematises T.H. Huxley's ([1893] 1989) characterisation of the 'cosmic process' (89) as necessarily separate from the 'artificial fabric' (79) of co-operative society and instead imagines a world suffering from their infinite fusion.

However, whilst Johnson (2009) importantly highlights the novel's relationship with evolutionary theory, he nonetheless underplays the work's examination of early Cold War tensions. Johnson argues that '*Ape and Essence* disappoints as a satire of atomic anxiety' (584) as nuclear warfare 'seems more the pretext than the context of the project' (584), which is largely concerned with 'the problematic of post-Darwinian ethics' (584). Yet the Arch-Vicar's lengthy sermon to Poole on the misadventures of human history, for example, clearly claims a broader relevance than is to be found in the novel's contemplation of evolution. Responding to Poole's desire for proof that the devil had guided mankind following the Second World War, the Arch-Vicar proclaims:

> The whole of subsequent history is the proof. Look at what happened when
> the phrase became a policy and was actually put into practice.
> Unconditional surrender – how many millions of new cases of

tuberculosis? How many millions of children forced to be thieves or prostituting themselves for bars of chocolate? [...] And, again, unconditional surrender – the ruin of Europe, the chaos in Asia, the starvation everywhere, the revolutions, the tyrannies. And finally, of course, there was the Thing. Unconditional surrender and bang! (*Ape and Essence*: 98)

The Arch-Vicar's lecture does in part correlate with Johnson's thesis, in so far as his belief in the devil's guiding hand can easily be seen as a metaphorical reference to biological instinct, yet the speech is also a polemical statement on post-Second World War geo-political developments. As in Stapledon's novella, Huxley picks out the suffering in Europe, and particularly Germany, in the years following the war as demonstrative of continued nationalistic aggression despite the disasters of two global wars. As is commonly seen in dystopian narratives (including, most obviously, both *Brave New World* (1932) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)), the Arch-Vicar's lament on the follies of history thus operates as a far-future warning to the present day, invoking a Cold War readership to guard against an equally disastrous historical trajectory to that which has led to imprisonment in post-apocalyptic darkness. Furthermore, as the Arch-Vicar's address continues he expresses dismay at scientists who were otherwise 'good, well-meaning men' (97) but had suspended their ethical judgements in order to take up jobs with the Nazis as 'specialists' (97). This sentiment is echoed by the narrator at the beginning of the Tallis script as he decries 'biologists, pathologist, physiologists' (31) who hurry home to 'bed at eleven and the familiar ecstasies of married love' (31) before returning to work the next day to discover 'how yet greater numbers of families precisely like their own can be infected with a yet deadlier strain of *bacillus mallei*' (32) – an apparent warning, again, concerning the burgeoning military-industrial complex of the Cold War.

Ape and Essence therefore has a dual function: being both a critique of social Darwinism and an articulation of Huxley's grimly expressed contemporary political anxieties. In a later lecture, Huxley ([1959] 1978) once more touches upon this combination of ideas by noting the 'profound change' (85) that he detected during his lifetime:

When I was a boy we still believed, with a kind of extreme Victorian optimism, that anybody who wore a top hat and took a bath every day and

went to church on Sundays would be perfectly incapable of the sort of atrocities that the Turks had committed against the Armenians. But in the First World War we discovered that even people who took baths every day and wore top hats were capable of that kind of thing. The goodness of civilized man, which had been taken for granted while I was still a boy, was changed into a taken-for-granted native badness of man, for whom anything was possible. (85)

What is intriguing about this statement is not only Huxley's description of the kind of barbarity that would litter the twentieth century, but also his embarrassment that at the start of the century a form of 'Victorian optimism' would hubristically assume this to be otherwise. Huxley's political vitriol is therefore contained in the realisation that western society has lurched from untenable naivety to apocalyptic slaughter within half a century. But implicit in this broad polemic is also a comment on social Darwinism in which Huxley alludes to the residual strain of seemingly instinctive aggression that lingers beneath a civilised veneer. In this way, *Ape and Essence* is an important precursor to the narratives of evolutionary crisis that would, as we will see, emerge in the 1950s through works such as *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and *The Death of Grass* (1956) and go on to influence New Wave writing, notably that of J.G. Ballard, who would continue to examine the collision between latent psychologies or 'instincts' and contemporary technological reality.

Within the Tallis script we see the perpetual overlap of these two ideas, which become particularly explicit in the description of a cinematic montage that would precede the Arch-Vicar's lecture:

> Dissolve to a shot through a powerful microscope of spermatozoa frantically struggling to reach their Final End, the vast moon-like ovum in the top left-hand corner of the slide. On the sound track we hear the tenor voice in the last movement of Liszt's Faust Symphony: *La femme éternelle toujours nous élève. La femme éternelle toujours ...* Cut to an aerial view of London in 1800. Then back to the Darwinian race for survival and self-perpetuation. Then to a view of London in 1900 – and again to the spermatozoa – and again to London, as the German airmen saw it in 1940. (*Ape and Essence*: 91)

Huxley, here, expresses with greater abstraction than at other more polemical points in the novel, the ongoing negotiation between the natural order and the progression of civilisation. The montage deliberately links the natural process of procreation to the rapid industrialisation of London, with Huxley implying that evolution is not segregated from human progress, but is an ever-present force regardless of man's

technological domination over the natural world. At the same time, Poole's analysis of the contaminated soil of post-atomic California leads him to pronounce, similarly to the Arch-Vicar, that mankind and the natural earth have not remained 'symbiotic partners' (129), but instead their relationship has become that of 'tapeworm and infested dog' (129). By equating human behaviour to that of parasitism the novel's contemplation of biological inheritance suddenly widens to incorporate a bio-ethical stance. Once more, discoveries within the dystopian landscape offer reflective warnings, which anticipate a later environmental politics in highlighting the dangers of discrediting the eco-system in favour of technological advancement, while the nuclear referent lingers as a symbol of a political and scientific endeavour that threatens to destroy all hope for natural and technological harmony.

Despite these stark warnings concerning the nature of human progress, *Ape and Essence* is also an absurdist satire of Hollywood script writing. The script itself is chaotic, drifting from fantasy to dreary moralising, while we also witness the sentimentalised romance of Poole and Loola, who are continually depicted through clichéd filmic language: 'She raises her face towards his and, as he bends down to kiss her, the image on the screen fades into the darkness of a moonless night' (148). Sanford E. Marovitz (1996) misses the irony of Poole and Loola's relationship, stating that '*Ape and Essence* presents a post-atomic horror show but gratifies the reader with a relatively happy ending in which the naïve lead couple is saved' (206); a reading of the novel which fails to grasp that these ostensibly trite moments serve a broader parodic function. In fact, the script is best understood as representing Huxley's estimation of what a Hollywood film on atomic war would look like. Thus, the gloominess of the post-nuclear setting is supplemented by a hopeful romance, signalling that the moral messages and historical lessons offered by the pious narrator have to be offset by a romantic, potentially joyful ending in order to turn such a script into a profitable product of the culture industry. Huxley had, of course, experienced the oddities of the movie industry whilst living in California, which presumably motivated, in part, the satire of *Ape and Essence*. However, Huxley's critique of an especially American institution also highlights a notably British resistance towards mid-twentieth century modernity, one that was seen as being defined, increasingly, through American cultural and political standards. As we have

seen, even the utopian hopes of Heard and Stapledon were infused with a nervousness about the political conditions of the late forties and Huxley's novel further articulates these ambivalences through a work that switches between playful satire and stark parable.

On first reading, it is easy then to view Huxley's work as a straightforward post-atomic war novel that is littered with a familiar set of warnings about the folly of Cold War nationalisms. A number of critics have accordingly judged the work harshly, including Rudolf B. Schmerl (1962) who declared that 'contrasted with *Brave New World*, *Ape and Essence* is an almost incredibly bad novel' (334). Schmerl similarly criticises the crudeness of the novel's symbolism and the constant interruptions of the narrator, although, in his final paragraph, concedes that perhaps 'one might well question whether any significant writer could, in 1949, have been the man he was in 1932' (334). This, indeed, seems to be crucial to any adequate reading of *Ape and Essence*, which would have to acknowledge that Huxley's occasional didacticism itself stems from the perceived desperation of western society as it emerged from the rubble of the Second World War and into the atomic age. Furthermore, the text goes beyond any simplistic exposition of moral failings and combines its political rhetoric with a broader reassessment of the ethical dimensions of evolutionary theory, which are framed by the novel's subtle, but persistent, parody of American cultural production.

More broadly, Huxley's novel, along with the texts by Heard and Stapledon, exemplifies imaginative works that deviate from Orwell's famous nightmare that has dominated discussion of dystopian fiction in Britain during the late 1940s. Scientific romance did not vanish in this period and, as will be explored, remained an underlying influence on British SF throughout the fifties and sixties. In this way, the novels of Heard, Stapledon and Huxley supply an alternative, if at times peculiar, assessment of the post-war moment. Similarly to Orwell in 'You and the Atom Bomb' and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, each novel senses the urgency (or desperation) of the post-war situation, yet in

contemplating future routes, they move away from the Orwellian mode, offering either grim satire or potentially utopian alternatives.

Chapter Two: the 1950s

If the late 1940s were marked by what Judt (2010) describes as an apparent 'prospect of misery and desolation' (13) in the wake of war, and the various cultural and political responses to this, Britain during the 1950s was characterised by a variety of contradictions. On the one hand, the reforming agenda of Clement Atlee's post-war Labour government had become a definable reality by the decade's opening, marking an epochal shift in social structures that widened the scope for opportunity and prosperity. As Alan Sinfield (1997) articulates it:

> ... the promise of full employment, a health service, universal full-time secondary education, nearly universal pension rights and public responsibility for housing were established. These were the good things of life that, traditionally, the upper classes had secured for themselves. Now the state was proposing to make them available to everyone. All the people were to have a stake in society, an adequate share of its resources as of right. It was an alternative conception of the social order. (15)

One could therefore trace a trajectory in the late forties and early fifties that moved away from what Asa Briggs (1994) identified as the 'many different "Englands" in the 1930s' (303), which were divided along rigid class lines, to a more inclusive system determined to allow political and economic capital to proliferate evenly across society. Yet Labour's defeat in the 1951 general election and the return of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister indicated that there remained significant national unease about social democratic reforms and hinted at a public mood that maintained an affinity with both wartime and pre-war models of national identity. Furthermore, up until the mid-fifties Britain was still feeling the effects of post-war austerity, with basic food rationing ceasing as late as 1954, meaning that any hope of future affluence was continually tempered, in the first half of the decade at least, by the continuation of everyday hardship. The domestic atmosphere in Britain at the decade's outset therefore combined both hope and despair. The rolling out of the welfare state in the previous decade – culminating in the establishment of the NHS in 1948 – signalled a political determination to develop state apparatuses that aimed to benefit the majority of the population. Nevertheless, unyielding economic sobriety, coupled with a nuclear arms race that looked certain to heat up, ultimately dampened any sense of collective exuberance.

Indeed, Britain's global position underwent significant transformation during the 1950s. Judt (2010) points out that military expenditure had risen to £209 million per annum by 1947, with Britain still maintaining an expensive, but imposing military presence even before the start of the Korean War in 1950:

> In July 1950, on the eve of the Korean War – i.e. *before* the increase in defense spending that followed the outbreak of war – Britain had a full naval fleet in the Atlantic, another in the Mediterranean and a third in the Indian Ocean, as well as a permanent 'China station'. The country maintained 120 Royal Air Force squadrons worldwide and had armies or parts of armies permanently based in: Hong Kong, Malaya, the Persian Gulf and North Africa, Trieste and Austria, West Germany and the United Kingdom itself. (162)

The maintenance of empire was offset in the late forties particularly by domestic frugality, a state of affairs that Judt (2010) characterises as 'conditions of restraint and voluntary penury' (162), yet as the fifties progressed this situation appeared gradually more untenable, especially if viewed in relation to the ever-expanding domination of the world stage by the Soviet Union and the United States. The breakup of the British Empire was played out through numerous events during the forties and fifties, and it is difficult to ignore a general argument that there developed an increasing acceptance, both politically and culturally, that a small island state could no longer project such military, economic and political power from within the new world order of the Cold War. While the Suez Crisis of 1956 represented an important symbolic incident in Britain's global decline, by mid-decade the anachronistic mantras of Empire also seemed distinctly insufficient in accounting for Britain's uncertain position within the newly-formed thermonuclear arena.

As examined in the previous chapter and introduction to this thesis, studies of literary culture during the forties and fifties have invariably acknowledged the perceived 'crisis' of representation for writers working in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. A number of critics have suggested that British literature ultimately found a voice in the fifties through the development of, as Dominic Head (2002) states, 'gritty working-class realism' (3), with the angst-ridden cries of writers labelled 'Angry Young Men' representing the dominant literary voice of a claustrophobic decade. This has often allowed the period to be aligned with broader

cultural perceptions which creates a historiographic formula whereby the fifties is conceived as being the direct opposite to the social revolutions of the 1960s. As Nick Bentley (2007) describes, this therefore creates an uncomplicated method for examining the fifties:

> The fifties are consequently recycled in our popular imagination with conservative myths of order, social stability, moral decency and restraint – the period before the experimentation, liberation and decadence of the 1960s. The 1950s are thereby understood as a period in which white, middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual men still held sway, before the 'barbarians', of various subject positions, began to challenge the citadels of power. (11-12)

While the neatness of such generalised historical models masks the underlying complexity of a decade that witnessed significant social and political transformations, broad surveys of post-war British fiction have also handled the fifties as a period that essentially marked a re-energising of realist style – what Robert Hewison (1988) describes as 'the recovery of old forms, rather than the evolution of new ones' (xi) – prior to the literary experiments of the 1960s and the later domination of what may be labelled 'literary fiction' by the close of the century. Yet, as I have already suggested, this equally tidy historiography of British literary culture fails to acknowledge the role of genre fiction, particularly SF, in responding to and speculating on the broad-ranging social upheavals of the 1950s. British SF is consequently overlooked or marginalised in the broad overviews of literature in the fifties, with scholars, at best, reluctantly acknowledging it as an interesting popular form without pursuing any extended critical assessment of its wider social and literary significance.

In charting the progress of British SF in the post-war years, Roger Luckhurst (2005) highlights the degree to which Science Fiction was often associated with crude American marketisation, an assumption that still persists in some examinations of post-war genre fiction today: 'For British intellectuals across the spectrum it was not just that SF embodied mass culture and crude investment in technological modernity, it was also that the genre was American' (123). Richard Hoggart ([1957] 2009) memorably detailed in *The Uses of Literacy* the supposedly sordid content of glossy SF magazines, remarking that 'this is "sex stuff" with zip-fasteners instead of old-fashioned blouses and skirts; vicarious fornication (with no details) on a

spaceship moving between Mars and Venus' (224). Yet, by linking SF solely with American commodity culture one underplays both the popularity and significance of a notably British style that flourished during the fifties. Following, in part, the styles of scientific romances developed by the likes of Heard, Stapledon and Huxley in the late forties, the popularity of what Brian Aldiss (1988) has dubbed 'cosy catastrophe' (315) fiction produced a definably British engagement with the early crises of the Cold War. It is thus valuable to examine a collection of 'cosy catastrophe' novels from across the 1950s in order to highlight how each fused together domestic social commentary with a wider evaluation of the Cold War and burgeoning military technology. Wyndham's two early-decade disaster narratives, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), in particular, ostensibly display recognisable Cold War anxieties and trepidations, but equally make continual implicit reference to the political constitution of post-war Britain, evaluating social democracy and technocratic organisation against pre-war models of middle-class individualism. John Christopher's 1956 novel *The Death of Grass* adapts the Wyndham blueprint for disaster fiction by offering a darker vision of post-apocalyptic England which aligns with later decade fears of thermonuclear warfare and the collapse of traditional forms of national identity in the face of imperial decline. While such catastrophe novels undeniably illuminate the despairing aspects of British culture in the 1950s, Arthur C. Clarke's early novel *Prelude to Space* (1951), by contrast, portrays an alternative, optimistic vision of technological and cultural progress realised through contemporary cross-national forms of scientific organisation. Yet Clarke's internationalist visualisation of co-operation in a global community also places Britain as the epicentre of such activity, with the representations of a regenerated South Bank of the Thames drawing parallels with the Festival of Britain of 1951 that sought to promote Britain's role as a positive force in the push for peaceful scientific innovation. Tackling these four works illustrates that rather than being a marginal trend in British literary culture during the 1950s, SF provided what was, in actuality, an increasingly appropriate platform for the examination of a transforming national situation.

Arthur C. Clarke and the Festival of Britain (1951)

The 1951 Festival of Britain represented a significant cultural moment in post-war British society. It offered a distinctive architectural and cultural visualisation of the future that had otherwise been obscured from the majority of the population still having to navigate unrepaired bomb sites and grapple with the hardship of rationing. The Festival itself consisted of a number of events around the country that aimed to promote Britain's cultural and scientific vibrancy, but the focal point was found on London's South Bank where, among a plethora of exhibits, stood the iconic images of the (very SF-like) Skylon, the Royal Festival Hall and the Dome of Discovery.[15] Indeed, Michael Frayn (1976) comments that the Festival offered an architectural vision that had barely been seen before, with the South Bank exhibition allowing visitors to extract themselves from 'the squalid compromises of the everyday urban scene into a world where everything was made to please' (334). Whilst the Festival engaged with a seemingly internationalist and idealised model of futurity – derived, architecturally, from the post-war codification of modernist design within the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) and the so-called International Style – it nonetheless maintained an intrinsically British feel, partly as a result of a constricted budget, but also as a consequence of its strong connection with a Labour government acutely aware of a looming general election. As Paul Hendon (1999) explains:

> From its original conception as an international trade exhibition the Festival mutated into something much more homely and parochial. The shrinking budget and lack of raw materials compressed its international aims into a national project, a celebration of 'British contributions to world civilisation in the arts of peace'. Or, as Peter Mandelson's grandfather, the Lord President of the Festival, Herbert Morrison, put it: 'the people giving themselves a pat on the back'. The festival was to be a 'tonic to the nation.' (15)

In particular, Frayn (1976) argues that the Festival represented the final act of the 'Herbivores' (320), the members of the 'radical middle-class – the do-gooders; the readers of the *News Chronicle*, the *Guardian*, and the *Observer*' (320) for whom the immediate post-war years had offered prominent positions in shaping a path towards social democracy. The election of a Churchill-led Conservative government in

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[15]See David Kynaston (2010): 6.

October 1951 signalled the end of the 'Herbivore' project and the re-establishment of, in Frayn's terms, the 'Carnivores – the readers of the *Daily Express*; the Evelyn Waughs; the cast of the Directory of Directors' (320). What marked the Festival of Britain as distinct was its visualisation of precisely these tensions in British society. Ostensibly, the Festival promoted the hope for a re-energised Britain, demonstrating how burgeoning ideas in design, technology and science could not only galvanise the nation, but also encourage an international and forward-looking vision of peace and cordiality. Yet, the Festival also looked inwards, falling back on conventional notions of Britishness as a means of tempering the internationalism that permeated the design and architecture on display, while also representing, in Brian Aldiss's (1976) terms, Britain's 'first walk out of hospital alone' (177) following the trauma of war.

A revealing example of this tension can be found in the short film *Brief City: The Story of London's Festival Buildings* (1952), which looks back at the Festival through a montage of event footage with commentary supplied by *Observer* journalist Patrick O'Donovan and the Festival's Director of Architecture, Hugh Casson. O'Donovan and Casson's narration at first highlights the Festival's desire to present a sense of optimism and to demonstrate how such design offers the possibility of a better standard of living to the nation. Indeed, O'Donovan and Casson state that the exhibition was built 'as a place to walk about in, a place, if you were, for pleasure'[16]. The suspended structure of the Skylon is described as fulfilling no role other than 'to astonish' its audience, whilst O'Donovan and Casson detail how a colourful screen was erected 'to cut off the darker side of London'. Visually at least, the Festival sought to offer an alternative image of urban existence, one that, in Becky E. Conekin's (2003) words, 'stressed progress and modernity, with science and planning evoked as the answers to the question of *how* to build a better Britain' (46). Even so, *Brief City* reveals a hesitancy about diverging away from the conventions of British town planning, with O'Donovan and Casson emphasising

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[16] *Brief City: The Story of London's Festival Buildings*, 1952. [film]. Directed by Maurice Harvey and Jacques Brunius. UK: Massingham Productions in association with *The Observer*. Accessed online 1 May 2011: http://www.archive.org/details/brief_city_TNA

Figure 1. Skylon and the Dome of Discovery at night, Festival of Britain (1951), South Bank, London.
©John Maltby/ RIBA Library photographs collection.

how the Festival contained 'no great vistas', but instead offered a number of small courtyards and squares that replicated the 'traditional way of building in this country'. The Festival's outlook was thus ultimately conciliatory, mixing optimistic conceptions of the future with fond remembrance of its place within a British tradition. As Conekin (2003) remarks:

> ...the festival's imaginings of the future and the past were not 'at odds'; rather they were mutually reinforcing. Particular representations of the past bolstered particular representations of the future and vice versa. Modernism has often combined with the most traditional imaginings of Englishness or Britishness. (80)

The past was accordingly gestured towards, whilst the future was constructed as a comfortable, acceptable modernity that, in its essential continuity with the past, did not offend the sensibilities of tradition.

While trying to reconcile tensions between conventional and futuristic design, the Festival's positivity also aimed to reduce anxieties surrounding the Cold War and atomic technology. As Conekin (2003) again suggests, the Festival 'sought to enlist science as the foundation of a new modernist aesthetic' (57), with the Dome of Discovery containing 'a model atomic pile' (57) along with 'atomic structures and snowflakes in the gallery and dress circle' (57). At the same time, O'Donovan and Casson's narration in *Brief City* gestured towards a newly imagined geo-political role for Britain, one that stood outside and sought to quell the posturing of superpowers in favour of a peaceful and reasoned international advancement away from the spectre of atomic conflict:

> There were no resounding proud messages here. No-one was taught to hate anything. At a time when nations were becoming more assertive and more intolerant, here was a national exhibition that avoided these emotions and tried to stay rational. In a bad year in the world's history it had a spiritual quality that is worth remembering. (*Brief City*: 1952)

O'Donovan and Casson's hopefulness resided not in a mere desire to plough forward, but rather in Britain's ability to placate and combine the forces of tradition and modernity, while internationally, as Conekin (2003) points out, Britain was seen as 'an independent "third force" between the extremes of the United States and Russia in the new Cold War world' (32). In this regard, the Festival presented an image of Britain as a strong, independent voice speaking for rationality amidst the

military posturing of the two global superpowers of the Cold War, whilst equally creating an alternative domestic voice that Casson (1976) would later praise for making 'people want things to be better, and to believe that they could be' (81).

Similar speculations regarding Britain's projected role in post-war technological and cultural developments are markedly present in the early works of Arthur C. Clarke. As chairman of the British Interplanetary Society for two periods in the late forties and early fifties, Clarke was unswervingly hopeful as to the possibilities of space travel as a result of advances in astronautics and the harnessing of atomic energy. Indeed, like the optimism of O'Donovan and Casson, who emphasised how modern architecture and design could encourage rationality and peaceful inquiry, Clarke actively promoted the idea that new technologies in astronautics could lead to an internationalist effort to reach space that would defuse political paranoia and the threat of nuclear war. In his 1951 non-fiction work, *The Exploration of Space*, Clarke ([1951] 1952) outlined not only the technical details that may necessitate space travel, but also analysed the moral and political ramifications of such a process and its possibilities as an antidote to Cold War hostilities:

> The crossing of space – even the sense of its imminent achievement in the years before it comes – may do much to turn men's minds outwards and away from their present tribal squabbles. In this sense the rocket, far from being one of the destroyers of civilisation, may provide the safety-valve that is needed to preserve it. Space-flight does not even have to be achieved for this to happen. As soon as there is a general belief in its possibility, that belief will begin to colour Man's psychological outlook. (194-5)

Yet beneath Clarke's near-utopian desires for space travel he also articulates a distinct concern regarding the immediate tensions of the Cold War, commenting that the near-future also harbours an alternative, destructive path: 'I am not unmindful of the fact that fifty years from now, instead of preparing for the conquest of the planets, our grandchildren may be dispossessed savages clinging to the fertile oases in a radioactive wilderness' (194). Furthermore, two of Clarke's early short stories, 'Nightfall' (1947) and 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' (1951) manifest a clear anxiety concerning possible military uses for atomic technology as well as musing upon the destruction of British tradition and heritage.

The two stories span just a few pages, with both describing the aftermath of an atomic conflict. 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' ([1951] 2001) describes earth from the viewpoint of a father and son situated on a lunar base that was established prior to an apocalyptic war. The ten-year-old child, Marvin, looks out at the world and wonders why he cannot return to a planet that ostensibly looks 'so peaceful beneath those lines of marching clouds' (406), yet as his eyesight adjusts he recognises the destruction that makes a journey home unlikely:

> Then Marvin, his eyes no longer blinded by the glare, saw that the portion of the disc that should have been in darkness was gleaming faintly with an evil phosphorescence: and he remembered. He was looking upon the funeral pyre of a world – upon the radioactive aftermath of Armageddon. (406)

While 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' depicts the successful establishment of a colony in space, it is clearly depicted as proving unsuccessful in freeing humanity from nuclear conflict. Thus, Clarke uses SF form here to supply a warning regarding the wider political and philosophical aspirations of space travel, which parallels a similar warning set out in the non-fictional *The Exploration of Space* ([1951] 1952), where Clarke laments the secretive military nature of research into rocketry:

> This state of affairs has presented a difficult problem to those wishing to take an active part in the development of astronautics, for almost all research on rockets is now carried out by military establishments and is covered by various security classifications [...] Separating the military and the peaceful uses of rockets is therefore an even more difficult task than creating atomic energy without atomic bombs. (188)

'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' therefore summons up Clarke's elegiac vision of a space programme that is founded upon national and military objectives. The political and military mistrust of the Cold War is consequently recognised as a major obstacle in the creation of an internationalist effort to harness astronautical design and atomic energy for peaceful, interplanetary exploration.

Intriguingly, 'Nightfall' ([1947] 2001) offers, however, a far more parochial picture of nuclear destruction. Set in Stratford-Upon-Avon after an atomic conflict, the story describes the historic town's instantaneous demise:

> For three hundred years, while its fame spread across the world, the little town had stood here at the river's bend. [...]
> Now it was gone, as though it had never been. In a moment of time the toil and treasure of centuries had been swept away. (89)

Whereas 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' uses nuclear warfare as a means of warning against insular, jingoistic politics, 'Nightfall' eulogises national cultural heritage in the face of its loss. Similar to the deference paid towards tradition in *Brief City*, 'Nightfall' indicates that Clarke's hope for co-operation and internationalism is constructed alongside a respect for particular aspects of national history and identity. Indeed, 'Nightfall', along with the warnings of global catastrophe in 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' and the hopes and fears for space travel in *The Exploration of Space*, hint towards a vision of the future that is founded upon a rational drive towards enlightenment which – at the same time – recognises its symbiotic links with what has come before. At the close of 'Nightfall' ([1947] 2001) the narrator describes what remains of Shakespeare's grave, noting how the epitaph contains a warning to those who disturb the dead poet: 'Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones, / And cvrst be he yt moves my bones' (sic: 91). Shakespeare's cautionary words thus echo into the post-apocalyptic future, supplying a prescient warning drawn from a national tradition that has been overlooked in favour of an irrational descent towards nuclear war. Just as the Festival of Britain sought, on occasions, to fall back on what Conekin (2003) labels 'timeless notions of British traditions and character' (103), 'Nightfall' calls upon Britain's literary past to offer a deterrent against the absurdity of nuclear conflict. Clarke's engagement here with the future, or a sense of 'newness', seems to parallel a notably English relationship with modernity. Indeed, just as the Festival of Britain conjured an architectural image that, in David Kynaston's (2010) words, represented a form of '"soft" Modernism' (9), which could sit neatly with a celebration of tradition (the 1951 event also marked the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851), Clarke's early short stories imply that desirable progress requires an interconnectedness with tradition, an idea that is most clearly defined by T.S. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' ([1919] 1986):

> This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (85)

In this way, both 'Nightfall' and the interpretation of modernity demonstrated by the Festival of Britain reject a formal break with tradition and are distinctly at odds with an earlier European model that is characterised in its most exaggerated form by, for example, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's declaration in 'The Founding and Manifesto

of Futurism' ([1909] 2004) that 'admiring an old picture is the same as pouring our sensibility into a funerary urn instead of hurling it far off, in violent spasms of action and creation' (252). Instead, the mid-century values of Clarke and the Festival organisers appear to chime with a liberal humanist desire to both openly embrace the past and project possibilities for the future.

Yet Clarke offers a more comprehensive and optimistic vision of the near-future in his early novel *Prelude to Space* ([1951] 1954), which nonetheless contains further comparisons with the social aspirations of the Festival of Britain. Published in the same year as the Festival, the novel is set largely in London during 1978 and details the internal workings of a British organisation entitled Interplanetary as they prepare for the first manned mission to the moon. Unlike the devastation of 'Nightfall' and 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth', *Prelude to Space* describes a world prospering as a result of extensive technological development. The novel's protagonist Dirk Alexson – an American historian sent to record the preparations at Interplanetary – arrives in London on a luxurious commercial airliner that itself resembles a vehicle of space travel: 'He walked over to the narrow, curving windows set in the leading-edge of the great wing and stared down at the featureless ocean below' (5). *Prelude to Space's* depiction of the future is immediately constructed through positive technological imagery and as Alexson is guided through London such images are reaffirmed by the prosperous and vibrant cityscape that confronts him.

On arrival, Alexson is promptly taken to Waterloo where he looks out upon the redesigned North and South Banks of the river that are positioned alongside the traditional sites of the city:

> They emerged at New Waterloo station, and walked the few hundred yards to the Thames. [...] The spacious sweep of the fine new Embankment, still only twenty years old, carried Dirk's gaze down the river until it was caught and held by the dome of St. Paul's, glistening wetly in an unexpected shaft of sunlight. (8-9)

Such descriptions of regenerated sites along the Thames are comparable to Frayn's (1976) enthusiastic accounts of the area during the Festival of Britain:

> Round every corner there was a new delight – a catwalk to look down from, or the superb water mobile by Richard Huws, which imitated the regular sequence of small and great waves on the shore. There was the river to look

at. And, on the other side of the river, the magnificent sombre building line
of the north bank, revealed for the first time as a back curtain to the colourful
and extravagant outlines of the Festival architecture. (334-5)

While direct links between Clarke's vision of London in *Prelude to Space* and the eventual design of the Festival of Britain site cannot be explicitly drawn,[17] both the London that confronts Alexson as well as the landmarks of the Festival emphasise a corresponding objective to blend progressive architectural modernity with existing sites of past endeavour. Furthermore, Alexson is fascinated by London's integration of the new with the traditional and archaic, explaining how 'Londoners are excessively proud' (28) of a collection of 'new turbine buses' (28) that weave through the city, yet he is then startled to notice 'a gilded, horse-drawn van' (28) still being used to deliver items along Bond Street. As with the Festival's aim of creating a visualisation of the future that, in Kynaston's (2010) words, 'came with a warm, unthreatening, scientific yet somehow companionable aura' (9), *Prelude to Space* imagines London as a site of modernity fused with tradition. It is a near-future cityscape that is technologically innovative, democratic and sensitive to its relationship with convention.

The conceptualisation of a broadly progressive and consensual model for British society in *Prelude to Space* is solidified by hinting towards the existence of a benevolent governmental system that eagerly supports scientific and cultural projects. Alexson subsequently comments in his journal about the mysterious nature of Interplanetary's organisational history, noting how it appears on the surface to be independent, yet is staunchly defended by the government:

It seems a typically British compromise, and there's very little on paper
about its formation and origins. [...] It exists in a state of chronic bankruptcy,
yet it's responsible for spending something like ten million a year (£, not $).
The Government has very little say in its administration, and in some ways it
seems as autocratic as the B.B.C. But when it's attacked in Parliament
(which happens every other month) some Minister always gets up to defend
it. (15)

Thus, when Alexson asks about the building costs for the project, he receives an uncertain monetary response but an enthusiastic philosophical one:

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[17]Edward James (1987) comments that Clarke actually wrote *Prelude to Space* in 1947 at a time when plans for the Festival of Britain were still under constant review and alteration.

...Professor Maxton once calculated that the ship's cost about ten million pounds in research and five million in direct construction. [...] But who cares about the money, anyway?
[...]
   We're gaining the freedom of the whole Universe, and all that that implies. I don't think it can be valued in terms of pounds and dollars. (66)

A semi-autonomous but state-sponsored body, typical of post-war welfare state institutions (as well as the BBC), Interplanetary is seen as acting on behalf of positive national interests that ultimately have a determinable benefit to civilisation, and accordingly represent the next logical steps in intellectual and scientific discovery. As detailed in *The Exploration of Space*, Clarke was frustrated by the military nature of atomic and astronautical research during the Cold War and what appears in *Prelude to Space* is an alternative utopian blueprint for scientific research, with government accepting its societal benefit as well as its international appeal. Clarke therefore speculates on the possibilities for social democratic organisation in the second half of the twentieth century, with *Prelude to Space* depicting a form of 'soft' or benevolent authoritarianism administered through paternalistic technocracy. The prominent roles for specialists, academics and technical workers in Clarke's novel thus correlates with Mike Savage's (2008) definition of new technocratic identities emerging, more generally, after the Second World War years:

> The emergence of a distinct modern and 'technical' vision began to become evident in the post-war years, marked in such occasions as the Festival of Britain. But in addition, it became possible to claim a managerial identity as one that was legitimate, indeed necessary in the period of post-war reconstruction, and which did not require any claim on 'status'. (470)

With notions of rigid social standing somewhat fractured after the war, Savage continues by noting that it was the middle class who adopted roles 'as managers of the nation' (470), using technical expertise rather than inherited status to implement social policy. This recalibrated image of the middle class appears key to Clarke's aims in *Prelude to Space*, with technocratic order ultimately ensuring effective scientific change. In this way, Clarke's novel also counteracts Orwell's despairing vision of a society directed by technocrats in 'You and the Atom Bomb' (1945) and, most famously, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Here, technocracy operates as a productive tool in scientific advancement and assists in eradicating nationalism in favour of technical co-operation.

Selected for their intellectual and technical capabilities, the staff of Interplanetary are therefore resolute in their belief that their work is to the benefit of mankind and accordingly disregard parochial concerns in searching for scientific discovery. Indeed, Alexson notes the harmonious and international nature of the workforce: 'Another query: apart from their accents, it's very difficult to see any real distinction between the different nationalities here. Is this due to the – to put it mildly – supranational nature of their work?' (16) This sense of a global contribution is echoed by the organisation's head Sir Robert Derwent who declares that 'any worlds we may reach will be the common heritage of all men' (95), while adding that 'we will take no frontiers into space' (95). Clarke's vision of the near-future is consequently one that has seen the tensions of the Cold War ebb away through *collectivised* scientific innovation. Yet, *Prelude to Space* only offers a very vague description of how such a peaceful world climate came into being, mentioning that the moon had initially been viewed as a potential military site but stating that 'such arguments were common in the decade following the release of atomic energy, and were a typical by-product of that era's political paranoia' (92). It is then pointed out that the treacherous post-war years were overcome 'as the world slowly returned to sanity and order' (92). Edward James (1987) argues that this belief in the power of rationality 'is not so much utopian as positively naive' (48), yet James also recognises how Clarke's unflinching optimism is located in his faith that space exploration can bring about wide-ranging sociological change:

> He wrote for a generation intrigued by the possibilities that science had to offer – by way of washing machines and television sets – yet a generation appalled by the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Space travel was the alternative route; mass destruction was to be avoided by the conquest of a territory without frontiers. (48)

Whilst 'Nightfall' and 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth' warned of the terrors that threatened the world should the early Cold War posturing continue, *Prelude to Space* encapsulates Clarke's belief that developing technologies produce the ability to shape an alternative and peaceable world order. The novel's utopian aspirations may have harboured naive assumptions about humanity's willingness to break away from political and military interests, but it at least offered a different path for scientific investigation outside of the entrenched militarism that characterised the Cold War.

Furthermore, Clarke's hope existed alongside both popular and artistic utopian thinking that saw space travel as the possible answer to earthly folly. The space race – that culminated in the 1969 moon landings – was, in part, fuelled by Cold War suspicion, yet equally it operated as a vital gesture to the prospect of transcending life on earth and branching into the solar system to start afresh. As John F. Kennedy's 1962 speech at Rice University famously asserted:

> For the eyes of the world now look into space, to the moon and to the planets beyond, and we have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace. We have vowed that we shall not see space filled with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding.[18]

In both *The Exploration of Space* and *Prelude to Space* Clarke uses space exploration as a potent alternative symbol to Cold War nationalism, but he also envisages research into interplanetary travel as the arena in which the scientist and their contemporaneous technological innovations can be solidly removed from an association with destructive weaponry and military secrecy.

The internationalist aspiration of novels such as *Prelude to Space* exemplifies the uniqueness of Clarke's fiction, yet there remains a distinctly English tone running through such narratives, as James (2008) outlines:

> Clarke has an international vision and voice, which is very rare among top science-fiction writers. But he also has a very English voice. His optimism about the future may be seen as an American trait; but his doubts, and his frequent reminders that all civilizations are ultimately doomed, seem very English. (432)

Furthermore, his work from the decade's opening presents a similarly buoyant message to the one aspired to by the Festival of Britain. Just as Casson and O'Donovan called for the world to 'stay rational' and embrace a progressive model of futurity centred around contemporary architecture and design, Clarke envisaged a future ruled by civilian scientific research and motivated solely by a quest for advancement through knowledge. But Clarke's progressive model of British technocratic democracy, unremittingly negotiating tradition with modernity, does not sufficiently account for the developing tensions in post-war British society. As will

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[18]John F. Kennedy, 1962. Transcript of address to Rice University, 12 September. Accessed online 23 April 2011: http://www.explore.rice.edu/explore/Kennedy_Address.asp

be seen in the fictions of John Wyndham and John Christopher, and historically through the domination of the Conservative party in government from October 1951 to beyond the end of the fifties, Britain remained detectably ambivalent with regard to the post-war settlement. It was the 'carnivores' who essentially dominated the decade. Longer term, by the end of the seventies – when *Prelude to Space* is speculatively set – belief in benign state authority increasingly fragmented to be replaced by the social and economic policies of neo-liberalism which would reach their peak following the end of the Cold War. What Clarke's early Cold War speculations did do, however, was create a largely optimistic plan for Britain that characterised developing technologies, and the social organisations they promoted, as essentially positive, and which countered a far easier Cold War vision of nuclear destruction brought about by dysfunctional social and political systems.

Class, Culture and the Cosy Catastrophe: John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and *The Kraken Wakes* (1953)

The optimism of *Prelude to Space* necessitated a degree of alignment with the technocratic aspirations of the post-war Labour government, presenting images of a nation heavily influenced by experts in science, engineering and design, while hinting at a broader cultural atmosphere that welcomed investment in expansive technological projects. Conversely, the fiction of John Wyndham (born John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris) apparently displays an antithetical set of political perspectives, which are invariably seen to connect his work to an articulation of middle-class anxieties surrounding Britain's diminishing global role or the pace of scientific advancement. Brian Aldiss's (1988) criticism of Wyndham as the 'master of the cosy catastrophe' (315) has solidified this sense that Wyndham's work merely communicates the generalised socio-political fears of the Cold War, while at the same time offering his middlebrow readership an exciting thriller narrative. Nicholas Ruddick (1993) reproduces such a model for interpreting Wyndham's fiction by suggesting that his novels were carefully designed with a specific market in mind:

> It seems that Wyndham, who started his career in the American pulps, shrewdly judged that his postwar British audience had a vast appetite for science fiction as long as it appeared to be detached from the supposedly

corrupting associations of American popular culture. One of Wyndham's strategies of detachment was to give his sensational pulp scenarios a British setting. (138)

Similarly to Aldiss (1988), who argues that Wyndham's disaster fiction is 'totally devoid of ideas' (315) and created specifically to appeal to 'a maximum audience, who enjoyed cosy disasters' (315), Ruddick implies, then, that Wyndham's narratives are constructed for an identifiable literary market, rather than developing through meaningful artistic aspirations, which accordingly echoes a perpetual criticism of genre fiction as a vulgar mass-market product. For such critics, the conservativism of Wyndham's fiction is located in its tendency to consolidate the multifarious worries of post-war British society into straightforward allegories – what Aldiss (1988) calls 'anxiety fantasies' (316) – as a means of exploiting the tastes of a broad middle-class audience. Furthermore, Ruddick (1993) focuses on Wyndham's ambivalent relationship with SF, commenting on his insistence 'that his postwar fiction not be marketed as science fiction' (138). Ruddick therefore implies that Wyndham's work was designed to not only capitalise on conservative sentiment that exhibited apprehension towards all things American – with certain 'types' of SF embodying such distaste – but that equally Wyndham was looking to create archetypal British narratives that would fit neatly within the lucrative middlebrow thriller market.

Matthew Moore (2007) summarises Ruddick's analysis of Wyndham's literary strategy, arguing that

> This is a vision of the Wyndhamesque as an advertising trick, created solely to satisfy the demands of the market, with the strict boundaries of the pseudonym's oeuvre being patrolled and maintained in the same way that any corporation protects its copyrights and trademarks. 'John Wyndham' here becomes the 'Wyndham brand', which must be protected from 'corrupting associations' in order to maintain its market share. (8)

The implications of Ruddick's arguments are that Wyndham's literary 'products' can thus be reduced to 'nothing more than a marketing scam' (Moore: 9).[19] Yet, despite Wyndham's fiction demonstrating a notable awareness of perceived audience

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[19]Moore (2007) systematically untangles Ruddick's arguments before elaborating on what he considers to be Wyndham's far more complex relationship with his audience: 'Wyndham is attempting to reach a far broader audience than those who huff "not enough science" and is seeking to overcome the opposite cry of "huh, science fiction"'(18).

sensibility – particularly through its exploration of broad-ranging anxieties suffered by stoical middle-class protagonists – it seems unfair to dismiss his novels as merely astutely marketed pulp fiction or simple, romping thrillers that continuously erode the philosophical precepts lurking within the subject matter.[20] Indeed, Wyndham's fiction – especially his disaster narratives – displays a wider engagement with the social questions facing post-war Britain than either Aldiss or Ruddick allow. The conservatism of Wyndham's disasters may therefore illustrate a deeper political current, demonstrating a distinct mistrust of the social democratic post-war settlement, which is played out through the wilful dismantling of state apparatuses and the 'freeing-up' of the protagonists from the bindings of technocratic organisation. Indeed, Luckhurst (2005) – in reference to *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) – emphasises how the novel's impact is not simply reliant on attempts 'to work out the Cold War allegory beneath the walking and talking plants' (132), but rather through the perceived 'inability to imagine a resolution for the crisis of British liberal humanism' (132). Wyndham's disasters therefore react to the contradictions that characterised post-war British society and whilst the political conclusions of such texts display inherent conservatism in illustrating middle-class dependability in the face of crisis, his fiction nonetheless tackles the uncomfortable questions of early Cold War Britain by exposing the tensions between lingering pre-war models of national identity and re-negotiated post-war structures. In doing so, Wyndham's fiction generates a series of political questions that cannot be reconciled entirely through 'cosy', appeasing answers or explained away through suggesting that his texts merely sought to satisfy a specified market demographic.

Two of Wyndham's most notorious catastrophe novels – *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) – therefore not only formulate apocalyptic scenarios as a means of communicating Cold War dread, but also as a way of negotiating post-war domestic politics and culture, particularly surrounding the growth of the state. *Triffids*' depiction of carnivorous plants and the representation of hostile amphibious invaders in *The Kraken Wakes* tempts one into assuming that such narratives represent straightforward metaphorical investigations of Cold War

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[20] Ruddick (1993) claims that Wyndham's disaster narratives 'embody anxiety in the form of a vague external threat' (140), with the novels ultimately offering '*consolation* for this anxiety and even the hope of *recovery* from it' (140).

paranoia – be it the fear of Soviet invasion, widespread nuclear catastrophe or uncontrolled scientific experimentation. Indeed, Barry Langford (1999) marks the appeal of such a reading of *Triffids* by listing the narrative events that lend themselves to a seemingly narrow set of interpretations:

> It is easy enough to point out the elements that date the book, whether the Cold War trappings – the triffids are the infernal by-product of secret Soviet biological experimentation; the blindness and subsequent plague are launched in error from an orbital satellite armoury - or Wyndham's pneumatic socialite heroine, the wincingly-named Josella Playton (viii).

It is true that, to some extent, Wyndham's fiction can be read as providing a checklist of axiomatic Cold War motifs, which offers, in Ruddick's (1993) terms, 'the cold war reader the pleasure of a vicarious "I told you so"' (140). Yet this interpretation also masks the subtlety of the narratives, what David Ketterer (2008) labels 'the contrast between content and style' (376) in the novels. The appeal of Wyndham's fiction – and British disaster narratives more generally – is consequently found through its overtly comfortable style whereby an ensemble of mainly bourgeois characters confront a monumental disaster that curiously fails to shake their impeccable social mores. Yet through this comfortable veneer Wyndham is continually able to indulge in nuanced satire as well as gentle but persistent political gestures which confront both domestic questions of class and government along with broader concerns of technological folly. As Ketterer (2008) points out in reference to Wyndham's handling of evolutionary ideas, he offers 'iron cruel lessons' (376) through an outwardly 'velvet novel of manners style' (376).

As already alluded to, the most vehement criticism of Wyndham has focused on an apparent social conservatism that runs throughout his fiction, a sentiment furthered by Ketterer's (2004) statement that Wyndham himself 'remained an Edwardian brought up by Victorians' (6). With this in mind, critics have held up Wyndham's work as a cultural artefact that aligns with a general sense of national decline in the years immediately following the war. As Ruddick (1993) remarks:

> The typical Wyndham protagonist articulates the bewilderment of the average Englishman at a time when the Island's centrality was being challenged, its dominance superseded, by forces so powerful that nothing whatever could be done to counter them. The islanders were being asked to make the helpless recognition in the cold war period that, with political and

technological hegemony lost, they had been reduced to a supporting role on the world stage. (140)

But it is interesting to note Wyndham's conception of the 'average Englishman' in his disaster fiction. The protagonists of *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* possess typically middle-class professions (Bill Masen in *Triffids* is a biologist whilst Mike and Phyllis Watson in *The Kraken Wakes* are journalists for a public broadcasting company) and inhabit a conventional bourgeois world – particularly in *The Kraken Wakes* – of dinner parties and trips to second homes. Their narrative agency may correspondingly be equated to pre-war definitions of Englishness, which find an overt articulation in E.M. Forster's 'Notes on the English Character' ([1936] 1990), with its declaration that 'the character of the English is essentially middle-class' (176). Just as Forster argued that the middle-class represent 'the dominant force in our community' where naturally 'the eye of the critic rests' (176), Wyndham's disaster narratives are concentrated on the fate of a small set of middle-class survivors who struggle to reassert themselves as the prevailing social group. In this way, while Wyndham's early disasters may superficially correlate with general concerns relating to Britain's declining military, industrial and political power, they also signify an unease at the socio-political realignment towards social democracy during the post-war period that accompanied the development of the Cold War state. In this sense, Wyndham's attempts to re-establish an idea of the 'average Englishman' also marks an uncertainty demonstrated across the political spectrum as to how an identifiable concept of 'Englishness' may be maintained in the post-war world. George Orwell's wartime essay 'The Lion and the Unicorn' ([1941] 1990), for example, articulates a vision of English society that resonates with certain sentiments of Wyndham's fiction, despite its left-wing sympathies:

> The liberty of the individual is still believed in, almost as in the nineteenth century. But this has nothing to do with economic liberty, the right to exploit others for profit. It is the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from above. (181)

What is curious about Orwell's descriptions is the peculiarly quaint and, to an extent, middle-class definitions of supposedly typical national traits – Orwell famously suggested that the English 'are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players,

crossword-puzzle fans' (181). Wyndham's disaster narratives seem intent on preserving similar national traits. However, his post-war representation of bourgeois individuals battling, first, the spread of social democracy, before later encountering a bleak post-apocalyptic terrain, demonstrates the increasing problem of maintaining this definable 'English character' in the early Cold War years.

An ambivalence with regard to social and political reform in the immediate post-war period is strongly encoded in *Triffids* ([1951] 1999) through the novel's narrator and protagonist, Bill Masen. During the opening chapters of the novel, Masen looks back at the events leading up to the Triffid domination of mankind and muses upon the social order that rapidly eroded following the near-universal blinding of the world's population:

> It is not easy to think oneself back to the outlook of those days. We have to be more self-reliant now. But then there was so much routine, things were so interlinked. Each one of us so steadily did his little part in the right place that it was easy to mistake habit and custom for the natural law – all the more disturbing, therefore, when the routine was in any way upset. (9)

Masen follows this assertion by elaborating on the 'habit and custom' (9) that prevailed prior to the post-apocalyptic engagement with broader natural and man-made processes:

> I knew practically nothing, for instance, of such ordinary things as how my food reached me, where the fresh water came from, how the clothes I wore were woven and made, how the drainage of cities kept them healthy. Our life had become a complexity of specialists all attending their own jobs with more or less efficiency, and expecting others to do the same. (9)

To some extent, Masen's characterisation of the old order's distance from the natural world reinforces one of Aldiss's (1988) criticisms of Wyndham as a pioneer of generalised concerns, in this case, aligning himself loosely with the mantras of what Aldiss defines as 'the back-to-nature movement' (315). Yet, Masen's comments also contain nuanced observations of the post-war political settlement. Masen criticises the previous order for its 'complexity of specialists' (9) trapped within a world of rigorous routine. Unlike Clarke's positive vision of technocratic organisation providing scientific, social and political progress, Masen's narration critiques a very similar structure for confining the individual to constricting specialism and overbearing bureaucracy. Indeed, Ross McKibbin (1998) explains the profound

socio-political disjuncture between pre and post-war Britain by noting that 'an individualist but 'progressive' middle-class democracy was abandoned in the 1940s' (535) and replaced by social-democratic structures that appeared to move political agency towards an organised working class.[21] Masen's assessment of the destroyed society therefore reveals a sense of relief at being 'self-reliant' (*Triffids*: 9) and freed from the low-level surveillance of the state. In this sense, the post-apocalyptic future offers Masen an opportunity to redefine himself along the lines of the 'progressive' middle-class individual that possessed such political potency in the 1930s.

The underlying class politics and prejudices of Wyndham's fiction no doubt account for his popularity amongst a middle-class readership. As Nick Hubble (2005) argues – with particular reference to *Triffids* – Wyndham's popularity can be partly attributed, for this reason, to his wilful speculative destruction of the social-democratic state erected in the late 1940s:

> The reason why this was so attractive to a middle-class readership is because the order being overthrown by Wyndham's Triffids was not their own but that of the Welfare State and collectivised social democracy, which by 1945 had supplanted the Conservative hegemony of the 1930s. (89)

By examining the plot of *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* one becomes acutely aware of the manner in which the old system is dismantled with limited sentiment and how a small band of middle-class individuals are promptly charged with the task of rebuilding civilisation in their own image, to the exclusion of a largely unseen working-class population. This is crystallised in *Triffids* when Coker and his crowd of blind Londoners converge on the University of London's Senate House building, only to be forcefully scattered by a series of gunshots fired into the air. However, Masen and the novel's heroine, Josella Playton, successfully enter the building by providing details about their situation as well as their occupation, with the Colonel granting them access with the words: 'Need good men. Nasty business this. Plenty to do here, though. Plenty' (87). In *The Kraken Wakes* ([1953] 2008) working-class characters are predominantly absent from view for the two protagonists Mike and Phyllis who work as journalists for the fictional English Broadcasting Company.

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[21]See McKibbin (1998): 'In the 1930s the ruling definition of democracy was individualist and its proponents chiefly the modernized middle class; in the 1940s the ruling definition was social-democratic and its proponents chiefly the organized working class' (533).

Indeed, on the few occasions that Mike overhears the conversation of an archetypal man-in-the-pub, it is characterised by ill-informed jingoism:

> 'All right' he said, 'say for the sake of argument they're right, say there *are* these whatsits at the bottom of the sea: then what I want to know is why we're not getting after 'em right away? [...] Well, why don't we go out to bomb 'em to hell before they get up to more trouble? Sitting down here and letting 'em think they can do as they like isn't going to help. Show 'em, is what I say, show 'em quick, and show 'em proper. (94-95)

While Josella in *Triffids* and Phyllis in *The Kraken Wakes* articulate a degree of generalised concern for the masses who are to feel the full terror of the disaster, they are quickly convinced of the need for pragmatism by their male companions. On the surface, the protagonists of both novels are being asked to make bleak Darwinian choices as to how they survive and how they treat the vulnerable. Yet the catastrophe also offers them an opportunity to assert direct political power in a newly-constructed post-apocalyptic community, and of fulfilling, as Hubble (2005) puts it, 'the utopian dream of supplanting the postwar British order' (92). Aldiss's (1988) comment that the cosy catastrophe hero 'should have a pretty good time' (316) therefore contains some validity here. Once the protagonists of *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* see off the 'nasty business' (87) that leads to widespread extermination of the masses, they are offered prominent roles in the rebuilding process while housed in the bucolic idylls of the Isle of Wight (*Triffids*) and Cornwall *(The Kraken Wakes)*.

Nonetheless, while the political undertones of Wyndham's disaster fiction signal a deep-rooted mistrust in the political formation of post-war British society, his work also casts a sharp satirical eye over the follies of class more generally. This is notably displayed in *Triffids* when Masen outlines the hesitancy he suffered prior to taking food from the abandoned shops and cafes that littered London:

> Such a foolish niceness of sensibility in a stricken world! – and yet it still pleases me to remember that civilised usage did not slide off me at once, and that for a time at least I wandered along past displays which made my mouth water while my already obsolete conventions kept me hungry. (41)

Here, Wyndham gently mocks the more transcendent notions of the 'English character' – politeness, civility, conformism – that can be separated from the specific political concerns that persist at a structural and institutional level. The focus on the

newspaper industry in *The Kraken Wakes* creates a similar, but more overt, satire of typically English traits, anchoring them explicitly to the various social and political classes who characterise the readership of particular newspapers:

> The *Mail* denounced the failure to rule the seas as supreme treachery, and demanded the impeachment of the saboteurs, omissive and commissive. The *Herald* told the housewife that the price of food would rise. The *Worker*, [...] rounded upon owners who drove seamen into danger in unprotected ships at inadequate wages. (123)

Whilst the ultimate political lessons of Wyndham's fiction may be considered conservative then, he is nonetheless conscious of the class divisions that persist in British culture and appears eager to satirise them. Placed within an apocalyptic setting this subtle mockery becomes all the more perceptive as it exposes the sheer absurdity of what Masen labels in *Triffids* as 'habit and custom' (9) when faced with a situation demanding instinctive behaviour. Indeed, Wyndham's satire corresponds with his definition of how SF texts should operate. In his collection of notes for a talk about SF in October 1954, Wyndham derides the populist, pulp narratives that were synonymous with the SF magazine culture and argues that SF can be a serious genre 'IF (*sic*) it is done conscientiously and with intelligence' (6). His light satire of class and etiquette in *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* complements both the social Darwinian choices faced by the survivors of each catastrophe and the pessimistic assessment of post-war political organisation. It quietly remarks upon the oppressive mores of the British class system as a means of provoking a contemplative response from a middle-class readership.

But even so, the continuation of bourgeois habits by the protagonists of both works creates a distinct paradox that is not entirely resolved. On the one hand, the satirical quality attributed to Masen's reluctance to steal food does lightly prod the reader into recognising the oddities of class and custom, yet it is ultimately a violent schism resulting in millions of deaths and the collapse of polite society which supplies Wyndham's characters with their dominant social status. This demonstrates that while Wyndham's objectives to create SF injected with intelligent ideas are to an extent successful, his works also rely on a degree of 'cosiness' in allowing their protagonists to continue unhindered. His disaster fiction explores class and culture through useful set-pieces – for example, Michael Beadley's lecture about human

destruction in *Triffids* – and provides a more distinctive engagement with contemporary politics than is often credited. Nonetheless, the scale of death and destruction as a result of the catastrophe is never fully explored, which limits the extent to which his works can explore the socio-political consequences of disaster. Apocalypse does not bring about epochal transformation in Wyndham's narratives, but rather it re-energises competing debates about the nature of the 'English character', with the middle-class individual ultimately triumphing.

Nonetheless, Wyndham's major success in creating SF narratives that offer considerate and intelligent themes is found through his handling of civilisation's relationship with the dynamics of evolution and his speculation on the uses of technology. In countering Aldiss's criticisms, Ketterer (2008) highlights the vitality of Wyndham's interaction with such sociological and scientific concerns, particularly in reference to *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes*:

> It is surely odd to describe a 1951 novel which introduced the notion of genetically modified crops to SF and a 1953 novel which anticipates Stanislaw Lem's theme of the utter unknowability of an alien species as "totally devoid of ideas." Furthermore, virtually all of JBH's fiction explores the consequences of a Darwinian explanation of life. (376)

Both *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* explore how modern industrialised man remains vulnerable to evolutionary struggle, echoing the concerns of pre-war scientific romance narratives pioneered by Wells. Yet, on top of this, Wyndham latches on to contemporaneous Cold War anxieties surrounding developing technologies, which offered a prescient topic for a post-war readership. While Wyndham's implicit politics suggest an alignment with middle-class frustrations surrounding a burgeoning social democracy, his focus on the prospect of reignited evolutionary struggle following technological abuses struck at notable philosophical questions during the early and uncertain years of the Cold War.

The relationship to technology in *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* is characterised by ambivalence. Masen in *Triffids* longs for the comforts of the quickly vanishing modern world and laments the imminent demise of the contemporary cityscape:

> I wandered across to the window, and looked out. Quite consciously I began saying goodbye to it all. The sun was low. Towers, spires, facades of

Portland stone were white or pink against the dimming sky. More fires had broken out here and there. (70)

Additionally, as London gradually floods in *The Kraken Wakes* the inhabitants of the city attempt to continue with their daily routine until the sudden 'failure of the emergency electric supply one afternoon, followed by a night of darkness, gave a kind of *coup de grace* to order' (217). Industrial feats and technical familiarities are thus seen as a form of glue for social cohesion and their loss signifies the continued path towards societal breakdown. Yet equally, scientific and technological irresponsibility is also regarded as partly responsible, especially in *Triffids*, for the apocalyptic meltdown. At the start of the novel, Masen outlines the existence and general anxiety surrounding the establishment of satellite weapons containing biological, chemical and nuclear material, which are later suspected of playing a role in the almost universal blindness suffered throughout the world:

> Great as was the public concern which followed the triumphant announcement of the first nation to establish a satellite weapon satisfactorily, a still greater concern was felt over the failure of others to make any announcement at all even when they were known to have had similar success. [...] From time to time there would be a panicky flare-up of expostulation when reports circulated that as well as satellites with atomic heads there were others with such things as crop diseases, cattle diseases, radioactive dusts, viruses, and infections not only of familiar kinds, but brand-new sorts recently thought up in laboratories, all floating around up there. (20)

This hesitancy and sense of insecurity also resonates in *The Kraken Wakes*. After Mike and Phyllis witness the use of the first atomic weapon in deep water, fellow journalist Mallarby remarks that 'it won't be just one bomb [...] Can you imagine us tolerating any form of rival intelligence on earth [...] Why, we can't even tolerate anything but the narrowest differences of views within our own race' (51). The burgeoning military technology of the Cold War is consequently recognised in each narrative as being as much a threat to civilisation as alien invaders or opportunistic carnivorous plants.

Both texts as such directly address Cold War anxieties surrounding the use of military technology rather than merely hinting at it through allegorical narrative. Indeed, Jo Walton's (2005) comment that 'nuclear wars are quite specifically a banned topic in cosy catastrophes' (35) appears incorrect in the case of *Triffids* and

The Kraken Wakes. As mentioned, Mike and Phyllis witness the first deep water atomic explosion, which essentially marks the first human act of war against the alien invaders. Later in the text we also learn of a growing protest movement entitled 'Bomb-the-Bathies' (207) and that the popular press print headlines that ask the question ''WHAT IS THE BOMB FOR?'' (*sic*: 207). Couple this with the continual satire of the reactionary language pioneered by both the Soviet Union and the West and one can identify a persistent account of nuclear tensions and hostilities within the novel. Similarly, in *Triffids*, Masen's growing suspicion that the satellite weapons may have been triggered accidentally, along with Michael Beadley's detailed lecture on man's path towards apocalypse through scientific immorality, also indicates a forceful engagement with prominent technological questions. The two works offer, in this way, a specific critique of the excessive industrial investment in military technology that was to characterise the geo-politics of the Cold War.

Wyndham's examination of technological investment for military purposes accordingly corresponds with a critique of what David Edgerton (2005) details as 'the dominant social democratic historiography' (101) of the late forties that invariably negates the enormous spending on military technology in favour of a triumphant representation of the founding of the welfare state:

> Systematically missing from these accounts was the gigantic, military-civilian warfare state apparatus. This was an extension of the inter-war structures, built up and kept at a much greater scale after the war. Surprising as it may seem, the most significant increase in state expenditure, and indeed state employment, between the nineteen-thirties and late nineteen-forties was in the warfare state, not the welfare state. (101)

In this sense, *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* offer useful insights into the prominence of Edgerton's 'warfare state' (101), with both texts pinpointing the turbulent disjuncture between a society that ostensibly seeks social reform and progress but that also invests in the development of weapons of mass destruction. L.J. Hurst (1986) remarks that such texts therefore articulate 'the logical consequences of irrationality' arguing that 'there is no paradox: people become prey

to the triffids as a necessary consequence of the world that originally farmed them'.[22] Yet, Hurst here ignores the multiplicity of paradoxes that informed the Cold War period with the seemingly rational and monstrously irrational combining to form an absurd logic. As outlined specifically in *Triffids*, the nuclear, chemical and biological weapons placed within satellites were developed through a well-organised and state-controlled essentially 'rational' programme, but the effects of their use undoubtedly symbolise the ultimate in human self-destruction. Indeed, the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) that acquired such currency during the Cold War was founded on this very logic, yet was constantly haunted by the likely suicidal consequences of the failure of its theoretically unbreakable system. Wyndham's catastrophes therefore question the validity and sustainability of an emerging Cold War logic, with his works expressing doubts as to the effectiveness of deterrence against the use of new military technology in the aftermath of the atomic attacks on Japan and the increasing polarisation of the two emerging superpowers.

The anxiety expressed towards military expansion through developing technologies is extended in the two works to a parallel concern regarding the industrial world's relationship with natural processes. Nonetheless, *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* do not contain any form of proto-hippy sentiment – a standpoint that would, in theory at least, be notably anti-bourgeois – but rather seek to expose how instinct and evolutionary imperatives remain deeply-rooted in the psyche of modern man. As such, Wyndham's continual representation of evolutionary tussles correlates with the concerns of previous writers of scientific romance, including those examined in the last chapter. Indeed, Wyndham's disaster fiction can be seen to align broadly with the ideas of T.H. Huxley as expressed in *Evolution and Ethics* (1893). For Huxley ([1893] 1989), the continuous development of civilisation has seen humanity increasingly establish a wall against the natural world, or the 'cosmic process' (89) as Huxley calls it. He notes that this is largely a desirable state but comments that humanity is constantly haunted by the 'serpent' (78) of instinct, which Huxley sees as encapsulated in the natural desire to procreate that he perceives, in neo-Malthusian terms, as leading to the problem of overpopulation.

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[22]L.J. Hurst, 1986. We are the Dead: *1984* and *Day of the Triffids*. *Vector*, issue 133. Accessed online 4 November 2010: http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/l.j.hurst/weredead.htm

Huxley therefore identifies the spectre of overpopulation as the potentially cataclysmic event that may necessitate a reintroduction of a 'cosmic struggle' (79) into an otherwise 'artificial fabric' (79). Both *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* use the catastrophe as an event – like Huxley's example of overpopulation – that forces survivors to step away from the civilising barriers erected against the natural world and once more confront Darwinian realities. The re-establishment of a struggle for survival is coupled with a contemplation of what Huxley calls 'cyclical evolution' (107), whereby both life-forms and civilisations are endlessly engaged in an inevitable cycle of rise, fall and renewal.

Rowland Wymer (1992) suggests that Wyndham consistently grapples with the unceasing calls of evolutionary instinct by noting that 'he has a completely consistent and bleakly Darwinian view of life as a ceaseless and ruthless struggle for existence waged between competing species governed by biological rather than moral imperatives' (26). While Wymer is right to assume that Wyndham returns to the idea of a brutal struggle between species, Wyndham also addresses, more directly, the tensions behind Huxley's differentiation of a system of 'ethics' and that of 'evolution', in other words, between the structures of civilised society and the ever-present natural order. As Moore (2007) outlines more precisely:

> Huxley places evolution and ethics in separate boxes and, according to this view, allows no traffic between the two. Wyndham, however, seems to see this separation as more aspirational than actual. It is desirable that the struggle for existence be limited, but it can never be escaped. (53)

This view appears prominently in *The Kraken Wakes*, particularly when Bocker outlines his theory about what the Xenobathites are planning in the deep seas:

> We'll deal with their present state, and I deduce that to be this: having settled into the environment best suited to them, these creatures' next thought would be to develop that environment in accordance with their ideas of what constitutes a convenient, orderly, and, eventually, civilized condition. They are, you see, in the position of – well, no, they are *actually* pioneers, colonists. Once they have safely arrived they set about improving and exploiting their new territory. (63)

Bocker uses the language of our own civilisation's history – 'pioneers, colonists' – to emphasise the connection between the actions of a seemingly instinctive life-form and that of a supposedly rational, civil order. Wyndham therefore highlights the way

in which Huxley's concept of a segregation of civilisation from the 'cosmic process' (89) may well be attractive, but is also misleading in so far as it overlooks society's development as a result of evolutionary struggle, rather than as an entirely separate entity outside of natural processes. *The Kraken Wakes* thus forces the reader to conclude that our own modern world is not at odds with evolution, but a product of it. As Bennell argues earlier in the novel: 'The line between instinctive action and intelligent action, particularly as regards self-defence, can be very uncertain – if only because both may produce the same response' (*Kraken*: 44-45). Despite our confidence of civility, Wyndham suggests that we can never fully escape the evolutionary battleground: to use Huxley's own words, there is always a 'serpent' (78) in the garden.

Where *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* undoubtedly succeed is in their simultaneous examination of contemporary phenomena – nuclear technology, the social and political direction of the post-war world – as well as their quasi-philosophical investigation of humanity's relationship with evolutionary development. This convergence is expressed most clearly in *Triffids* through Michael Beadley's lengthy speech that muses upon the inevitability of apocalypse:

> From 6 August 1945, the margin of survival has narrowed appallingly. Indeed, two days ago it was narrower than it is at the moment [...]
> In any single moment of the years since then the fatal slip might have been made. It is a miracle that it was not. It is a double miracle that can go on happening for years.
> But sooner or later that slip must have occurred. It would not have mattered whether it came through malice, carelessness, or sheer accident: the balance would have been lost, and the destruction let loose. (96)

Beadley's lecture again makes specific reference to destructive post-war technological developments – in this case the atomic bomb – which have increased the likelihood of apocalypse. Yet, Beadley's reflections upon the inescapability of human collapse indicates that in one way or another humanity will unavoidably confront again the grim struggle for survival as a form of eschatological test that paves the way for renewal. This idea is illuminated towards the end of Beadley's speech where he comments that: 'we have repositories of knowledge that can teach us to do anything that has been done before – though there are some things that may be better unremembered' (97). For Beadley and the other survivors, selective

knowledge from the pre-apocalyptic world may once more be beneficial in the establishment of a new civilising post-apocalyptic order, but in doing so the survivors must not only conquer the Triffids in an evolutionary battle for survival, but also critically 'unremember' the destructive tendencies of the old order. Wyndham hints here at the way technical knowledge can once again erect a wall against the brutalities of the natural world. But the prolonged battle with the Xenobathites and the unceasing confrontation with the Triffids indicates that evolutionary instinct is difficult to vanquish entirely, for as Moore (2007) asserts: 'the opponents of civilisation in his books can be seen as coded references to the Darwinian realities underlying everyday life' (54). Wyndham's evocation of evolutionary instinct lingering within civilised society in turn further demonstrates his mistrust of the Cold War's absurd logic, as Wyndham's fiction invariably sways towards an assertion that instinctive behaviour will inevitably sprout from beneath supposedly rationalised systems.

Viewed simply from a socio-political perspective, by comparison to the forward-looking scenarios of a writer such as Clarke, Wyndham's disaster narratives offer a distinctly conservative message. Yet, this conservatism is not found through Aldiss's (1988) reductive assessment that his work only conjures allegorical 'anxiety fantasies' (316) for a nervous middle class, nor, equally, does it mean that his fiction can be reduced to the level of a marketing exercise designed to satisfy the demands of a specific middlebrow category. Instead, the texts speak to deeper concerns within the English middle class during the post-war period; a class who felt that their political agency of the pre-war years had significantly diminished by the late 1940s. Wyndham's fiction therefore sympathises with the frustrations of a class who, as McKibbin (1998) argues, 'in the 1930s was the class of progress' (533) but by the 1940s were firmly 'the class of resistance' (533). The general appeal of Wyndham's fiction comes, however, from his ability to break out from his typically English settings and speculate on the future of civilisation at large. He explicitly comments on technology's dual role as both a site for progress and modernity but also as the potential source of mass destruction, with the pessimistic outlook for technological progress in his fiction corresponding with, for example, Theodor Adorno's ([1966]1983) famous post-war assertion that: 'no universal history leads from

savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb' (320). Furthermore, his considerations of humanity's link to the natural order is founded on a genuine engagement with the sociological applications of evolutionary theory. As Moore (2007) notes, Wyndham's fiction speculates on the notion that reason is 'in some way "unnatural", gifted only to the few and under threat from the irrational forces around it' (61). It is due to this unsettling philosophical premise that Wyndham's work has retained its popularity, as his catastrophe fiction does not only expose the instinctive and irrational behaviour that lurks beneath the veneer of civilisation – which had a heightened and terrifying appeal for readers locked in the world of Cold War logic – but also suggests that such irrationalities and seeming evolutionary regressions are an inevitable and unavoidable part of 'civilisation' itself.

Britain, the Bomb and the Semi-Cosy: John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956)

John Christopher's (real name Sam Youd) 1956 novel *The Death of Grass* ostensibly continues the Wyndhamesque sub-genre of anxious British disaster fiction. The narrative largely follows the suburban architect John Custance, his friend Roger Buckley and their respective families as they forge across English countryside blighted by famine. As their journey in search of a farm owned by John's brother David develops, Britain becomes increasingly anarchic and societal structures quickly collapse. On the surface, *The Death of Grass* replicates the themes of Wyndham's earlier catastrophes in that it narrates an ecological terror which causes structural meltdown and subsequently leaves a group of archetypal English suburbanites facing a post-apocalyptic battle for survival. However, Christopher's novel offers – particularly in its representation of the post-apocalyptic moment – a bleaker view of humanity's potential reaction to widespread destruction. Unlike Masen in *Triffids* and Mike and Phyllis in *The Kraken Wakes*, who hold on to a collection of liberal bourgeois mores, John's suburban characteristics quickly vanish as he embraces his new role as a brutal feudal leader.

Brian Aldiss (1988) has consequently acknowledged Christopher's reworking of British disaster fiction by classifying him as the 'master of the semi-cosy' (317), which recognises that Christopher's work, to some extent, moves away from the supposed 'cosiness' of Wyndham's earlier novels. However, Aldiss's classification of the 'cosy' and the 'semi-cosy' requires some investigation. While Aldiss does not sufficiently elaborate on his categorisations, they do nonetheless offer an interesting insight into the perceived structures of British disaster fiction in the 1950s. In assessing Wyndham's work, Aldiss makes clear his objection to the supposed smoothness of his novels, which he sees as favouring ease of read over any detailed philosophical investigation. As already discussed, this is coupled with a notable reluctance in the texts to detail the horrors of the unfolding disaster and instead promote the newly-found freedoms of the protagonist, which Aldiss (1988) sums up as an archetypal trait of the cosy catastrophe genre: 'The essence of the cosy catastrophe is that the hero should have a pretty good time (a girl, free suites at the Savoy, automobiles for the taking) while everyone else is dying off' (316). Roberts (2007) notes that the apparent 'cosiness' of such fiction is felt for Aldiss through 'their lack of any genuine sense of threat; they fictionalise a sort of adventure playground rather than the terrors of ontological extinction' (210). Aldiss's (1988) opposition to the 'cosy' narratives of Wyndham particularly can therefore be attributed to the formal politeness of the texts, which cater purposely to an apprehensive, early Cold War middlebrow readership that 'enjoyed cosy disasters' (315). For Aldiss, Wyndham's novels imagine the catastrophe to the moment where things become noticeably unpleasant, at which point the narrative focuses purposefully on the romping adventures of the protagonists, with the external crisis appearing secondary.

In fact, Wyndham himself, in a 1960 interview for the BBC, commented that he was always aware of the extent to which his fiction should concern itself with the disturbing consequences of widespread disaster: 'There do have to be limits [...] there is an upward and lower limit and sometimes it works out so that the lower limit is unacceptable, it's unpleasant'.[23] He continues by making specific reference to *The*

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[23]John Wyndham (1960), interviewed on *Tonight*. [TV Programme]. BBC. 6th September. Accessed online 24 February 2011: http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/writers/12206.shtml

Chrysalids (1955), noting that when representing a post-nuclear war landscape there has to be a filtering of certain 'logical outcomes' that may potentially 'swamp the whole story'. Wyndham appears thus to argue for a necessary limitation of probable, but nonetheless gruesome, representations of the post-apocalyptic environment, exhibiting a determination to resist overt articulation of the brutalities of disaster. This narrative strategy is employed most notably in *Triffids*, particularly when Masen and Josella search for and subsequently find a pied-à-terre in which they spend the night before setting off across the city. While lying in bed at the luxury flat Masen reflects upon the sounds he hears, commenting on the horrors that are faced by many outside:

> I lay awake for an hour or more. Night magnified the quiet of the city, making the sounds which broke it the more desolate. From time to time voices rose from the street, edgy and brittle with hysteria. Once there came a freezing scream which seemed to revel horribly in its release from sanity. Somewhere not far away a sobbing went on endlessly, hopelessly. Twice I heard the sharp reports of single pistol shots... I gave heartfelt thanks to whatever it was that had brought Josella and me together for companionship. (78)

The disaster is invariably external to Masen and Josella's direct experience. In these opening stages of the novel they are both able to access the luxuries of the old order while the unfolding apocalypse is something that they hear and occasionally glimpse sight of without it necessarily impacting upon them, or the reader, through direct visceral experience.

By categorising *The Death of Grass* as an example of the 'semi-cosy', Aldiss implies that Christopher's work partly breaks free from Wyndham's deliberate retreat from explicit representations of barbarity or post-apocalyptic existential turmoil. Aldiss (1988) resultantly praises Christopher for the way his catastrophe 'takes on an edge of terror' (317) and congratulates *The Death of Grass* for its 'grasp of political as well as psychological possibilities' (317). Certainly, the novel sustains the ability to shock by graphically portraying the increasingly desperate actions taken by John and Pirrie as the national and global situation deteriorates. One of the most startling moments occurs when the group locate a small farmhouse that they decide to raid for supplies, with John, Roger and Pirrie storming the property and killing the adults inside:

> There was a distant crack, and at the same time the massive body turned inwards, like a top pulled by its string, and slumped towards them. [...]
>   John pulled the shot-gun away from under the body which lay over it. One barrel was still unfired. With a nod to Roger, he stepped over the dead or dying man and into the house. (109)

Upon leaving the house with the weapons of the dead inhabitants, John coldly states to Pirrie that the raid was 'not a bad exchange – two shot-guns and, presumably, ammunition, for two rounds' (111). The increasingly stark realities of Christopher's post-apocalyptic landscape therefore confronts both the horror of a world devoid of order as well as the breakdown of seemingly respectable middle-class identities when faced with a frantic battle for survival. Yet, by labelling Christopher's fiction as 'semi-cosy', Aldiss also suggests that his work maintains an air of quaintness, which is presumably located in its suburban and later rural English setting along with its largely bourgeois cast. This sense of the 'cosy' is indeed played out in the events following Pirrie's shooting of a rival group leader. After the remaining members of the enemy gang defect to John and Pirrie's side it is suggested that they should all drink tea to calm tensions: 'Wouldn't it be a good idea for us all to have some tea? We've got a big can and plenty of tea and some dried milk, and there's water in the brook just along' (152). In Aldiss's definition, *The Death of Grass* works within the formal boundaries of the cosy catastrophe, but rather than turning away from the 'lower limits' that Wyndham maintained a moralising objection to, Christopher's novel is eager to speculate directly on the social traumas arising from catastrophe and the unpleasant decisions faced by individual characters.

Yet, one cannot overcome a sense that Aldiss's classification of Wyndham and Christopher's fiction does a disservice to the complexity of both writers' work. As outlined earlier in this chapter, Wyndham's disaster narratives pose intricate questions of the post-war political settlement through the representation of unprecedented crisis, while his visions of ecological and technological terror also update the themes of the Wellsian disaster for a Cold War readership grappling with daunting scientific developments. Equally, Christopher's supposedly 'semi-cosy' fiction does not merely add extra fright and bleakness to Wyndham's 'cosy' formula, but instead responds to a changing political climate both domestically and internationally in the mid-fifties. Aldiss's (1988) own admission that *The Death of*

Grass comprehends 'political as well as psychological possibilities' (317) indicates that Christopher's disaster fiction – rather than being a partial improvement on the previously 'cosy' method – in fact had a role in steering British SF towards the radical aesthetics of the New Wave that would crystallise in the next decade. The closing remarks of Aldiss (1988) on Wyndham and Christopher therefore appears disingenuous as he relates the significance of their fiction to a specific post-war moment that would quickly appear anachronistic:

> Perhaps time was running against Christopher and Wyndham; for the catastrophe novel presupposes that one starts from some kind of established order, and the feeling grew – particularly in the mid-sixties – that even established orders were of the past. (317)

This seems to negate any suggestion that Wyndham and Christopher's work sustained a wider impact beyond representing the anxieties of a nervous middle class in the 1950s and hints that both the content and style of the cosy catastrophe was rooted firmly in that immediate context alone. What Aldiss fails to recognise is the extent to which the 'cosy' disaster altered according to contextual shifts throughout the decade and the noticeable recalculation of the form in Christopher's later decade fiction.

Christopher's reworking of British disaster fiction in the second half of the decade may therefore be seen as part of the genre's persistent development that would undergo another transformation in the 1960s with the publication of J.G. Ballard's collection of ecological catastrophe novels, beginning with *The Wind From Nowhere* in 1962. Accordingly, partial explanation for the hasty collapse of all notions of civil society in *The Death of Grass* can be extracted from the political and cultural events of the mid-fifties which contributed to a significant perceptual shift in defining the 'English character'. Whilst the end of all rationing in 1954 signalled that Britain was slowly emerging from the austerity measures felt since the war, 1956 is invariably marked as a significant moment in Britain's post-war history. The Suez Crisis of November that year has been regularly cited as the historical event that confirmed Britain's inability to act as an independent global power, with the crisis often represented as a fatal blow to any remnants of British imperial identity. Robert Hewison (1988) summarises the impact of Suez on the British popular imagination,

noting that the iconographic role of the crisis as signifier for British decline has invariably trumped its political effect:

> Retrospectively, 1956 has become an *annus mirabilis*. The 1950s do not have the convenient end-stops of dates and events that encapsulates the Second World War. [...] If the 1950s *are* focused in this way, then the point of focus is 1956. It is the first moment of history after the Second World War about which there is anything like a persistent myth, and like the myths of wartime, it is a combination of historical truths and popular distortion. The pattern for the myth is provided by the coincidence of political events and cultural shift: crudely, Suez and *Look Back in Anger* seem part of the same event, although *Look Back in Anger* was first performed in May and the landings at Suez did not take place until the beginning of November. (148)

While it's easy to overstate Suez in the grand scheme of Britain's post-war historiography, it does seem to maintain, in Hewison's words, a form of 'symbolic significance' (148-9) in influencing the direction of cultural and artistic representation in Britain. Judt (2010) finds a similar pattern emerging in film and television productions from 1956 onwards, citing war films such as *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Dunkirk* (1958) and the proliferation of kitchen-sink dramas as examples of a mood that was beginning to 'darken discernibly' (300). Furthermore, John Osborne in his essay 'They Call it Cricket' (1957), contained in a collection of articles by young British writers named *Declaration*, attacks the persistence of conventional conceptions of British identity in the face of later decade nuclear testing:

> 'The H-Bomb Wives' it called them. There were photographs of them – Ordinary British Housewives. One of them was holding her baby. No one knows at this time whether one day some Japanese housewife may hold up a baby that is not quite so well-formed or healthy because of a few British husbands and their game of nuclear cricket. (66)

Osborne here confronts the relevance of British imperial identity, wrapped up in the civilised ideal of a game of cricket, against the hydrogen bomb tests of 1957, which represented, to Osborne at least, an unnerving threat to the very fabric of British culture and identity.

Coupled with Britain's darkening domestic mood, *The Death of Grass* is also constructed at a mid-decade moment that witnessed a notable shift in the technology of nuclear weaponry which, to an extent, altered the nature of Cold War anxiety and the scope for imagining apocalypse. Britain exploded its first atomic weapon on 3rd

October 1952, with the 'Blue Danube' atomic bomb entering service a year later. Yet Britain's atomic bomb programme was a number of years behind the efforts of both the United States and the Soviet Union. On 1st November 1952 the US detonated its first, far more destructive hydrogen weapon, codenamed 'Ivy Mike', while the Soviet Union exploded its first hydrogen bomb nearly a year later on 12th August 1953. Wyndham's *Triffids*, published in 1951, offers a selection of warnings about the potential for nuclear, biological and chemical weaponry, but the novel is also written during a period where public knowledge of such developing technologies was markedly limited. While the description of satellite weapons in *Triffids* ([1951] 1999) highlights typical Cold War fears of mass destruction, the doubt surrounding their numbers or even their actual presence signals a double concern around state secrecy regarding the manufacture and deployment of such weapons as well as an uncertainty as to the ultimate devastation the new armaments might cause:

> Whether such uncertain and potentially back-firing weapons had actually been placed is hard to say. But then, the limits of folly itself – particularly of folly with fear on its heels – are not easy to define. A virulent organism, unstable enough to become harmless in the course of a few days (and who is to say that such could not be bred?) could be considered to have strategic uses if dropped in suitable spots. (*Triffids*: 20)

Wyndham's early Cold War narrative is thus embedded firmly in the atomic age, exhibiting distinct apprehension with regards to the direction of budding military technologies. Beadley's speech to survivors at the University of London later in the novel consequently comments on how the post-war world had headed towards a situation where 'the path to safety started to shrink to a tight-rope along which we had to walk with our eyes deliberately closed' (96), while later commenting on the unknown potential of new weapons: 'How bad it would have been, we cannot say. How bad it *could* have been – well, there might have been no survivors: there might possibly have been no planet...' (97). At this point, Wyndham's characters can only speculate on how nuclear weaponry may evolve, and while they consider it possible that weapons similar in power to hydrogen bombs may be produced, such thoughts can only be considered as mere conjecture in the novel.

Correspondingly, a brief examination of cultural attitudes towards the possible production of hydrogen bombs in the early 1950s highlights a mood of uncertainty

regarding the likely effects of such weapons. An article published in *The Times* on 27ᵗʰ January 1950 entitled 'The Hydrogen Bomb: A New Method of Releasing Energy for Destruction' attempts to explain the technical process of producing such a weapon in order to clear up 'a certain amount of misunderstanding about what is meant' (5). The article proceeds by accurately outlining the physics driving nuclear research, yet the concluding paragraph can only hypothesize on the length of time required to manufacture such weapons before bluntly ending with a statement on the possible power of the new technology: 'There seems, however, little doubt that within a few decades, if not a few years, it will be possible for any Power with modern industrial resources to destroy the world as we know it' (5). The following day, 28ᵗʰ January, *The Times* published a further article on the hydrogen bomb, this time considering the extent of radioactive contamination emitted from an explosion. Again, the article's examination of the bomb occasionally falls back on conjecture as the correspondent reports on rumours regarding the radioactive consequences of a detonation: 'It had been reported that if such bombs were dropped off the pacific coast the prevailing winds would carry the radioactivity over this country, and would result in extinction of all forms of life' (5). At this early decade moment nuclear technology is a recognisable reality, yet its uses and destructive power are to an extent obscured from public understanding.

The ambivalent reaction to Cold War military technology in *Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* therefore has some connection to certain cultural assumptions at the start of the decade that seemed to side with apprehension rather than outrage at the prospect of hydrogen weapons. Yet, the tentative handling of the nuclear question in the early fifties appeared to be increasingly challenged as the thermonuclear era became an undoubted reality. Doris Lessing's polemic 'The Small Personal Voice' (1957) contained in the *Declaration* collection illustrates a growing suspicion of government logic in pursuing thermonuclear testing:

> Now, in March 1957, the British Government decides to continue the hydrogen bomb tests which threaten unborn children. Yet of the men who took the decision I am sure there is not one who says: Because of me thousands of children will be born crippled, blind, deaf, mad. They are members of a committee. They have no responsibility as individuals. They represent me. But I repudiate their act. I don't know one person, have never

known a person, who would agree, as an individual, to throw the particular switch which will make children be born monsters. (19)

Unlike Clarke's positive early-decade representation of technocratic organisation, Lessing reacts angrily to the facelessness of bureaucratic decision making, especially in their collective decision to pursue hydrogen bomb tests, which for Lessing applies a collective Cold War logic to an action that could never be justified at a personal level. Lessing's outrage reflects wider dissent, which culminated in Britain with the establishment of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in January 1958. The CND's objection to nuclear weapons coincided with growing knowledge of the immensity of hydrogen explosions, while interestingly, as with Wyndham's belief that instinct has the ability to disrupt the rational and civilised, the CND message reacted to the absurd rationalism of the Cold War stand-off by insisting on the inevitability of its malfunction. As J.B. Priestley – one of the founding members of the CND – argued in his pioneering 1957 article in the *New Statesman*:

> But all this is to the good; and we cannot have too much of it, we are told, because no men in their right minds would let loose such powers of destruction. Here is the realistic view. Any criticism of it is presumed to be based on wild idealism. But surely it is the wildest idealism, at the furthest remove from a sober realism, to assume that men will always behave reasonably and in line with their best interests? Yet this is precisely what we are asked to believe, and to stake our all on it.[24]

The second half of the decade correspondingly witnessed a fracturing of political trust in nuclear projects, with the spectre of global thermonuclear war seemingly penetrating public consciousness in a way not witnessed in speculations from the earlier part of the decade.

While Christopher's disaster narrative does not necessarily correspond explicitly with the political attitudes that would later characterise the CND, *The Death of Grass* does nonetheless depict worsening apocalyptic perspectives that would enter collective consciousness in the second half of the decade. Christopher's disaster – represented through the Chung-Li virus – is global and once started national governments are unable to deal with the threat. Whilst I do not want to suggest that the Chung-Li virus in *The Death of Grass* represents some form of overarching

[24] J.B. Priestley (1957). Britain and the Nuclear Bombs. *New Statesman*, 2nd November. Accessed online 28 April 2011: http://www.newstatesman.com/society/2007/02/nuclear-world-britain-power

metaphor for the global nature of thermonuclear war, it does however rework the scope of British catastrophe fiction to fully incorporate a world-wide view of destruction that accurately reflects the anxieties of later-decade society. Again, viewed contextually, the publication of a government White Paper in April 1957 entitled *Defence: Outline of Future Policy* – which admitted that civil defence appeared distinctly outmoded in the face of thermonuclear weapons – suggested that a war involving hydrogen bombs would ultimately leave individual nation states such as Britain helpless in the face of likely global catastrophe:

> It must be frankly recognised that there is at present no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons. Though in the event of war, the fighter aircraft of the RAF would unquestionably take a heavy toll of enemy bombers, a proportion would inevitably get through. Even if it were only a dozen, they could with megaton [ie. hydrogen] bombs inflict widespread devastation.[25]

What is distinctive about Christopher's disaster narrative is its acceptance that there are certain threats that once unleashed cannot be combated nationally, and which will break down and reformulate cultural and personal identity into almost unrecognisable forms. The bleakness of *The Death of Grass* is located in its sense that the crisis appears geographically inescapable. John and his group survive the immediate threat of famine in London, but the catastrophe soon becomes so extensive that the hope of forming a post-apocalyptic community away from threat becomes increasingly unlikely.

In this sense, *The Death of Grass* suitably anticipates the prospect of Britain obtaining the hydrogen bomb, an event that would not take place until the end of May 1957.[26] John's pompous yet well-connected friend Roger Buckley acquires a piece of leaked information from government that details the plans to destroy both major cities and their starving populace: 'Atom bombs for the small cities, hydrogen bombs for places like Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds – and two or three of them for London. It doesn't matter about wasting them – they won't be needed in the

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[25]Cited in Peter Hennessy (2007), 467.

[26] Following the end of the Cold War it was revealed that the initial hydrogen bomb tests on 15th and 31st May 1957 were, in fact, fission explosions, with the power of Britain's thermonuclear tests later that year also being doubted. See Norman Dombey and Eric Grove (1992).

foreseeable future' (48). While the Chung-Li virus represents a devastating natural disaster that has the power to overthrow technological man, like Wyndham, Christopher appears to view nuclear weapons as susceptible to abuse once the gloss of civility is removed and the unpredictability of instinct emerges. The interaction with nuclear war in *Triffids* and *The Death of Grass* is nuanced, but looked at contextually, the prospect of survival in *Triffids* and the hope of re-establishing a community on the Isle of Wight does seem to coincide with early Cold War uncertainties as to the extent to which nuclear war was a threat to civilisation in its entirety. In other words, the disaster in *Triffids* appears eminently survivable. The nature of the disaster in *The Death of Grass*, however, signals a darkening mood when read against its contextual backdrop of a burgeoning thermonuclear arms race and the breakdown of Empire. Survival for the likes of John and Pirrie requires a submission to barbarous instinct. Personal and cultural identity is shed in order to temporarily survive in an increasingly desperate post-catastrophe Britain. The hope of building a community akin to Wyndham's Isle of Wight settlement is shattered as John kills his brother, David, in a blundered siege on his farm. As Luckhurst (2005) puts it, *The Death of Grass* increasingly offers 'elegiac reflection' (131) on all that has been lost rather than hope of renewal: 'I've been thinking – how long do you think railway lines will be recognizable as railway lines? Twenty years – thirty? And how long will people remember that there were such things, once upon a time?' (*The Death of Grass*: 124).

The power of *The Death of Grass* also lies in its startling representation of personal identity as the narrative unfolds. Christopher diverges from Wyndham's acceptance that the bourgeois values of his characters will remain largely untouched in a post-apocalyptic setting by transforming John Custance from a stuffy suburbanite to an uncompromising feudal tribesman. Indeed, John's personal revolution is represented as entirely necessary by way of Darwinian adaption to environmental change and it is this stark recognition that the moral codes of the previous order are likely be entirely eradicated that provides the catastrophe with its, in Aldiss's (1988) terms, 'edge of terror' (317). John's adaption and redeployment in the role of, as his wife Ann says, 'medieval chieftain' (189) is consequently realised at the novel's conclusion. Having toiled across England to his brother's farm Blind Gill, John and

his thirty-four followers are refused entry by David as he claims the farm is full. While David offers John and his immediate family sanctuary, John remains loyal to his entire group and decides to take the farm by force. The subsequent raid results in the death of David at the hands of John, which presents control of the farm to the triumphant brother. Ruddick (1993) has noted that the denouement of *The Death of Grass* highlights John's new position as perennial survivor, whilst his brother – who prepared meticulously for the crisis by planting potatoes and beet at Blind Gill – simply attempts to shelter himself from the disaster:

> It is not John's training as an engineer that enables him to survive, but his ability to rapidly adapt himself to new conditions and become tempered by his experiences. Moreover, unlike his brother, he is responsible for a family, and this is a reality that cannot be gainsaid. It gives him the incentive to continue to struggle, sharpening his will, so that he becomes fitter than his brother. He proves himself to be a survivor, whereas his brother has merely survived. (145)

Equally, John's willingness to kill his own brother grimly realises the fragile framework of civilised order as the narrator speculates on the possibility that sibling rivalry hid a darker relationship between the two men: 'Had there been, beneath all that, a resentment of what his brother had – a hatred concealed even from himself?' (*The Death of Grass*: 194). The competing actions of John and David also reveal differing tactical responses to catastrophe that seem to correspond with the changing methods of representing apocalypse in the thermonuclear era. David essentially draws up his own personal defence plans, fortifying his farmland and hoping to protect it against the forthcoming terror, whilst John simply adjusts to the brutal world that he has no choice but to try and survive within. John's triumph offers an interesting insight into Christopher's reworking of British disaster fiction. For all David's planning he is ultimately usurped by his brother who has confronted the catastrophe in all its miserable detail. Survival in Christopher's novel is only found for those who engage thoroughly with the new Darwinian environment and consequently it falls on Christopher to explore the 'lower limits' that Wyndham was so cautious of representing.

John's personal transformation is necessitated by a rapid breakdown of civil society and the novel consequently highlights the fragility of broader models of national identity. John's post-catastrophe character is promoted to a powerful

position as tribal leader that surpasses his previous status as an engineer. This to some extent imitates Masen's rise in *Triffids* from research scientist to family patriarch and prominent member of the Isle of Wight colony. Yet Masen holds on to the personal values of a previous order and refuses to subject himself fully to visceral instinct, relying on hope that public order can be suitably restored: 'And so, my dear, we stay here. We learn how to support ourselves. And we go on supporting ourselves – unless help comes. There may be an organization somewhere ...' (*Triffids*: 194). John however appears more than willing to accept the brutality of the newly-formed world and readily discards the value system he had previously unquestioningly adhered to. Indeed, this is explored most directly when Pirrie decides to take a young woman, Jane, as a sexual replacement for his wife. John overlooks the objections of the other women in the group, stating: 'It's a different world we're living in. The girl went over to Pirrie of her own free will. There's nothing else to be said. Off we go now' (*The Death of Grass*: 135). Both *Triffids* and *The Death of Grass* consciously explore the instability of civilisation and the ease with which it can be swept away, yet *The Death of Grass* actively confronts the cultural upheavals likely to challenge survivors in the aftermath of global catastrophe. Both Masen and John in some ways benefit from the apocalypse, becoming self-appointed leaders. However, what makes the character of John Custance all the more powerful a figure is the extent to which he throws off the shackles of bourgeois conformism and rapidly accepts the amoral Darwinian struggle he finds himself embroiled within.

The speedy alteration of John's personality challenges the constitution of the 'English character' in a fashion not evident in Wyndham's early-decade catastrophe novels. Orwell in 'The Lion and the Unicorn' ([1941]1990), marks out the subtle inconsistencies present in broad definitions of everyday English existence, at one point citing comic postcards as tidy illustrations of the English mindset:

> One can learn a good deal about the spirit of England from the comic coloured postcards that you see in the windows of cheap stationers' shops. These things are a sort of diary upon which English people have unconsciously recorded themselves. Their old-fashioned outlook, their graded snobberies, their mixture of bawdiness and hypocrisy, their extreme gentleness, their deeply moral attitude to life, are all mirrored there. (182)

Orwell continues by noting English distaste of 'war and militarism' (182) before articulating the hypocrisy of such a view that seemingly 'ignores the existence of the British empire' (183). *The Death of Grass* accurately mocks and exposes these contradictions before tearing them apart through rapidly plunging the nation into near-feudal existence. Ruddick (1993) rightly states that when the novel ponders Englishness 'it does so without the sort of imperial nostalgia suffusing the Wyndhamesque text' (45), with the destruction inflicted by the Chung-Li virus exposing 'this pleasant greenness as a purely superficial phenomenon' (145). Indeed, the representation of Roger Buckley exemplifies Christopher's overt dissection of English middle-class pretensions. At the opening of the novel, Roger displays a 'general air of school-boyish high spirits' (*The Death of Grass*: 17) mixed with unquestioning jingoism and even racism: 'There's an awful lot of Chinks in China. They'll breed 'em back again in a couple of generations' (18). Roger is easy to dislike as he continually spouts nationalistic propaganda and plays down the prospect of Britain suffering extensively from the Chung-Li virus. He soon, however, takes on a far more parodic role as his belief in government is thoroughly shaken when he learns of plans to use hydrogen bombs on major cities. Roger's faith in what Orwell ([1941] 1990) defines as the 'gentleness of the English civilisation' (182) is instantly overturned, with his reaction encapsulating the pomposity of his convictions: 'The bloody murdering bastards. We aren't like the Asiatics. We're true-blue Englishmen and we play cricket' (46).

What is noticeable about Roger's reaction here is his unwillingness to adapt to the new conditions in the same way as John, and the residual diminishing of his personal and political agency as a result. Essentially, the text demonstrates that Roger cannot replicate the actions of Wyndham's Bill Masen in Christopher's new interpretation of catastrophe. As the crisis deepens, Roger appears increasingly impotent and John soon realises that the brutal but assertive Pirrie has become the man he can rely on: 'John turned towards Pirrie. He realized, as he did so, that, although Roger might be his friend, Pirrie was his lieutenant. It was Pirrie's coolness and judgement on which he had come to rely' (140). Roger accordingly accepts this situation towards the end of the text, understanding John's reliance on Pirrie and explaining that 'I couldn't have handled the situation, because I wouldn't have had the stamina for it' (161-2).

Roger hangs on to illusions that some sense of moral decency will remain amongst the English, arguing with Pirrie that 'direct action – murder for self-preservation – is a different matter. I find it difficult to believe they could even bring themselves to the sticking-point' (76). Pirrie and John are, however, pragmatic about the crisis and recognise that holding on to old value systems will result in near-certain death. The bravado of Roger in the opening sections thus operates as a narrative prop which illuminates the archaic and inflexible nature of conventional definitions of Englishness, particularly a brand of middle-class national identity that was earnestly set out during the inter-war years. It is ultimately represented in *The Death of Grass* as a hopeless attitude for it fails to engage with the requirements of the new order and maintains a rigidity of outlook that does not concede ground to powerful developing identities.

Christopher's dismantling of archetypal notions of Englishness therefore coincides with the changing domestic environment in the mid-fifties. As outlined, the events of Suez symbolised the decline of British imperial identity, while the birth of the CND in the second half of the decade demonstrated a growing mistrust of government during the thermonuclear era. Hence, the concept of a stable, independent national culture is attacked in the text by the worldwide terror of the Chung-Li virus, which, as Ruddick (1993) argues, breaks down England's delusion of being a self-determining island race:

> The novel also exposes the economic helplessness of the supposedly self-contained Island as well as the delusive smugness, deriving from the mythology of World War II, about the supposedly greater innate self-discipline in the face of food shortages of the British compared with lesser breeds. (145)

The global nature of the virus can also be read against changing perceptions regarding national prospects in the event of nuclear war. The virus leads to 200 million deaths through famine in China, before promptly decimating Europe, with a faint emergency broadcast later in the novel bluntly outlining the situation: '... fragmentary, but all the evidence indicates that Western Europe has ceased to exist as part of the civilised world' (*The Death of Grass*: 116). The continued testing and development of hydrogen bombs in the mid-fifties consequently altered the scope for representing apocalypse. *The Death of Grass*'s political and cultural impact therefore

resides in its recalibration of British disaster fiction away from the implication that definably English characters may battle tirelessly against the threats to civilisation, and towards a starker recognition that catastrophe in the thermonuclear age is likely to be an entirely global event that transcends superficial structures of national identity.

Towards the New Wave

As outlined in the opening to this chapter, the 1950s do not necessarily fit into the straightforward assumptions commonly used to caricature the period. While the first half of the decade can, to an extent, be seen as upholding the powerful post-war image contained in the phrase 'austerity Britain', it nonetheless masks the collection of complex and contradictory socio-political tussles that offered competing visions of how Britain should position itself in the emerging Cold War world. Kynaston (2010), in describing the expansion of consumer society in the late fifties, remarks that Britain remained torn between fully embracing modernising forces and the comfort of tradition:

> For most people the future [...] was indisputably modern – yet modern, they hoped, within a familiar, reassuring setting. Modernists, by contrast, had little patience with the recalcitrant forces of social conservatism. The tensions between these two perspectives – one glancing anxiously over the shoulder at a disappearing past, the other forging ever onwards and upwards – would be played out in modernity Britain. (697)

Just as the start of the decade witnessed an array of oppositional forces – self-imposed austerity versus widespread welfare reform; lingering pre-war and wartime models of national identity versus emerging technocratic notions of citizenship – by the close of the fifties a new assortment of contradictory visions were competing on the same stage. In July 1957 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan addressed a Conservative Party rally in Bedford where he made the now famous statement that: 'most of our people have never had it so good' (quoted in Hennessy (2007): 533), noting that 'a state of prosperity' (533) existed which the nation had never previously witnessed. Whilst Macmillan's speech also expressed caution as to the likelihood of such affluence continuing, it did illustrate a general domestic scenario whereby the average household was witnessing a marked improvement in living

standards and the attainability of a growing selection of consumables. Yet as Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (2004) discuss, Britain's domestic prosperity was at odds with its seemingly diminishing global status: 'In comparative economic and imperial terms Britain might have been in decline, but the full employment, the availability of consumer durables, and the benefits of the post-war welfare state were palpable' (2). The sense, after Suez, that Britain no longer possessed the international power to which it had previously been accustomed therefore operated as a counterbalance to domestic affluence.

Priestley (1957) in his famous *New Statesman* article reacted to the prospect of Britain's declining international status by speculating on the possibility of Britain operating as a mediating, rational presence that could remedy the polarising effects of the Cold War:

> There is nothing unreal in the idea of a third nation, especially one like ours, old and experienced in world affairs, possessing great political traditions, to which other and smaller nations could look while the two new giants mutter and glare at each other.[27]

Yet, this idea of Britain occupying the role of a 'third nation' would come under strain, as Priestley acknowledges, by continual alliance with the United States, while as Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders (1983) point out, as the sixties progressed Britain's lack of political and military power made the nation appear increasingly impotent in global matters:

> Furthermore, the decline in Britain's influence in international affairs became even more marked. When in 1962 President Kennedy issued an ultimatum to First Secretary Khrushchev to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba, the British people and government could do no more than hold their breath and cross their fingers. Faced with the escalation of the Vietnam war later in the decade, the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, fondly imagined himself in the role of mediator and peacemaker, but his offer to help provoked no more than an embarrassing and desultory silence on the part of the protagonists. (30)

It was apparent, therefore, that by the end of the decade Britain had undergone a notable transformation. Internationally, Britain did not have the imperial muscle that it could call upon in previous decades with its global standing appearing all the more

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[27]Priestley (1957). Britain and the Nuclear Bombs. *New Statesman*, 2nd November. Accessed online 28 April 2011: http://www.newstatesman.com/society/2007/02/nuclear-world-britain-power

indeterminate as a result. Meanwhile, domestically, the welfare state had markedly improved the physical and material health of the populace, but in a way that developed hand-in-hand with a new ('Americanised') leisure and consumer culture.

By the end of the decade the British population had lived under the nuclear cloud of the Cold War for nearly fifteen years, and while much of that period had seen the nation adjusting to a reformulated international environment, it had, by the last years of the fifties, generated a series of new sociological phenomena that would provide fertile ground for the literary imagination. Aldiss (1988) argues that the coming of the sixties marked a fundamental shift in personal and political outlook that detached itself firmly from the drabness of the previous decade:

> Austerity and drabness were out. A law was passed forbidding old age. The days of the holocaust were behind ... and possibly ahead. But not NOW. NOW was for the Pill, for Peace, for Profile, for Pantheistic mysticism and violence in the streets. NOW was for the glowing images of television: by which flickering light whole societies seems to radiate a more glowing image of themselves. (359)

Aldiss continues by correlating this cultural schism with the developing trends in SF, which he characterises as being divided between 'the old guard of SF writers who had grown up in the pulp tradition and were used to obeying its rules of play' (359) and a new group of writers who 'wanted to break the rules, to import life-style, philosophy, the trendier, so-called softer sciences, contemporary prose, and – of course – much heartier helpings of sex' (359). Aldiss's image of sixties culture and SF provides a neat picture of how they can be ostensibly distanced from the dynamics of the 1950s. Yet as a general picture of the two decades this is problematic, not only because it creates a superficial historiographical narrative, but because it also fails to recognise how the late fifties provided the framework from which the social and literary upheavals of the 1960s themselves developed. It was the affluence of the second half of the fifties that provided the fertile cultural conditions – extended leisure time, growing youth movements, organised political dissent most prominently expressed through the CND – which would allow the counter-cultural sentiments of the 1960s to fully develop.

Similarly, British SF did not produce a single, timely revolutionary act whereby it removed itself entirely from the baggage of the previous decade. Indeed, J.G. Ballard – often cited as a particularly potent radical figure in British SF – published a quartet of disaster narratives between 1962 and 1966, which can be seen as a further reworking of the Wyndhamesque cosy catastrophe to fit the new politics of the sixties. Luckhurst (2005) argues that Ballard's break from the styles of Wyndham and Christopher is pronounced:

> The resonances of Ballard's landscapes were with the paintings of Yves Tanguy, George De Chirico or Salvador Dali, with archetypal symbolic spaces analysed in Jungian analytic psychology, with the existentialist commitment to 'living in the desert' explored by Albert Camus, with Laing's schizophrenics, and with the uneasy colonial settings of fiction by Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene. This range was a riposte to the insular genre of the English disaster fiction, of Wyndham and Christopher, which Ballard explicitly rejected and inverted. (149)

Luckhurst is certainly correct to name the variety of influences on Ballard's rich fiction, which undoubtedly broadened the scope of the English disaster narrative, yet, as the next chapter will argue, Ballard's catastrophes can also be viewed as an evolutionary step that did not entirely overturn the tropes of the 'cosy' disaster that held such a prominent position in post-war British SF. In this sense, the following chapter will examine the extent to which New Wave SF broke away from the early Cold War anxieties articulated most notably by Wyndham and analyse the effects of growing counter-cultural movements on the aesthetics and content of British SF.

Chapter Three: the 1960s

In a 2004 speech on crime policy, during his second term as Prime Minister, Tony Blair made a famously pejorative reference to the 'liberal consensus' of the 1960s, noting that despite the championing of progressive social causes during the decade, it was also a period where a culture of excess and irresponsibility flourished:

> Today, people have had enough of this part of the 1960s consensus. People do not want a return to old prejudices and ugly discrimination. But they do want rules, order and proper behaviour. They want a community where the decent law abiding majority are in charge.[28]

Responding directly to Blair's speech, the historian Dominic Sandbrook has argued that such straightforward definitions not only add weight to conventional stereotypes about the sixties, but also fail to consider the broader complexities of the era:

> If most writers and TV producers are to be believed, almost everyone who lived in Britain during the 1960s was aged between 16 and 30, regularly snapped up the latest record by the Beatles and the Stones, smoked enormous quantities of dope and took to "free love" with eager abandon. [...] Such recollections are laughably detached from reality. True, different periods are marked by particular cultural concerns or national "moods"; if they weren't, there wouldn't be much sense in dividing them up into periods. But just as historians have teased out the subtleties and nuances of life in the 1930s – the social and technological changes that made the period more than one of breadlines and dole queues – so they are beginning to look behind the myths of the 1960s, too.[29]

Instead, Sandbrook calls for the decade to be viewed as a period of 'continuity'[30] where the emerging frictions of the late fifties further solidified, with the tensions between youth culture, consumerism and tradition becoming all the more prominent.

Sandbrook's response to Blair therefore aligns, in part, with the account of the late fifties in the previous chapter, which notes the burgeoning everyday affluence that had seemed unimaginable in the immediate post-war years. This growing emphasis on leisure and consumption accordingly necessitated a degree of alteration in the social landscape of Britain as the sixties commenced and also facilitated a growing

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[28] Quoted in Joe Murphy and Ben Leapman (2004). Blair Attacks Swinging Sixties. *London Evening Standard*. 19th July. Accessed online 27 July 2011: http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-12034494-blair-attacks-swinging-60s.do

[29] Dominic Sandbrook (2005). The Swingers Who Never Were. *New Statesman*. 21st March. Accessed online 29th July 2011: http://www.newstatesman.com/200503210015

[30] *Ibid.*

divide between old and new forms of national identity, which was further pronounced by the increasing number of young people growing up with no direct memory of the Second World War. Despite this, Sandbrook continues his riposte to Blair by claiming that characterisations of youth radicalism in sixties Britain are also questionable:

> ... just one in ten young people in the late 1960s went to university. Most did not join communes or have orgies or march against the Vietnam war; instead, they spent their days at work and their evenings watching TV, drinking in the pub or pursuing harmless hobbies. Even students were more conservative than we imagine: a survey at Leeds in 1968 found that just 4 percent identified with the radical left, while the largest group, 35 per cent, supported Ted Heath's Conservatives.[31]

Yet, both definitions provided by Blair and Sandbrook are misleading. Blair misunderstands the purpose of social changes during the decade, wrongly implying that 'rules, order and proper behaviour' per se were somehow eroded. As such, he fails to properly recognise how various moments of radicalism during this period can be just as easily regarded as a legitimate challenge to established ideas about nationhood or social values that had remained doggedly unchanged since wartime. Equally, Sandbrook – while correct in recognising the continuities between the late fifties and sixties – overplays the solidity of conservatism. Whilst the 'swinging' side of the period was probably only experienced by a select few, it is unfair to claim that a decade which saw the introduction of the contraceptive pill (1961), the legalisation of homosexuality (1967), the legalisation of abortion (1967) and the abolition of the death penalty (1969) was a period of largely unchanged traditionalism. An examination of British culture during the sixties must therefore show caution towards the popular idea of a clean, definable break from the supposed drabness of the fifties, yet, at the same time, recognise that the period did witness an acceleration in social transformations that had been gradually materialising since the end of the Second World War.

If, on a domestic level the sixties did then see some form of social upheaval in Britain, geo-politically the idea of British decline remained continually present post-Suez. By the end of the 1950s it was clear that in order to maintain a nuclear

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[31] *Ibid.*

deterrent Britain would need to rely heavily on the United States for both technological assistance and military hardware. Throughout the late fifties there had been a collection of agreements that had seen Britain acquire American nuclear weaponry, with much debate as to the extent to which Britain possessed independent use of the technology.[32] The Holy Loch controversy of 1960 provides a useful example of such uncertainties, whilst also illustrating Britain's increasingly junior position in the Anglo-American relationship. In September 1960 Macmillan agreed to the purchase of American Skybolt missiles that would be carried by the RAF's Vulcan bomber fleet and as part of the deal Macmillan allowed American Polaris submarines to be stationed in Holy Loch on the Firth of Clyde. The agreement indicated that the US did not have any obligation to consult the British prior to firing weapons from the Scottish based submarines, consequently making Scotland a prime target in the event of Soviet nuclear attack. The agreement symbolised Britain's increasing subservience to the United States in military planning. By the end of the fifties the nation was militarily reliant on American assistance in adopting any form of nuclear defence strategy, while as stated in the previous chapter, by the time of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, Britain was beginning to play little more than a minor diplomatic role in the notable flashpoints of the Cold War.

It is unsurprising therefore that the CND would gain significant support during the early part of the decade, especially with Britain appearing as both a peripheral global force and an increasing site for Soviet bombardment in the event of nuclear conflagration. Following the Holy Loch deal, protests were held in February, April and September of the following year, with the latter attracting a crowd of 12,000 protesters in Trafalgar Square. The 1961 Easter march to Aldermaston was also labelled as the biggest ever.[33] Yet, by the mid-sixties the movement had entered a long decline partly as a result of the policy of deterrent holding-out during the Cuban missile crisis (albeit with much global anxiety), but moreover as a consequence of the Partial Test-Ban Treaty of 1963[34] which confirmed, in Jonathon Green's (1999) words, 'that neither Kennedy nor Khrushchev seemed to be quite as psychotic as

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[32]For a fuller account of the Thor Missile agreement and the Blue Streak missile debacle, see Sandbrook (2006): 243 – 244.
[33]See Hewison (1986): 15.
[34]The treaty prohibited the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, underwater and in outer space but underground testing was not banned.

rumoured' (23). Nonetheless, by the early sixties it was clear that Britain occupied, at best, an uncertain position in the geo-political arena. A comparison between *Daily Express* articles from the late fifties and early sixties highlights this transformation. Chapman Pincher's front page story entitled 'Our BIG Bomb' (*sic*: 1) from 1st June 1957 attempts, post-Suez, to emphasise Britain's continued military strength, declaring the H-bomb to be 'the cheapest destructive and deterrent agent ever devised' (1) following the test on Christmas Island a day earlier. Pincher's celebratory tone – he also rejoices in the news that 'the troops have built a cricket pitch with lagoon mud' (1) – is in sharp contrast to the *Daily Express*'s stance at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Sympathising with Bertrand Russell's letter to Khrushchev, Douglas Clark's article from 25th October 1962 is titled 'Summit, Please' and outlines the Soviet leader's response to Russell. The article is understandably anxious, but also highlights Britain's limited involvement, only briefly suggesting that 'Mr. Macmillan should take the initiative and call the two K's together' (2). Thus, during the Cold War's most terrifying moment, Britain did not appear as the strong force that Pincher evokes in his 1957 article, but rather as helpless onlooker.

Despite the CND's failure to create a significant change in parliamentary policy, its dissenting message did symbolise a cultural shift in the 1960s, with deferential respect for parliament and its members beginning to diminish. In charting the early history of the CND Meredith Veldman (1994) notes the movement's importance as a forerunner for protest groups later in the decade, but equally recognises its continual backward glances to a vision of harmonious interactions with technology:

> ... CND challenged British political life by offering a vision of the nation that resonated with sectors of the middle class and was rooted in the romantic tradition. In its call for participatory democracy, CND anticipated the central theme of the 1960s; the value system that shaped CND, however, looked backward to a time of greater community both among individuals and between humanity and its technological creations. (134)

Figure 2 (top). *Daily Express*. 1st June 1957.

Figure 3 (bottom). *Daily Express*. 25th October 1962

This vision of bucolic utopia would be energised further by the hippy movement later in the decade, yet the CND's commitment to non-violent direct action did at least articulate a developing discomfort amongst a younger generation towards the post-war political consensus that would also be reflected, for example, in the 'satire boom' of the late fifties and early sixties. Therefore, whilst the early sixties largely marked a continuation of the social anxieties of the previous decade, there was a slow, but recognisable alteration in the cultural climate of Britain that sought to tentatively move away from the favoured political stances of previous generations.

If the social and political changes in sixties Britain were then more complex than is often suggested by popular recollections of the decade, it is certainly the case that in technological terms the period was one of notable invention and achievement. As Brian Aldiss (1988) neatly summarises in his analysis of sixties SF:

> New technologies proliferated quantally. [...] The decade saw the development of the laser (1960), manned spaceflight (1961), communication satellites (1962), supersonic aircraft (1963), the discovery of quasars (1964), unmanned landings on the Moon (1966), the first heart transplant (1967), the discovery of pulsars (1968) and finally, a manned landing on the moon (1969). (359)

Harold Wilson's famous evocation of technological 'white heat' is therefore, in some ways, a useful indicator of the changes underway in the sixties. However, the scientific advances of the sixties were also, at times, linked to the burgeoning military-industrial complex of the Cold War – particularly the space race, supersonic aircraft and satellite technology. Arthur C. Clarke's visions of space flight in *Prelude to Space* (1951) had materialised by the sixties, but unlike in his novel where the achievement had been reached through peaceful international co-operation, the reality was that military needs often determined such technological innovation. Indeed, upon leaving office in 1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower made specific reference to the dangers of the military-industrial complex:

> In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.
> We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge

industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.[35]

The decade's technologies sparked social excitement as scientific knowledge began to permeate popular consciousness, and, as Jane Pavitt and David Crowley (2008) observe, the language of scientific research soon filtered into everyday speech with 'terms such as "networks", "feedback", "systems", "software" and "hardware" acquiring broader meaning beyond the bounds of their original usage' (165). Yet these high-tech advances were always accompanied by anxieties relating to their Cold War production. As Pavitt and Crowley rightly put it: 'the computer set off concerns about dehumanization; the fast spread of television led to discussion of the persuasive effects of new media; and global communications systems were imagined as instruments of surveillance' (165). Just as the early fifties witnessed public uncertainty surrounding the potentialities of new nuclear equipment, similar anxieties proliferated then alongside the technology of the sixties, which were seemingly linked to an increasingly visible military-industrial infrastructure.

Evolving out of this ambiguous cultural relationship with Cold War technology, the British New Wave in SF viewed the hi-tech developments of the 1960s with increasing suspicion. Luckhurst (2005) points out that writers such as Ballard and Aldiss categorically rejected the 'space race as an exercise in thrusting nationalism and ideological mystification' (143), while the New Wave also proved 'strongly resistant to the cybernetic languages of capitalist efficiency that followed after the first real inroads of computerization into Western economies' (143). The New Wave resultantly cast a sardonic and satirical eye over the unfolding hi-tech consumer landscape of the 1960s, with Moorcock's reinvented *New Worlds* magazine, in particular, providing a platform for a form of visual and literary SF that would capture the mechanisms of emerging media landscapes, with the peak of such experimentation coming with the publication of Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* in 1970. This uniqueness coupled with the New Wave's direct engagement with the cultural events of the sixties provides some authority to Aldiss's (1988) sweeping statement that 'science fiction has always been of its age' (360). Yet, as with the

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[35] Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961). Farewell address to the nation. 17th January. Accessed online 3 August 2011: http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm

numerous continuities located culturally between the fifties and sixties, Aldiss's generalisation fails to acknowledge the common traits that exist between the New Wave and the 'cosy catastrophe' writing of the fifties. Indeed, Ballard's early catastrophe novels exhibit concerns about the validity of technocratic organisation which implicitly re-examine the anxieties of the Wyndhamesque disasters from the previous decade, whilst Michael Moorcock's redesign of *New Worlds* may have set formal and visual challenges to traditional SF styles, but nonetheless continued to speculate on the legitimacy and sustainability of Cold War logic. Just as it is ultimately unhelpful to assess the sixties as a decade of complete revolutionary schism so too is it disingenuous to view the New Wave as an undisputed retreat from the SF of the fifties. As Luckhurst (2005) correctly states, 'ruptural history' (159) invariably leads to an 'ahistorical conception of the New Wave, because it is only able to read for discontinuity, not for the substantial continuities within the genre' (160). As the following examination of Ballard's disasters seek to expose, there are in fact a series of connections located between the catastrophe narratives of Wyndham and Christopher and the evolving visions of 1960s New Wave SF.

Reworking British Disaster Fiction: J.G. Ballard's *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962) and *The Drowned World* (1962)

Along with Michael Moorcock, J.G. Ballard is invariably cast as the major force in the development of the British New Wave during the 1960s. It would be hard to overestimate Ballard's influence through both his transformative disaster fiction in the first half of the sixties and his later decade experimentation, whilst his 1962 essay in *New Worlds* entitled 'Which Way to Inner Space?' was also crucial in defining the generic transformations that the New Wave sought. Yet Ballard's wilful inversion of the British disaster tradition can also be traced to his estrangement from the cultural life of the nation. Having spent the majority of the Second World War in Shanghai, Ballard's arrival in England in 1946 did not entirely match expectations, as he recalled in an article for *Time Out* ([1993] 1997):

> When I actually arrived in 1946 I found a London that looked like
> Bucharest with a hangover – heaps of rubble, an exhausted ferret-like
> people defeated by war and still deluded by Churchillian rhetoric, hobbling

around a wasteland of poverty, ration books and grotesque social division. (185)

Unlike writers such as Wyndham, whose political and cultural attitudes were shaped by experiences of pre-war, wartime and post-war Britain, Ballard had instead lived through the flourishing of a modernity that gripped Shanghai in the 1930s, before witnessing its occupation by Japanese forces in 1937 and then imprisonment in the Lunghua internment camp between 1943-45. Accordingly, the malaise of post-war Britain, grappling with the loss of empire, severe social conditions and class conflicts failed to inspire Ballard (2008) who noted that 'hope itself was rationed' (123) in Britain during the late 1940s. While it may be unhelpful to rely heavily on autobiographical readings when scrutinising Ballard's early fiction, it does then seem an appropriate starting point for investigating the uneasy, 'outsider' relationship that Ballard frequently maintained in relation to British post-war culture.

For this reason, it is perhaps unsurprising therefore that the influences for many of Ballard's early short stories – particularly the likes of 'Prima Belladonna' (1956) and 'Venus Smiles' (1957) – can be found not in British SF, but in the consumer landscape of the United States as well as in the colourful visions of a hi-tech future in pulp SF magazines and the multifaceted collages and paintings of Pop Art and Surrealism. However, it was a largely British event, the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1956 that appeared to provide the most direct artistic influence on this aspect of Ballard's work. The exhibition itself displayed works by a range of artists, graphic designers and architects, many of whom were loosely associated with the Independent Group – a collection of creative practitioners who are often cited as the founders of British Pop Art. Ballard attended the exhibition which included the collages of Richard Hamilton, an 'as found' installation of ephemeral objects by Alison and Peter Smithson and Robby the Robot from the SF movie *Forbidden Planet*. For Ballard (2008) the exhibition's direct engagement with technological and social change made it 'the most important event in the visual arts in Britain until the opening of the Tate Modern' (187), identifying Hamilton's now famous artwork *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* as a particularly prescient examination of emerging social circumstances:

Hamilton's *Just what is it...?* depicted a world entirely constructed from popular advertising, and was a convincing vision of the future that lay ahead – the muscleman husband and his stripper wife in their suburban home, the consumer goods, such as the tin of ham, regarded as ornaments in their own right, the notion of the home as a prime selling point and sales aid for the consumer society. We are what we sell and buy. (188-9)

The developing strands of Pop Art in the 1950s in this way influenced Ballard precisely because of their explicit examination of the hi-tech, commercial world that radiated primarily from America during the formative years of the Cold War. American SF of the 1950s, with its unremitting exploration of a technologically inspired future, was an additional pull for Ballard who had access to American magazines whilst based in Canada with the RAF. It is important to recognise these influences on Ballard as they represent a notable divergence from the revulsion at perceived 'Americanisation' amongst earlier writers, notably Orwell, Hoggart and Wyndham. Accordingly, the most striking difference between Ballard's early writings and the catastrophes of a writer like Wyndham is the perpetual focus on social and technological change in western culture, regardless of its predominantly American association.

Ballard was quick to react to these new social conditions, deciding that the rapid technological changes of the sixties made certain strands of 'hard' SF unsustainable, expressing particular vitriol in 'Which Way to Inner Space?' towards the prominence of space narratives: 'The degree of interest inherent in the rocket and planet story – with its confined physical and psychological dimensions and its limited human relationships – is so slight as to make a self-sufficient fictional form based on it almost impossible' ([1962] 1997: 196). Ballard reasoned that a widespread focus on outer space had conversely limited the imaginative scope of SF by restricting it to space craft, lunar terrains and a particular niche readership, and instead called for an embrace of 'softer' science and a critical investigation of expeditious worldly and internal landscapes. Ballard ([1962] 1997) continues by arguing that this shift in SF writing should recognise that 'the biggest developments of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is *inner* space, not outer, that needs to be explored. The only truly alien planet is Earth' (197). Ballard thus makes clear at the start of his novel writing career that he wishes to turn SF's sights firmly on the present and the uncharted terrain of an evolving modernity itself in a

way that identifies him with both British Pop Art and the more modernist artists and designers associated with an earlier project like the Festival of Britain.

With this in mind, it is curious, on the surface, that Ballard would turn to the traditional catastrophe narrative as a means of beginning his campaign to create a 'complete speculative poetry and fantasy of science' ([1962] 1997: 198). Indeed, Ballard's first novel *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962), which is largely a continuation of the 'cosy' disasters of the previous decade, has invariably been purposefully excluded from his oeuvre as a consequence of its hasty construction and commercial aims.[36] Even so, Ballard's subsequent trilogy of surreal disaster novels – *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Drought* (1965) and *The Crystal World* (1966) – also maintain similarities with the supposedly comfortable and socially conservative narratives of the 1950s. Indeed, the genre's archetypal examination of a small gang of middle-class Englishmen actually presented Ballard with a distinctive opportunity to explore the psychological consequences of catastrophe and incorporate the 'psycho-literary ideas' ([1962] 1997: 198) that constituted a key component of his inner space fiction. Ballard's early novels operate within the confines of the British disaster narrative, as it is within this space that he is able to represent both the unconscious urges that lurk beneath the veneer of bureaucratic organisation and also expose the imminent breakdown of bourgeois identity when confronted with transformative social conditions. In this way, Ballard's early catastrophes intentionally bring into question the assumptions of the catastrophe genre by purposefully disrupting its 'cosy' resolutions.

While Ballard's catastrophes significantly distort the formula of the genre, they also mark another step in its historical development that had already seen a transformation from Wyndham's 'cosy' narratives to Christopher's supposedly 'semi-cosy' fictions. Ballard's success in radicalising the form is found in his willingness to move beyond the linear structure of preceding British catastrophe novels – which largely follow the pattern of pre-apocalyptic order, followed by catastrophe before reaching an ultimately hopeful post-apocalyptic order – and analyse instead the unspoken, latent energies that continually prompt narratives of

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[36] Ballard wrote the novel in a few weeks in order to fund his move to full-time writing.

catastrophe. *The Wind from Nowhere* therefore has greater significance in Ballard's bibliography than it is often credited with, for it functioned as a valuable exercise that tested the compatibility of the disaster narrative with the 'psycho-literary' style he envisioned. Furthermore, looked at closely, *The Wind from Nowhere* also aligns closely with Christopher's *The Death of Grass*, where the disaster does not merely result in the freeing of repressed suburbanites, but facilitates a fundamental change in the psychology of the protagonist.

   The Wind from Nowhere ([1962] 1974) ostensibly subscribes to many of the core features of a 'cosy' disaster story. The narrative largely follows the protagonist Donald Maitland as he scrambles amongst London's remaining infrastructure whilst wind speeds increase to unprecedented levels. As with *The Death of Grass*, the crisis initially erupts in the Far East before spreading to the western world, with news reports detailing the rapid global proliferation:

> ... widespread havoc is reported from many parts of the world, particularly in the Far East and the Pacific, where tens of thousands are homeless. Winds of up to hurricane force have flattened entire towns and villages, causing heavy flooding and hampering the efforts of rescue workers. Our correspondent in New Delhi has stated that the Indian government is to introduce a number of relief measures.... (21)

Luckhurst (1997) notes that this geographical movement of apocalyptic threat highlights a distinctive imperial sub-text in many English disaster narratives: 'the "waves" of destruction, the first signs of the catastrophe, always seem to begin obscurely in the Far East and move inexorably towards England' (41). Indeed, just like the disasters of Wyndham and Christopher, *The Wind from Nowhere* expresses a subtle, but continuous, anxiety with regard to a perceived threat to English imperial identity, which correlates with a wider crisis in British cultural life post-Suez. Yet, alongside this, the novel also continues the characteristic suspicions of the genre concerning the viability of Cold War technocratic order. Whilst the structures of social democracy fall apart in *Triffids*, and the remnants of legislative and military control slowly ebb away in *The Death of Grass*, the political order represented in *The Wind from Nowhere* is deemed hopelessly inadequate in dealing with the crisis, as Symington explains to Maitland:

> If the wind goes on increasing, say to hurricane force, there'll be a tremendous outcry in the House of Commons if we haven't prepared at

least a handful of deep shelters. As long as one tenth of one per cent of the population are catered for everybody's happy." He paused bleakly for a moment. "But God help the other 99.9." (23)

The Wind from Nowhere's conclusion is comparable to the disasters of Wyndham and Christopher, whereby the hope of a new rationalised, scientific order prevails as the crisis is slowly overcome. Nonetheless, Ballard's experiment with the 'cosy' catastrophe does not represent mere mimicry for commercial ends, but also functions as a means of testing the legitimacy of the disaster narrative as a carrier for Ballard's own interpretations of the psychological consequences of Cold War logic.

   Regardless of *The Wind from Nowhere's* broad parallels with past narratives, the novel also hints at the subsequent direction Ballard would take in reworking the disaster genre. Maitland's mysterious wife Susan provides a glimpse of the Ballardian protagonist of future disaster narratives – fascinated by the disaster itself and infused with a desire to experience its full extremity rather than flee to safety. Despite the high winds Susan refuses to leave her high-rise apartment, ignoring Maitland's ensuing attempts at rescue:

   'Susan, for God's sake, what are you playing at? This is no time for putting on an act.'
   She leaned against him, smiling wanly. 'I'm not, Donald,' she said mildly, 'believe me. I just like to watch the wind. The whole of London's starting to fall down. Soon it'll all be blown away, Peter and you and everybody.' (85)

The reimagining of the stock catastrophe protagonist is also witnessed as we encounter the narcissistic millionaire, Hardoon, who constructs an elaborate pyramid as an apparent celebration of the apocalyptic events: 'watching them from his eyrie in the pyramid, the iron-faced man christened the ramparts in his mind, calling them the gateways of the whirlwind' (90). Hardoon, too, decides to embrace the destructive winds, resolving not to save himself as his structure collapses, but instead choosing to stare 'upward into the sky like some Wagnerian super-hero in a besieged Valhalla' (181). What Ballard begins to explore in *The Wind from Nowhere* is the idea that the catastrophe produces identifiable psychological alteration. Susan is entranced by the winds, climbing to the highest point to realise some form of a previously latent death drive, while Hardoon has delusions of grandeur, experiencing a quasi-religious revelation that forces him to build a shrine to the disaster.

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Ruddick (1993) points out that the creation of such characters illuminates the ways in which Ballard's writing reflects upon catastrophe itself and the reasons behind humanity's continual reimagining of disaster:

> What Ballard seems to have recognized right at the start of his novel-writing career is a truth at once so simple and yet so hard to understand that to get to grips would be a lengthy struggle and yet one worth the undertaking: human beings desire catastrophe. That is to say, there is from the first in Ballard the recognition that catastrophe is not merely immanent or necessary, but actually *desirable*. (154)

While the disasters of *Triffids* and *The Death of Grass* represented a freeing from social constraints required to allow the likes of Masen and John to assume positions of social and political control, the apocalyptic occurrence itself is never subject to extended examination. What Ballard begins to introduce through the characters of Susan and Hardoon is an idea of absolute submission to apocalyptic conditions as a transformative psychological state regardless of its position as a prelude to death. Equally, this functions as a movement away from the pseudo-Darwinism of Wyndham and Christopher – whose apocalypses are assessed as a fleeting return to survivalist instincts – and towards a more psychoanalytic interpretation of the underlying motivations of the apocalyptic imagination. Additionally, as we will see prominently in *The Drowned World*, the visual contortions of apocalypse also intrigue Ballard through their surreal interactions between modernity, nature and latent dreamscapes.

The Wind from Nowhere uses the philosophical set-pieces that litter the catastrophe genre as a means of gently mocking the semi-intellectual explanations of the disaster in Wyndhamesque incarnations of the form. Indeed, the narrator pauses at regular intervals in the narrative to broadly consider the response of humanity to the crisis:

> On the whole, people had shown less resourcefulness and flexibility, less foresight, than a wild bird or animal would. Their basic survival instincts had been so dulled, so overlaid by mechanisms designed to serve secondary appetites, that they were totally unable to protect themselves. (120)

For Ruddick (1993) these moments represent 'a clever impersonation of the portentous tones of sub-Wellsian admonitory scientific romance' (154), with Ballard purposefully replicating the conventions of the genre while simultaneously exposing the superficiality of their pseudo-philosophical contemplations. Nonetheless,

Ballard's use of quasi-intellectual lectures by numerous characters is not entirely satirical, but rather a means to broadcast what Ballard described in 'Which Way to Inner Space?' ([1962] 1997) as a 'fantasy of science' (198). Indeed, as we will see, Bodkin's pseudo-science in *The Drowned World* is not intended solely as an attack on previous incarnations of the genre, but also as a vehicle for exploring a landscape experiencing extreme social, material and psychological rupture.

The Drowned World therefore provides the first explicit example of Ballard's bold evolution of the genre as he makes use of the radical tropes exhibited fleetingly in *The Wind from Nowhere* and develops them into an entire narrative. In doing so, Ballard still works loosely with the conventions of the English disaster novel and even continues to contemplate a collection of the political and cultural anxieties that permeate earlier texts. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic world following the melting of the ice-caps. London, the novel's principal setting, is submerged under a dense lagoon, which is covered in tropical vegetation as a result of a drastic shift in climate. *The Drowned World*'s seemingly distant post-disaster setting is a notable disruption of the English catastrophe, which habitually opens during a pre-apocalyptic moment or as the disaster is just beginning to unfold. However, as Luckhurst (1997) argues, Ballard's disaster narratives actually 'take place *between catastrophes*, in the space after the initial catastrophe and the "catastrophe" which follows: death' (38). This correlates partly with the trajectory of fifties disaster fiction in so far as it is the elongated 'struggle' in the post-apocalyptic moment that paves the way for the hopeful dénouement. Yet Ballard's inversion of the form is found in his refusal to accept a cyclical return to steady human progress, instead conceiving the apocalypse as a transformative unleashing of unconscious urges that ultimately resolve themselves *through* death.[37] What the *Drowned World* clearly marks is Ballard's desire to disturb generic convention, a technique that would become a recurrent aspect of his literary style. In this way, his disaster fiction sits simultaneously inside and outside the genre, with his work exposing, as Luckhurst (1997) states, 'the space *between* frames' (xiii), which uncovers 'the hidden

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[37]A useful example of a cyclical history narrative is found in Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), which charts the re-building of civilisation following nuclear war and envisages a new renaissance and Enlightenment that culminates in another nuclear conflict.

assumptions behind the secure categorizations of literature and literary judgement' (xiii).

Prominent examples of Ballard's distortion of the catastrophe format can be found in *The Drowned World*'s relationship with both the technocratic structures of the old world as well as in its undercutting of constructs of national identity. As with the works of Wyndham and Christopher, which exhibit substantial discomfort regarding the motives underlying the supposedly rational systems of modernity,[38] Ballard's novel is doubtful as to the likelihood of old organising forces withstanding the rigours of the apocalyptic event. The scientific testing station that Kerans wilfully abandons is accordingly represented as a relic of a surpassed social and political order, although, as Andrzej Gasiorek (2005) argues, its crew still persist in propping up the pretences of the pre-apocalyptic world:

> The testing station combines two public functions: scientific and administrative. In its scientific capacity it endeavours to get to grips with the changing nature of the world in order to adapt to it; in its administrative role it polices the movement of individuals. (34)

The catastrophe narratives of Wyndham and Christopher locate potential salvation in new semi-rural communities – the Isle of Wight commune in *Triffids* and the fortified farmland of Blind Gill in *The Death of Grass* – yet Ballard's novel entirely disrupts this hopeful resolution, with the testing station instead becoming a symbol of futility. *The Drowned World* thoroughly rejects the concept of supplanting one political system with another similar but smaller scale structure. Instead, it views the catastrophe in absolute terms, a transformative event that temporarily opens up new vistas for exploring the latent content of the apocalyptic imagination, before slamming them shut through the personal apocalypse of death. The apocalyptic event therefore leads to the complete breakdown of the surface realities of post-war technocratic order and enters into what Mary Ann Caws (2004) notes in her analysis of surrealist artworks as 'a *dialogue* with the other' (15) – in this case the emerging psychological territory of what Kerans's colleague Bodkin names 'ancient organic memory' (74). While the Wyndhamesque catastrophe 'frees-up' its protagonists

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[38]In *Triffids*, Masen expresses dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic structures of the old order and Michael Beadley articulates the path towards disaster that was forged by a military arms race, while in *The Death of Grass*, a democratically elected government considers dropping atomic weapons on its own citizens.

from the overbearing presence of Cold War modernity before ultimately suppressing the psychological energies of disaster through a freshly constructed community centred around pre-catastrophe values, Ballard's apocalypse exposes the limpness of such conclusions and instead seeks to entirely 'free' Kerans from the discontents of civility and into the manifestations of repressed psychological desire.

This deliberate disturbance of the social and political messages of the catastrophe genre is expanded further through *The Drowned World*'s challenge to the remnants of cultural identity within the post-apocalyptic landscape. Colonel Riggs, the head of the scientific research team, is represented as a stoical middle-class moralist whose adherence to pre-disaster ideals is increasingly mocked by Kerans and Beatrice, with Beatrice deriding his inflexibility: 'But, darling, he was insufferable. All that stiff upper lip stuff and dressing for dinner in the jungle – a total lack of adaptability' (80). Ballard again temporarily converges here with the themes of previous catastrophe narratives, for Roger in *The Death of Grass* is cast as an equally rigid figure desperately clinging to declarations of English superiority despite the descent into barbarism, while Masen is gently parodied in *Triffids* for his determination to leave 'a fair price' (*Triffids*: 41) for a meal he acquires from an abandoned cafe. Yet, in both *The Death of Grass* and *Triffids* it is the preservation of 'useful' aspects of middle-class culture that benefits the protagonists as Masen refuses to accept the dictatorship of Torrence in favour of social consolidation on the Isle of Wight, while John, in Christopher's novel, chooses to remain loyal to his family and group of survivors despite his personal transformation and willingness to engage in the barbarity of post-apocalyptic England. Ballard assesses this outlook as ultimately fruitless within the landscape of *The Drowned World*, with the parodic figure of Riggs illustrating not only the obsolescence of conventional middle-class models of Englishness but also representing, through his hopelessness, an inevitable disintegration of all societal conditions. Ballard thus unleashes an unsettling assertion that is akin to Sigmund Freud's contemplations in *Civilisation and its Discontents* ([1930] 1962) on the notion that society produces necessary situations that repress the destructive and libidinal wishes of the unconscious. Freud states in the final section of the book: 'The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in

mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction' (92). The conclusion to the novel sees Kerans accept this fate, purposefully rejecting the skeletal remains of a crumbling civilisation and welcoming his resultant journey into the otherwise repressed unconscious:

> His time there had outlived itself, and the air-sealed suite with its constant temperature and humidity, its supplies of fuel and food, were nothing more than an encapsulated form of his previous environment, to which he had clung like a reluctant embryo to its yoke sac. The shattering of this shell, like the piercing doubts about his true unconscious motives set off by his near drowning in the planetarium, was the necessary spur to action, to his emergence into the brighter day of the interior, archaeopsychic sun. (146-47)

Here, *The Drowned World* goes beyond straightforward parody of middle-class stiffness and dogged conventionality in order to speculate on the possibility of a wholly re-imagined personal identity that simultaneously reflects back the disconcerting forces running beneath the continuous recycling of apocalyptic fantasy.

The Drowned World is undoubtedly subject to many of Ballard's aesthetic influences, most notably the psychological ideas embedded within Surrealism and Freudian psychoanalytic theory. However, as with the catastrophe fiction of the fifties, it is also a product of its socio-political moment. As noted at the start of this chapter, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 represented a clear peak in Cold War hostilities and Ballard's novel of the same year explicitly reacts to the psycho-social as well as literary implications of living with potential thermonuclear extinction. Reacting to the contexts of the novel, Ruddick (1993) states that *The Drowned World* can therefore be seen as a recognisable response to the nuclear age in the same way as *The Time Machine* constituted Wells's reaction to the Darwinian era. Whereas Darwin opened up 'the immense vistas of geological time' (Ruddick: 155) to writers like Wells, Ballard's novel correspondingly reacts to the shutting down of such an avenue in the age of thermonuclear weaponry:

> The advent of the nuclear age, marked by the bombing of Hiroshima, was, as far as the human future was concerned, effectively a closing-down of these vistas. Geological time seemed irrelevant, given the deployment of a means of instant self-extinction by a species that was not in the habit of developing costly technologies that it did not subsequently use. (155)

This is a useful way of reading *The Drowned World*, and more broadly, it demonstrates the burgeoning nuclear referent influencing British catastrophe fiction during the post-war era. Writing in the early sixties, Ballard appears all too aware of the problem of representing disaster when the likelihood of any recordable survival appears limited should the nuclear arms race reach its apocalyptic peak. Ballard therefore reacts to the ease and speed of thermonuclear destruction by slowing down time within the text. The all-powerful sun of *The Drowned World* is visualised as a 'colossal fire-ball' (7) that has not only helped submerge nation-states but, powered by nuclear fusion, also resembles a slow-motion nuclear blast, especially as the text describes survivors of the disaster who are 'suffering from malnutrition and radiation sickness' (12). Kerans's languid existence in the baking lagoon represents an important counter-balance to the frenetic world that previously existed beneath the swamp. Ballard's post-apocalyptic landscape is not a place where its inhabitants hurriedly rebuild, but an alternative time-system where the unconscious drives of modernity can be examined without restraint. The nuclear fireball that looms over the submerged world remains as a persistent symbol of humanity's technological end game.

In this way, Ballard's pseudo-scientific concepts of 'archaeopsychic time' (44) and 'ancient organic memory' (74), which seek to open up the latent content of human biological and psychological history, illustrate the unattainable nature of far future projections during the 'hot' moments of the Cold War. In the aftermath of Hiroshima and the nuclear build-up that followed, *The Drowned World* enacts a retreat into the neurological mythologies of the human psyche as a method of uncovering the processes that have led to such a point in human history. 'Archaeopsychic time' (44) pulls Kerans away from speculations of a non-existent future and forces him to step backwards and dig for the geological clues of the past:

> Guided by his dreams, he was moving backwards through the emergent past, through a succession of ever stranger landscapes, centred upon the lagoon, each of which, as Bodkin had said, seemed to represent one of his own spinal levels. (83)

This inverted speculation once more allows Ballard to move beyond the straightjacket of the British catastrophe novel, intentionally using some of its most prominent themes – in this instance its concern regarding humanity's role in the

disaster – before breaking up conventional assumptions surrounding degeneration or political and social folly by looking to the ancient processes of evolutionary and psychological development. Crucially, *The Drowned World* does not offer solace for a nervous Cold War readership by offering the 'cosy' hope of post-apocalyptic sociological redemption. Instead, as Ruddick (1993) argues, Ballard's survivors are left to 'stand on the terminal beach of the present, wondering about the nature of the time machine responsible for delivering them there' (155). Ballard therefore creates a catastrophe novel that is concurrently pre- and post-apocalypse. Individually the protagonists are placed in a space after the initial disaster but before their own personal deaths, left in a visible 'zone of transit' (*The Drowned World*: 35). Yet, at a broader contextual level this landscape is also a prescient form of the contemporary, a slow-moving nuclear blast that facilitates the in-between spatial moment of the submerged world.

Excavating the 'Pre-Third' in J.G. Ballard's 'The Terminal Beach' (1964)

Ballard's disaster quartet persistently explores the latent psychological forces behind personal and global destruction. By working within the confines of the disaster narrative these fictions of radical transformation offer a substantial challenge to the 'cosiness' of the genre, while, at the same time, continuing to articulate broad concerns surrounding the nature of Cold War political and military organisation. Ballard's short story 'The Terminal Beach' ([1964] 2006) offers a more specific evaluation of the nuclear age by allowing the story's protagonist to slip into 'thermonuclear time' (TB: 33) and unearth a collection of unexplored desires driving hydrogen bomb tests. Published in the wake of the Partial Test-Ban Treaty and visualising the abandoned remnants of a nuclear testing site, the story represents Ballard's undeviating take on the era of thermonuclear build-up, while additionally signifying Ballard's shift away from disaster narratives and towards the contemporary dystopias that would preoccupy his fiction in the late sixties and early seventies.[39]

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[39]In an interview that appeared in *Interzone* (106, April 1996), Ballard explained that 'The Terminal Beach' 'marks a link between the science fiction of my first ten years, and the next phase of my writings that led to *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash*' (22). Cited in Gasiorek (2005): 61.

The story is set on the Eniwetok Atoll in the Pacific Ocean, the location for the first ever hydrogen bomb test in 1952 and a few hundred miles from Bikini Atoll, the site of the largest nuclear explosion by the United States in 1954.[40] The protagonist, Traven, is a former Air Force pilot who has landed on the island following the death of his wife and son in a car accident. As with Kerans in *The Drowned World* – who repels collectivism to embark on his own personal journey into the psychic avenues of the new order – Traven is equally drawn to the almost entirely abandoned Atoll where he suffers increasingly from malnutrition and Beriberi, yet is simultaneously offered revelatory spectral glimpses of the latent psychological content that fuelled the thermonuclear age. Just as Kerans achieves some form of personal fulfilment by sailing relentlessly into the heat, here, too, Traven is drawn to the epicentre of destructive events in the hope of acquiring psychological nourishment. H. Bruce Franklin (1979) criticises this tendency in Ballard, arguing that 'he therefore remains incapable of understanding the alternative to these death forces' (93), yet John Gray (1999) counters this by emphasising that Ballard is not interested in offering political solutions but rather in demonstrating 'what individual fulfilment might mean in a time of nihilism'.[41] With this in mind, the overt Cold War setting of 'The Terminal Beach' does not necessitate a definable political message about the morality of nuclear testing, but instead purposefully complicates the prospect of any solid political conclusions by focusing on the abstract disruption of time, space and identity when living in a period of nuclear tension. As with *The Drowned World*, Ballard's story creates an overdetermined landscape akin to a Surrealist artwork or Pop Art collage that reflects the complex array of competing and contradictory signs that litter contemporary culture.

While it is true then that Ballard resists producing any overt moral statements on the highly charged topic of nuclear testing, the story is set in what Colin Greenland (1983) labels as 'the unambiguous present' (110), which allows the text to offer a degree of contemporaneous evaluation. Indeed, Traven internally constructs the

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[40] For a detailed account of US nuclear testing in the Pacific and its subsequent controversies see Barton C. Hacker (1994).
[41] John Gray (1999). Modernity and its Discontents. *New Statesman*. 10th May. Accessed online 10 January 2012: http://www.newstatesman.com/199905100041

concept of the 'Pre-Third' (TB: 31), which he reasons to be an appropriate title for the historical period immediately following the Second World War:

> The Pre-Third: the period was characterized in Traven's mind above all by its moral and psychological inversions, by its sense of the whole of history, and in particular of the immediate future – the two decades, 1945–65 – suspended from the quivering volcano's lip of World War III. (31-32)

Whereas Ballard's catastrophe novels look back from a visibly post-apocalyptic future to untangle the psychic drivers behind human extinction, the contemporary setting of 'The Terminal Beach' chillingly asserts that mid-sixties society itself sits in the aftermath of catastrophe. As Greenland (1983) states, 'the catastrophe – the development of a thermonuclear weapon – has already happened' (110). Therefore, just as Kerans gives himself over to the revelatory liminal spaces of the lagoon world – which is after the initial disaster but prior to his own personal apocalypse – Traven is also wilfully marooned in an in-between landscape. He is placed in the inescapable 'Pre-Third', an epoch unique to the early decades of the Cold War, after the atomic destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki – symbolised on the island by the crumbling B-29 Superfortresses – yet before the impending global apocalypse of thermonuclear war, to which the Atoll is a ghostly precursor.

The derelict Atoll is littered with the debris of the Cold War state – abandoned bombers, scientific testing stations and blockhouses. However, the state itself is notable for its absence. Simon Sellars (2009), in analysing Ballard's Pacific fictions, argues that locations such as Eniwetok require 'no need to even allude to the presence of the State, for these are *stateless* worlds – "between owners"' (45). Eniwetok is not only a key locale in the social formation of the 'Pre-Third', but it is also a place for Cold War detritus, the storehouse for the junk left behind after the nuclear tests. As with many of Ballard's protagonists, Traven wishes to stay amongst the wreckage of the dystopic island as it is within this space that he pieces together the processes that led to the looming nuclear conflagration embodied within the arms race. As he forages across the island, Traven begins to create collages from the objects he discovers, at one point attaching a list of popular songs to a chart of mutated chromosomes:

> In the field office he came across a series of large charts of mutated chromosomes. He rolled them up and took them back to his bunker. The

abstract patterns were meaningless, but during his recovery he amused himself by devising suitable titles for them. (Later, passing the aircraft dump on one of his forays, he found the half-buried juke-box, and tore the list of records from the selection panel, realizing that these were the most appropriate captions. Thus embroidered, the charts took on many layers of associations.) (39-40)

Ballard's Atoll, abandoned by a nation-state no longer conducting atmospheric nuclear testing, is therefore a landscape littered with the cultural fragments of the immediate past. Sellars (2009) argues, for this reason, that the island 'becomes a space where social relations can begin again, where the social order is de-commissioned, recombined, reconstructed and reshaped in ways that subvert dominant systems of thought' (53). Just as Kerans is free to explore, without restraint, the geological layers of 'archaeopsychic time' (*DW*: 44), Traven, alone on the Atoll, is released amidst the crumbling infrastructure to reinterpret the codes of meaning subsumed beneath the militarised Cold War state.

Yet, the plethora of objects scattered across the irradiated island also captures the uncanny contradictions of the Cold War. Similar to the early collages of Independent Group member Eduardo Paolozzi, and British Pop Art more broadly, 'The Terminal Beach' visualises the period's juxtaposition between military violence and glossy modernity. Within the island's 'coded' landscape, Traven is able to excavate the concealed logic behind the thermonuclear arms race and in doing so acquire an unsettling glimpse as to the Bomb's place within the terrain of Cold War culture. By collating ephemeral objects from around the island, Traven establishes 'many layers of associations' (53), which directly links to the overall aims of Pop Art as set out in Alison and Peter Smithson's article 'But Today We Collect Ads' ([1956] 1990), where they declare the importance of 'the objects on the beaches, the piece of paper blowing about the street, the throw-away object and the pop-package' (186). Traven's collage is thus an attempt to decipher the subtexts of the everyday – a jukebox list and a chromosome chart from a science lab – and in doing so discover his own personal response to the historical machinations of the 'Pre-Third'.

As the narrative unfolds and Traven rummages further amongst the island's symbols of its nuclear past, he begins to generate his own response to the hydrogen

bomb, declaring to one of the remaining scientists, Dr. Osborne, that 'for me the hydrogen bomb was a symbol of absolute *freedom*. I feel it's given me the right – the obligation, even – to do anything I want' (TB: 43). Greenland (1983) interprets Traven's somewhat frenzied embrace of the Bomb as an exercise by Ballard in counteracting the emotional opposition to nuclear weapons expressed most vocally by the protest poets of the fifties and sixties:

> This deliberate suppression of expected emotional response separates Ballard from the protesters [...]. He perceives clearly man's complicity with this catastrophe of his own making. While it seems a dreadful mistake and fills his conscious mind with horror, it is also the ultimate tool, the end of his technological drive. Man now has absolute power over his own existence: the power of uncreation. (111)

The hydrogen bomb is perceived as liberating to Traven for precisely this reason as it necessitates the terminal point in humanity's search for technological control. What is intriguing about Ballard's ostensibly nihilistic view of the contemporary is that while it correlates with, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno's ([1944] 2002) assertion that 'the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity' (1), Ballard's fictions do not provide either a fiery polemic against, or a necessarily meek submission to, the follies of human misadventure. Instead, his protagonists invariably embrace the transformative process that confronts them.

Indeed, Traven becomes immersed in the psychological space of the 'Pre-Third'. Recognising the disaster that awaits as well as the catastrophes of the previous war, he celebrates the liminality of his present condition as he reconfigures the symbols of the past and future in his terminal bunker. Near the end of the story Traven embarks on a series of goodbyes to the external world as he attempts to remain within this new reality:

> 'Goodbye, *Eniwetok*,' he murmured.
> Somewhere there was a flicker of light, as if one of the blocks, like a counter on an abacus, had been plucked away.
> *Goodbye, Los Alamos*. Again, a block seemed to vanish. The corridors around him remained intact, but somewhere in his mind had appeared a small interval of neutral space.
> *Goodbye, Hiroshima*.
> *Goodbye, Alamagordo*.
> '*Goodbye, Moscow, London, Paris, New York...*' (45)

By the story's conclusion however, Traven has not constructed an alternative temporality. He remains haunted by ghostly visions of his wife and child and the 'burning bombers' (50) that plague his dreams. This illuminates the political ambiguity of Ballard's fiction. As Luckhurst (1997) states, Ballard's protagonists invariably encounter and revel in moments of transcendence yet this is simultaneously 'offered, but denied' (69). Traven's expedition into the condensed landscape of the Atoll presents him with a frozen image of the amassed symbols of the 'Pre-Third'. By attempting to piece them together he is able to unpick their latent content, yet as he stands outside his bunker alongside the dead Japanese pilot that he has positioned as a sentry, Traven continues to feel the presence of external time systems speeding away from the epoch of the 'Pre-Third'.

Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds* (1964 – 70): Issues 174 and 177

Ballard's early decade fiction set in motion a drastic evolution of the English disaster narrative, which appropriately reflected a changing social and political climate post-Suez and in the years surrounding the Cuban missile crisis. Yet, the second half of the decade marked a further shift in cultural atmosphere and attitudes. The early decade activities of CND – charted at the start of this chapter – had expressed a broader unease about the terms of the post-war consensus in an era of widespread nuclear proliferation, and this suspicion of Cold War technocratic order filtered into other movements that emerged in the later part of the decade and were displayed most prominently in the vociferous protests against the Vietnam war, the 1968 student uprisings and the rise of counter-culture. As Veldman (1994) states in her assessment of CND's political legacy:

> The call for participatory democracy that became the rallying cry of protest movements across the world later in the 1960s was at its heart a rejection of the alienating effects of technological development and the corresponding institutional structures that were emerging in the postwar world. To some CNDers, the bomb represented the elevation of the expert and the triumph of technology at the expense of ordinary people. (202)

It is all too tempting therefore to examine the latter half of the decade as a period whereby radical urges finally blossomed and mounted a concerted attack on technocratic omnipotence, yet this would fail to address the uncertainties,

insecurities and, above all, paranoia of political activists, artists and writers trying to unpack the nature of increasingly hi-tech systems of political manipulation and organisation.

Emily Apter's (2006) recent assessment of contemporary systems of paranoia furthers this sentiment in relation to literary culture. Focusing on the early fiction of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, Apter argues that

> Pynchon draws on theories of biofeedback, quantum mechanics, Fibonacci sequences, behaviorism, pattern recognition, artificial intelligence, black boxes, game systems and probability theory hatched in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s [...] The writing of Pynchon and DeLillo, one could argue, is as much a symptom of this postwar paranoid culture as its literary archive. Their work imports into literature the mesh of cognitive modeling and conspiratorial globalism that gives rise to theories of paranoid planetarity. (367-68)

For such reasons, it seemed apposite, by the mid-sixties, for writers to express uncertainty as to the rapidity of technological transformation in the post-war world, which, in turn, prompted deeper existential questions regarding individual freedom within blossoming networks and mediascapes. As Leo Bersani (1989) puts it in his assessment of *Gravity's Rainbow*, it was hence reasonable for writers to ask whether we can escape 'being manipulated - perhaps even destroyed - by such systems?' (103).

In their appropriately titled essay 'The Hi-Tech Cold War', Pavitt and Crowley (2008) provide an important example of how media systems were increasingly perceived as the drivers of cultural experience in the late 1960s. They note that 'television began to organise history' (179), citing the moon landing as the period's landmark televisual event, illustrated appropriately by the fact that Neil Armstrong's initial task upon landing on the moon was 'to switch on a television camera' (179). They continue by exploring the parallel ideological role of media in the Soviet Union, pointing out that unsurprisingly the 21st July 1969 saw the broadcast of 'a Soviet musical followed by a brief announcement of the moon walk in *Pravda*' (179). This analysis illustrates, in some ways, how the Cold War was witnessing a strategic shift in the sixties. While the previous decade had seen an overt ideological battle fought-out through a nuclear arms race, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile

Crisis the technological and cultural Cold War solidified while the actual military conflict shifted, to a greater extent, to proxy wars.[42]

The most prominent and quotable theoriser of the changing landscape of Cold War culture in the 1960s was Marshall McLuhan, whose examination of developing technologies helped to characterise the altering relationship between individuals and burgeoning media systems. McLuhan ([1967] 2008) developed the notion of the 'global village' (63) which emphasised the world wide interconnectedness sustained through the ever-increasing use of contemporary technology. Central to McLuhan's argument, which recalls in certain respects the ideas of Clarke in the early 1950s, was the idea that traditional parochial political constructs no longer had relevance in this new world order. Indeed, McLuhan stated that 'old civic, state and national groupings have become unworkable. Nothing can be further from the spirit of the new technology than "a place for everything and everything in its place". You can't go home again' (16). McLuhan also contemplated how mediascapes altered the nature of warfare, noting that the Cold War had become an example of an 'information war' (138). For McLuhan, military prowess had become secondary to electronic information:

> Real, total war has become information war. It is being fought by subtle electronic informational media – under cold conditions, and constantly. The cold war is the real war front – a surround – involving everybody – all the time – everywhere. Whenever hot wars are necessary these days, we conduct them in the backyards of the world with the old technologies. (138)

While McLuhan's theories in some ways offered a potentially utopian interaction with technologies which had previously evoked unease, they also hardened such disquiet because they tore apart the notion that the individual had a direct, civic relationship with the state and instead were entering into a world of infinite flux that in itself may be open to political and psychological manipulation from the very state systems from which they had hoped to be released.

This sense of paranoia as to the extent of the Cold War state's controlling reach was a perpetual concern for the counter-cultural movements that developed during

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[42]The prolonged conflict in Vietnam being the most recognisable of these, although the Korean War (1950-53) was a notable precursor. Direct nuclear tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States would, of course, re-emerge in the eighties following the election of Ronald Reagan.

the late 1960s. On the one hand, the use of psychedelic drugs and the open experimentation with alternative forms of living was perceived as a radical break from the conformities of the suburban nuclear family and as a genuine attempt at combating the prescribed values subtly infusing media systems. Yet, accompanying this optimism there were underlying doubts as to the sustainability of movements that prided themselves on chemical intoxication, and additionally, fear that the broad left itself was subject to clandestine manipulation by intelligence agencies.[43] In *Bomb Culture* (1968) Jeff Nuttall expands upon this nervousness by directly addressing the underground movement, of which he was part, and declaring that 'drugs are an excellent strategy against society but a poor alternative to it' (248). Contrary therefore to the axiomatic view of the 'swinging' late sixties, with its happy combination of drugs, sex and oppositional politics, there was in actuality a continued debate as to the long term viability of the counter-cultural project in sustaining its challenge to the all-pervading structures of the Cold War state.

Nuttall (1968) proceeds by questioning the psychology behind the counter-culture, arguing that in a culture dominated by the Bomb the actions of sixties radicals may have been merely 'a different excuse for exactly the same destructive drives as the so-called squares' (140). Whereas the 'squares' retreated into their comfortable jobs and suburban homes in psychological defence against the prospect of nuclear war, Nuttall asks whether counter-cultural attitudes offered a similar set of 'defence mechanisms' (141) against the ominous image of the Bomb. Nuttall thus looks apprehensively at the gestures of counter-culture, claiming 'the cool element' (141) to be in some ways 'an extension of masturbation' (141). In this description, the performance of counter-culture becomes a narcissistic front to the overriding traumas of the nuclear age. What Nuttall illuminates here is the problem of oppositional gestures in an environment increasingly determined by media landscapes that, ostensibly, appear diverse and fractious. This environment would nonetheless prove inspirational to the New Wave, whose brand of SF aimed to indulge in the paranoia of the period while using the language and visualisations of hi-tech media and consumerism to create new forms of literary representation.

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[43]See Hugh Wilford (2003) and Frances Stonor Saunders (2000). Both examine the secret funding of *Encounter* magazine and the CIA's continual interest in leftist intellectuals.

Michael Moorcock's editorship of *New Worlds* magazine between 1964 and 1970 would see the publication increasingly focus on fusing SF writing with competing art forms – predominantly those from the visual arts. The magazine also purposefully confronted the social, cultural and political debates of the decade, and encouraged by the visionary proclamations of Moorcock and Ballard particularly, sought to redefine the imaginative parameters of SF to accurately reflect the changing social and technological landscape of the mid-sixties. As Luckhurst (2005) argues:

> Moorcock's aim, stated in his first editorial, was to redefine SF not as 'science fiction' but as the more inclusive category 'speculative fantasy', and with this to promise nothing less than 'an important revitalisation of the literary mainstream'. His exemplary writer for the 'ad-saturated, Bomb-dominated, power-corrupted times' was William Burroughs. (141 – 42)

While the likes of Ballard naturally revelled in the magazine's refocus to incorporate developing literary trends outside of SF, it is perhaps surprising that in the closing years of the decade the older and more established figure of Brian Aldiss would also become a prominent figure associated with the British New Wave. Aldiss never fully immersed himself in Moorcock's *New Worlds* project, remaining in Colin Greenland's (1983) words 'an ambiguous figure' (69) who had established himself to the extent that he was published by Faber and appeared on the surface to be 'at odds with the rebellious and defensive poses of his 1960s' confederates' (69). Yet, when *New Worlds* appeared on the brink of financial collapse in 1966 it was Aldiss who acted as chief organiser in obtaining an Arts Council grant which ensured the magazine's survival for a few further years.[44]

While Aldiss's own experimental output will be explored shortly through an examination of his 1969 novel *Barefoot in the Head* – which was originally published as a series of short pieces in *New Worlds* – it is worth first investigating, in greater depth, the transformation of the magazine under Moorcock's editorship. Previously edited by Edward Carnell and focusing largely on the publication of what Mike Ashley (2005) calls the 'hard-science story' (232), under Moorcock's guidance the magazine became the natural home for new forms in SF. Indeed, the generic boundaries of SF were challenged during this period through the magazine's

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[44]For slightly fuller accounts of Aldiss's financial rescue mission see Luckhurst (2005): 145 and Greenland (1983): 70.

continual publication of experimental narratives set contemporaneously or in the near-future, which invariably dodged the technical language associated with hard SF, or when it did, looked to concurrently mock or distort the sub-genre. This, in turn, created a wider question about how to properly define such disparate types of speculative writing. As we have seen, Ballard's 1962 editorial 'Which Way to Inner Space?' outlined a series of tropes that may contribute to a 'complete speculative poetry and fantasy of science' ([1962] 1997: 198), which went some way to identifying how 'inner space' writing sought to utilise the language of SF as part of a broader project to examine the underlying psychologies of contemporary existence. However, Moorcock perhaps provides a clearer literary history in his preface to Langdon Jones's anthology *The New SF* (1970):

> The visionary impulse has, it seems to me, become more sophisticated since the days of Wells and Huxley. Now writers assume increasingly the responsibility of the poet – they seek to match their techniques to their vision. They continue to invent imagery that suits their subject matter and they invent ways of story-telling to suit both. Thus, I feel, they have begun to create a genuinely new kind of fiction in keeping with the attitudes of people who belong, spiritually, if nothing else, to the last quarter of this century. (8)

Moorcock therefore traces antecedence through the likes of Wells and Huxley, but also characterises the new styles in 1960s SF as acutely tuned to contemporary phenomena and, in doing so, not bound by strict genre codes. Moorcock continues by producing a varied list of people who have all 'drawn heavily on SF imagery' (7) in order to highlight the increasing overlap between avant-garde visual artists (Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi are mentioned) and filmmakers (Moorcock picks out Chris Marker, François Truffaut and Stanley Kubrick among others) with the otherwise popular terrain of SF. Indeed, in the introduction to a later collection of *New Worlds* stories, Moorcock (1983) notes that he very much intended to 'blend the artistic avant garde with the worlds of science and popular fiction' (22). Moorcock and his coterie were therefore SF fans, but they were also aware of its limitations and endeavoured to create fictions that weaved between genre classifications in order to reflect the growing complexities of mediascapes, consumerism and their overshadowing by the continued threat of nuclear conflict.

To reflect the hybridisation of SF with other popular art forms, Moorcock was determined to transform not only the content of his publication, but also its design. Moorcock had initially envisaged turning *New Worlds* into a glossy, art-style magazine, but was at first restricted to the pocketbook design used under Carnell.[45] However, by July 1967 and helped, partly, by the Arts Council grant, Moorcock produced a freshly designed edition of the magazine. Appearing in near-A4 size and displaying M.C. Escher's lithograph print *Relativity* on the front cover of the first new issue, *New Worlds* now stood apart from the standard SF fanzine in both its written content and visual form. What was also noticeable about the front cover was its bold redefinition of the magazine's literary allegiance, no longer was it strictly a Science Fiction publication, but instead the front cover housed a broader reaching sub-title which read 'Speculative Fiction'. This allowed Moorcock to remain loosely affiliated to Science Fiction, while facilitating a wider exploration of contemporary trends in art, literature, science and technology. Accordingly, a key component of Moorcock's editorship was in contemplating the wider social and political application of scientific development. While the short fiction of writers like Ballard and Aldiss in the late sixties continually assessed the links between technological landscapes and the workings of the psyche, the non-fiction within the publication also sought to unearth the political uses of Cold War technology. During Carnell's reign, *New Worlds* had contained lengthy essays on scientific discoveries, but there was an apolitical or even celebratory quality to these articles, whereas Moorcock was determined to print material that interrogated the Cold War contexts of such breakthroughs. This therefore created a unity between the fiction and the non-fiction contained within the magazine. Rather than merely reporting, the non-fiction in Moorcock's reinvented *New Worlds* – and in particular the 'leading article' section at the front of each edition – was in itself imaginative, contemplating the uses and abuses of science and technology, which, in turn, complemented the proceeding imaginative writing.

It is appropriate, therefore, to examine two specific editions of the new look *New Worlds* from 1967. The first I want to consider is issue 174, published at the height

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[45]See Ashley (2005): 'Moorcock's one disappointment when taking over *New Worlds* was that his desire for an art-format magazine was not acceptable' (238).

of the 'Summer of Love', a few months after the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. This edition usefully demonstrates the broad scope of the new project, containing a piece by Christopher Finch on the work of Eduardo Paolozzi, Brian Aldiss's short story 'Multi-Value Motorway' – which would later form part of *Barefoot in the Head* – an article by an Air Force General, Thomas H. Crouch, on the space race and Michael Butterworth's apocalyptic dead astronaut story 'Concentrate 1'. Issue 177 from November 1967 is also interesting to explore as it contains a sustained focus on the Cold War, exploring military psychology in the lead article 'Peace and Paradox', before contemplating artwork influenced by the conflict through another art-criticism piece by Christopher Finch, this time focusing on the work of Colin Self. Both editions are rigorous in their reporting of scientific discoveries, yet, as with Ballard's early decade catastrophe writing, there is a doubtful tone in both the stories and articles with regard to the role of science within late sixties society, with suspicion typically expressed towards its use within the military-industrial complex of the Cold War.

The scientific articles contained in issues 174 and 177 are accordingly worth comparing with the type of science writing produced during Carnell's editorship. In an article from issue 80 (published February 1959) Kenneth Johns explores 'The Meson Story'. The piece is a historical account on the discovery of meson particles, which focuses almost exclusively on explaining the 'hard' science. Yet when Johns indulges in broader evaluation he does so with recognisable neutrality:

> Nuclear physics is one of the fastest advancing – and most popularised of the sciences. Now backed by vast expenditure and awe-inspiring machines the basis of present-day physics is often less understood by the layman than was the work of the alchemists three hundred years ago [...] A-bombs, H-bombs, nuclear power stations and the promise of H-power to come are greater miracles than any pagan deity dared dream of promising. (52)

Additionally, Johns's article appears in isolation, placed between John Kippax's story 'Friday', which contemplates human identity on a far-off planet, and Donald Malcolm's fictional contemplation of the psychology of sleep entitled 'The Stuff of Dreams'. This is at odds with the later editions of the magazine where related imaginative writing and social commentary accompanies reports of scientific discovery. For example, in issue 177 John W. Gardner's article 'Off-Beat

Generation' tackles the question of energy supply for a burgeoning world population and is included a few pages after a long extract from Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, which is primarily concerned with the prospect of overpopulation. Similarly, in issue 174, Thomas H. Crouch's essay 'New Directions in Medicine' praises 'what space-age knowledge and technology have done and can contribute to the advancement of medicine' (56), yet is followed on the next page by Michael Butterworth's story 'Concentrate 1', which explores, in part, a failed and traumatic space flight. While literary style was gleefully experimented with and subject matter broadened considerably, Moorcock's *New Worlds* also intentionally examined, in this manner, the scientific and political order of the era, with the content considering both the social and imaginative consequences of scientific paradigms.

This ambivalent relationship with science is expressed clearly in the lead article contained in issue 177 entitled 'Peace and Paradox' by American writer John T. Sladek, with the contents page identifying Christopher Priest as co-author. The essay is an exploration of game theory and its application by thinkers such as Herman Kahn in *On Thermonuclear War* ([1960] 2007) – in which Kahn argued that a nuclear war could be fought successfully if one treated 'some aspects of human tragedy in an objective and quantitative fashion' (41). While the article provides a detailed explanation of decision and game theory, it is also quick to comment on its misuse by political and military strategists. Indeed, the opening paragraph of the article expresses full support for nuclear disarmament and mocks conservative reactions to those campaigning for peace:

> On the subject of thermonuclear war there have been spoken a few hysterical truths and a lot of dispassionate nonsense. Surely everyone, with the exception of a very few genuine psychopaths, wants to "ban the bomb", if only the U.S. and U.S.S.R. could find some agreeable way to do this. Yet we find anyone who recommends it is openly labelled at once a freak, crank or comsymp. (Sladek: 2)

The article sets out its political position immediately and even as the workings of game theory are examined, finds space for a series of attacks upon its Cold War application. It is pointed out that theorists of nuclear war have only the ability to feed problems into computers and 'rip out answers to them' (3) without maintaining 'a tie-in to reality' (3). Equally, the supposed rationalism of Kahn's theory of nuclear

war is critically confronted, with the writer asking 'how can deaths be lumped into equations along with abstract entities like "the American image", "the democratic way" or "U.S. prestige in South-east Asia"?' (5). Sladek reacts to the dehumanising effects of nuclear strategy, and as with films from the period, notably Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and Peter Watkins's docu-drama *The War Game* (1965), which will be discussed in the next chapter, contests the logic behind such cold calculations when confronting the doomsday scenario of large-scale thermonuclear warfare. Furthermore, Sladek challenges political motivations behind such theories, associating them with what Herbert Marcuse ([1964] 1986) called 'the language of total administration' (85) whereby 'two-dimensional, dialectical modes of thought' (85) are subsumed by those fashioned by a form of technological determinism – in this case expressed through the implication that nuclear war is statistically 'winnable' and thus capable of being incorporated into a wider nationalistic discourse.

Here, and in Moorcock's *New Worlds* more generally, links are drawn between the military-industrial complex of the Cold War and emerging scientific theories and technologies. This is emphasised by Ballard in an interview with George MacBeth included in *The New SF* (1970) anthology. Ballard argues that 'the new science fiction' (59) rejects the scientific confidence of earlier forms and is instead 'introverted, possibly pessimistic rather than optimistic, much less certain of its own territory' (59). Furthermore, Ballard singles out American golden age SF as the specific style that the New Wave was seeking to disrupt:

> There's a tremendous confidence that radiates through all modern American science fiction of the period 1930 to 1960; the certainty that science and technology can solve all problems. This is certainly not the dominant form of science fiction now. I think science fiction is becoming something much more speculative, much less convinced about the magic of science and the moral authority of science. (59-60)

Both the fiction and non-fiction in Moorcock's *New Worlds* is doubtful as to the likely successes of science and technology. As demonstrated by Sladek's article, the magazine refuses to divorce science from its social and political contexts, exposing, instead, its contemporaneous misuse through polemical articles and pursuing its potential consequences through the speculative imagination.
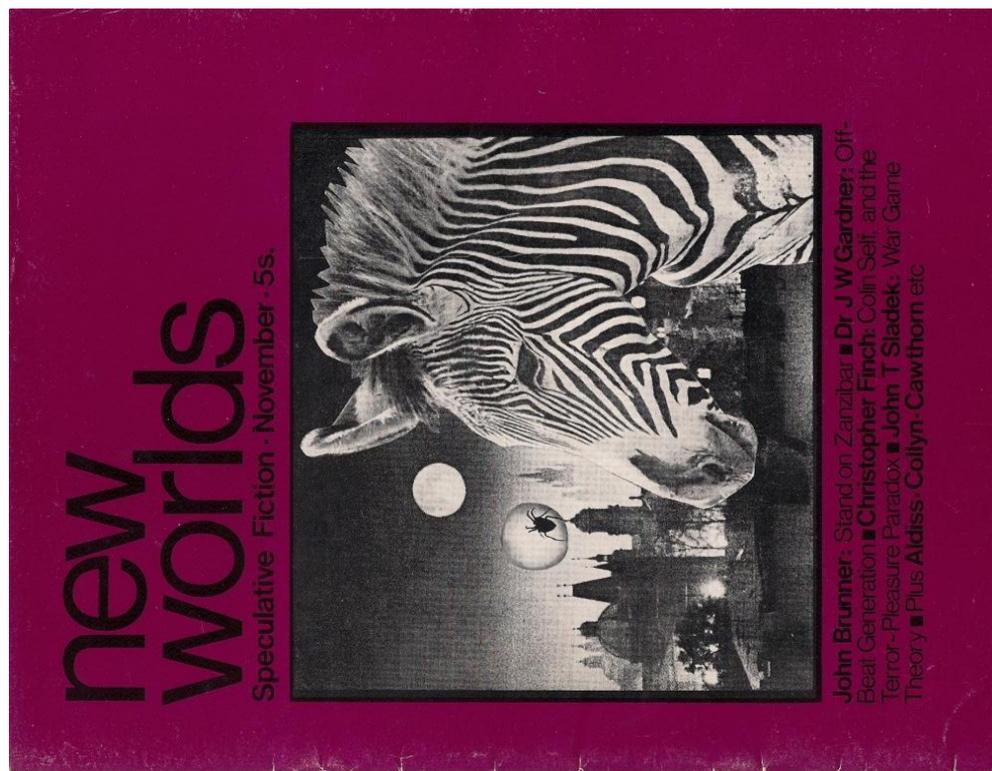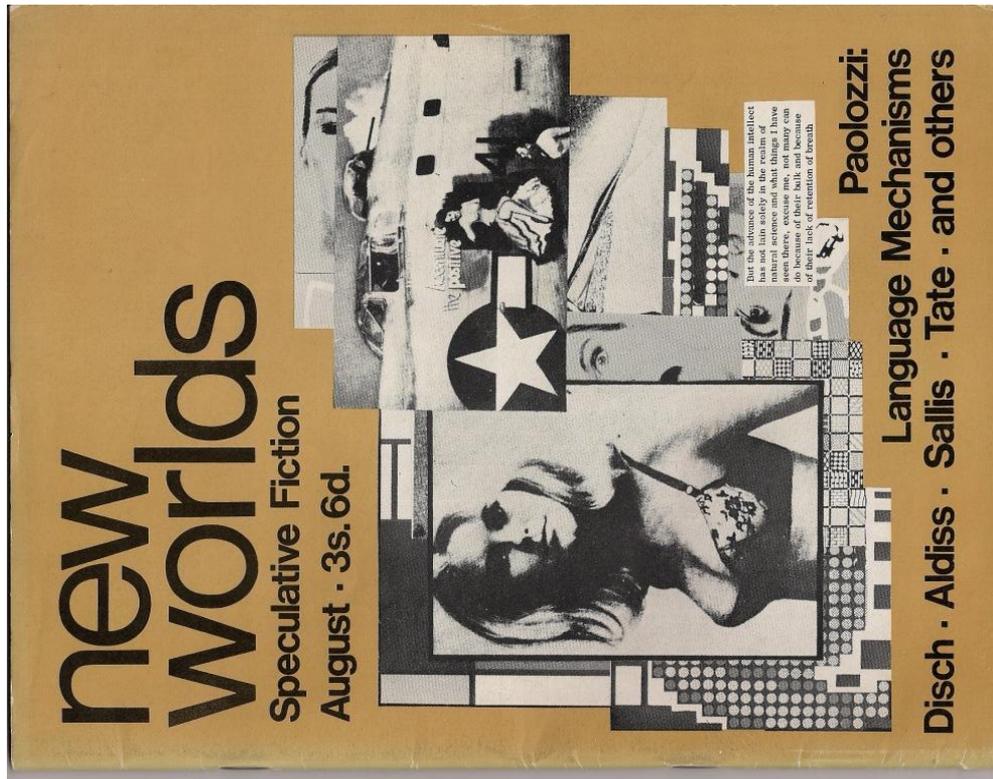
Figure 4 (top). © *New Worlds*, Volume 51, No. 174 (1967). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Figure 5 (bottom). © *New Worlds*, Volume 51, No. 177 (1967). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

The fiction included in issues 174 and 177 therefore reflects this ambivalence towards science, technology and the Cold War. In 174 the publication of a section from Thomas M. Disch's *Camp Concentration* as well as Aldiss's 'Multi-Value Motorway' offers imaginative postulations on military science and experimentation. Similarly in 177 the extract from Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* offers a cut-up vision of future dystopia, with George Collyn's 'Wine on an Empty Stomach' also charting the fruitless rebuilding of community following apocalypse. All of these stories reflect not only an experimental urge unseen in earlier Science Fiction – Aldiss and Brunner happily use stream-of-consciousness, while Collyn's story is written as a kind of prophetic, dream-like parable – but they simultaneously enter into a dialogue with sixties political culture. Aldiss tackles the sustainability of hallucinogen-infused counter-culture, Disch investigates the misuse of drugs by systems of power in a time of war and Brunner speculates on political responses to a population boom. Such overlapping themes were not coincidental and, as previously noted, they invariably provided imaginative counterpoints to non-fiction articles contained in the same issue. Ashley (2005) relates that Moorcock and associate editor Langdon Jones 'spent a lot of their time encouraging writers and explaining just what they were seeking' (240), which indicates that the convergence of themes in each edition was a consequence of Moorcock's broader aim to make the magazine not simply a radical SF fanzine, but also a vehicle for serious contemporary comment and fictional experimentation.

A useful example of the transformation in literary style and emphasis under Moorcock can be found in Michael Butterworth's story 'Concentrate 1' from issue 174. Butterworth was a regular contributor to *New Worlds* in the late sixties and would also collaborate with Moorcock for his novels *The Time of the Hawklords* (1976) and *Queens of Deliria* (1977), which were fictional off-shoots to the real-life rock band Hawkwind.[46] Indeed, there is an interesting link here between SF, the experimentation of *New Worlds* and contemporaneous popular music. In the early seventies Hawkwind would become, in Phil Hardy's (2001) terms, 'the mascots of

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[46]See John Clute (2012). Butterworth, Michael. In: John Clute, David Langford, Peter Nicholls and Graham Sleight (eds.) *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. London: Gollancz. Accessed 26 March 2013: http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/butterworth_michael

Britain's underground media and burgeoning alternative society'[47] and Moorcock himself would later collaborate with the group on their 1975 album *Warrior on the Edge of Time*. The band's counter-cultural reputation coupled with their consistent use of SF and fantasy imagery neatly demonstrates both the disparate range of alternative cultures in late sixties and early seventies Britain, as well as highlighting the proliferation of SF beyond the boundaries of magazine and pulp fiction; a proliferation reflected in the titles and covers of Hawkwind albums such as *In Search of Space* (1971). Butterworth's 'Concentrate 1' is a mere two pages long and is broken up into five fragmentary sub-sections, with each containing a separate internalised monologue. The deliberate reconsideration of received SF traits in the story exemplifies the New Wave's wilful experimentation with form, whilst concurrently aiming to transcend the traditional demarcation between genre fiction and avant-garde literature and art; something that Kingsley Amis (1981) would later deride as an unseemly meeting of 'shock tactics, tricks with typography, one-line chapters, strained metaphors, obscurities, obscenities, drugs, oriental religions and left-wing politics'.[48] Butterworth's narrative, while not conforming to all of Amis's objections, nonetheless makes use of interiority and non-linearity as a means of adjusting to the rapidly changing social and artistic climate of the late sixties rather than as a way of producing a form of agitprop that Amis crudely associates with New Wave SF.

The first section of the story, 'Fragments of a Letter found in a dead Astronauts Possessions', inverts the conventions of space opera by representing space travel as the facilitator of disturbing dreamscapes. As with Ballard's 'condensed novels' of the same period, Butterworth fuses scientific language with dense metaphorical prose:

> Space is a matrix of avenues, cold planes of continuity. Human feature is blurred by the spiralling patterns of space, rendered insignificant by their continual cone formation and wave within wave fluctuation. It becomes an

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[47]Phil Hardy (2001) *The Faber Companion to 20th Century Popular Music*. London: Faber and Faber, no page number. Online edition, accessed 26 February 2013:
http://www.credoreference.com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/entry/ffcpop/hawkwind
[48] Kingsley Amis (ed.) (1981) *The Golden Age of Science Fiction*. Cited in J.G. Ballard ([1981] 1997). New Means Worse. *A User's Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews.* London: Flamingo, 190.

inverted reassemblement of its actual makeup, a highway of space and its sized, ever-changing globular designs. (Butterworth: 57)

The journey through space is therefore envisioned as a nightmarish juxtaposition between hi-technology and the cold darkness of the universe. This is encapsulated in the second section, 'Deep Freeze Unit for Hungry Spacers', where the lonely traveller, Clalvalar, tries to escape a boiling planet for 'the cold and purple lozenge of his deep freeze unit' (57). In both fragmentary narratives, the topical late sixties issue of space travel is not perceived as a monumental sociological opportunity for colonisation beyond earth, but as the creator of psychological trauma. In this way, Butterworth's story pre-empts the claustrophobic visualisations of space travel in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), with Tarkovsky's work, in particular, exploring the potential unleashing of spectral psychologies through long-distance interplanetary travel.

The final three sections of the story are set on earth as a seeming antidote to this hellish visualisation of space. However, once again, we are presented with a solitary character trawling through an illusory landscape. The third section, 'The Catalogue of the Works of Man', depicts its protagonist jumping into a car and noting in fractured prose that 'I can't get these straight lines. Ads all over the place. Difficult to follow. Maybe if we tried the old library?' (57). Yet his search for substance is futile as he finds 'no records there' (58) and is left to wander amongst the 'leftovers of the white bones of the Men' (58) in an intangible hyper-reality of automobiles and advertisements. The apocalyptic sentiment of this section is then emphasised by the final two parts of the story. 'After Galactic War, From a Road on Earth' outlines the journey along a road at night where above 'set in the sky were the crystals of ships that had broken. Each chip was a silent last fleck of humanity' (58). While the concluding part, 'To be Read Indifferently', is a more direct comment on the contemporary, stating, in the final line, that 'A Heinz beancan label, for instance, makes a world of difference to your reasoning power – it virtually dulls it out. And those are the mental conditions you / I kind of wanted when we realised the end was at hand' (58). Set in landscapes overloaded with adverts and mass produced goods, the final sections of the story clearly nod towards Pop Art, with the Heinz bean can labels conjuring the image of a British counterpart to Andy Warhol's artwork

Campbell's Soup Cans (1962). Yet this playfulness is juxtaposed with a broader pessimism as Butterworth laments the creation of a Marcusian 'Happy Consciousness' (Marcuse [1964] 1986: 85) through the abundance of consumer goods that 'dulls out' a broader evaluation of the unfolding apocalypse.

Similarly to George Collyn's story 'Wine on an Empty Stomach' from issue 177, which concerns itself with the attempts to relocate meaning after societal breakdown, Butterworth's narrative depicts a world devoid of the authentic or tangible and instead envisions an atomised society, plagued by advertisements and haunted by the prospect of war. Butterworth's story is therefore broadly concerned with a sense of, in Fredric Jameson's (1991) terms, 'depthlessness' (6) in which simulacra has usurped any concrete formulation of the real. While Butterworth revels in the hallucinatory images this provokes, he ultimately mourns the intangibility of meaning. Indeed, the tone of the story reflects a general sentiment expressed within *New Worlds* in the late sixties, with the fiction included in the publication invariably turning away from the space race and towards the social and technological transformations within consumer culture. In doing this, Butterworth's story inverts generic codes, killing off the astronaut-hero protagonist and representing space as a static realm 'drained of time' (57). It is the move to earth that facilitates the actual discoveries as the unnamed characters uncover the 'white bones of Men' (58) amidst a swirl of advertisements, making the narrative reminiscent of Ballard's earlier short story 'The Subliminal Man' (1963) where advertising dominates a society obsessed with the motorcar.

The cut-up style of many of the stories within *New Worlds* indicates the influence, most vividly, of William Burroughs, but their collage-like imagery was also influenced, through either osmosis or direct engagement, by the visual art contained within the pages of Moorcock's glossy version of the magazine. Issues 174 and 177 both contain articles by art writer Christopher Finch, with the first an evaluation of Eduardo Paolozzi's work and the second, entitled 'The Terror-Pleasure Paradox', analysing Colin Self's Cold War-themed collages. Each article is accompanied by double-page prints of the artist's work. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Paolozzi and the Independent Group had a notable influence on Ballard's early fiction and

Finch's article outlines Paolozzi's wider relevance to the late sixties by summarising his artistic exploration of language, media and technology. However, it is Finch's article in issue 177 which explores Colin Self's artworks that aligns most prominently with the recurring Cold War concerns that dominated the magazine during this period.

Finch explains that Self's 'chief concern is the paradoxes of terror and pleasure, which he sees as typical of the modern world' (30) and provides a series of quotes from Self that outline the social observations in his drawings:

> Cars (and other manufactured products) of a nation reveal many characteristics of that nation. Because people have adjusted to pessimistic events, leisure seems to have forced the upper hand at the moment. [...] Most people appear to have forced fear of warfare from their everyday existence by developing a greed for these comforts. (Self quoted by Finch: 30)

Self's artworks, with their uncomfortable juxtaposition of leisure culture alongside the machinery of nuclear warfare, therefore tie in neatly with the methods of the British New Wave in SF who were concurrently charting the unreality of consumerism and advertising, while conjoining such visions with the ever-present spectre of nuclear catastrophe. Furthermore, by including articles about, and prints by, visual artists, Moorcock was stretching the definitions of what SF could legitimately cover, while additionally recognising that the language and imagery of speculative narrative was beginning to extend beyond the confines of popular genre fiction. Paolozzi and Self's borrowing of SF images was enough to justify their inclusion in *New Worlds* alone, but their speculations on late sixties political culture signalled that they were also charting a similar terrain to Moorcock and his associated writers.

The major achievement of *New Worlds* during this period was then found in its use of the science fictional mode to reflect the social instability of the decade. As with modernist fiction of the earlier twentieth century, the isolated individuals of Ballard's catastrophes or Butterworth's fragmentary landscapes echo a wider feeling of dislocation in a society increasingly dominated by new mediascapes as well as the material threat of nuclear apocalypse. Accompanying this, Moorcock's *New Worlds*

was reacting to a brand of scientific optimism as recorded in American golden age SF, but its ambivalence towards science and technology is also a continuation of a notably British tradition. If we return to Wyndham's 1950s disasters, there is an evident anxiety directed towards scientific experimentation during the early period of the Cold War. Whilst Wyndham's political solutions are fundamentally conservative, its unease regarding the likelihood of irreversible social disaster as a consequence of the abuse of science and technology is traceable through large sections of post-war British SF. Moorcock's *New Worlds* was not fundamentally unique, therefore, in its scepticism towards scientific progress, but its radical legacy was found in its dismantling of genre orthodoxies and the political positions they invariably necessitated.

'There had been a war, a dislocation': Brian Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* (1969)

With these changes to form in mind, it is worth considering Brian Aldiss's own experimentation in the late sixties. As already noted, Aldiss was somewhat tentative in attaching himself to Moorcock's project, but nonetheless, coinciding with his financial rescue mission on behalf of *New Worlds*, Aldiss also started to publish a series of stories and novels that engaged directly with the New Wave aesthetic. In *An Age* (1967), *Report on Probability A* (1968) and *Barefoot in the Head: A European Fantasia* (1969), Aldiss experimented with received SF form to create fictions that aptly reflected the growing fragmentation of late sixties culture. The last of these three novels, with its vision of a near-future European dystopia, is the most directly relevant examination of sixties drug culture, the breakdown of Cold War states and the troubling question of what to build in its place. What is also noticeable about Aldiss's post-apocalyptic narrative is that whereas Ballard's disaster novels set out to distort the conventions of the Wyndhamesque catastrophe in order to uncover their latent dreamscapes, Aldiss looks to move even further in reforming the style of disaster narratives by fracturing language, inverting archetypal characterisation and incorporating different literary forms (in this case poetry) into the text.

Barefoot in the Head ([1969] 2000) details the journey of the novel's protagonist, Colin Charteris, following a devastating war which had seen Kuwait launch a wave of chemical weapons containing psychedelic drugs upon Europe. As the novel develops and the effects of the hallucinogens intensify, the prose becomes increasingly fragmented. Indeed, Peter Nicholls (1979) suggests that the work adopts 'a dense, punning style reminiscent of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*' (21). However, the novel does not entirely fall into such near impenetrable formal complexity, but instead makes use of splintered prose to illustrate, above all, the uncontrolled nature of Charteris's journey and the growing incoherency of his troupe of followers who perceive him as a messianic saviour.

Charteris begins the novel in France, a country which had remained neutral during what are recalled in the novel as the 'Acid Head Wars' (*BH*: 10)[49] and suffered very little from the chemical attacks. Yet, Charteris promptly feels disillusioned by the sterility of life in Metz where the pre-war structures remained surprisingly unchanged despite the radical transformations taking place in the rest of Europe: 'He saw these people as victims of an unworkable capitalistic system dying on its feet. They were extinct in their clothes' (9). He quickly flees to what he assumes is a fundamentally altered Britain, having been the first victims of the psychedelic bombs, but initially discovers a suburban enclave seemingly untouched by the disaster:

> This was a middle-class area, and unlike anywhere he had visited before. Roads of small neat houses and bungalows stretched away on all sides, crescents curved off and later rejoined the road, rebellion over. All were neatly labelled with sylvan names: Sherwood Forest Road, Dingley Dell Road, Herbivore Drive, Woodbine Walk, Placenta Place, Honeysuckle Avenue, Cowpat Avenue, Geranium Gardens, Clematis Close, Creosote Crescent, Laurustinus Lane. (33-34)

Charteris's instant revulsion at the apparently staid existence of people in Metz and England sets up a familiar critique of suburbia, yet the parody of parochial Englishness soon serves a further purpose that resonates more specifically with the political context of the late sixties.

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[49]Sections of *Barefoot in the Head* appeared as the 'Acid Head Wars' stories in *New Worlds*.

Charteris's unnamed guide through this typically English suburbia quickly states that 'this way of life is dead' (34) and that 'the values on which this mini-civilisation has been built have been swept away' (34). Accordingly, a schism is recorded whereby the solidity of tradition is overturned in the aftermath of an unprecedented chemically-induced psychological upheaval. This correlates with the clean break from conventionality advocated by sixties counter-culture whose aims Hewison (1986) outlines (in terms that recall Ballard) as being 'to ignore all boundaries and conventions, and as far as possible to escape the imposed definitions of material reality by exploring inner space' (86). But Aldiss's mocking of suburbia also subtly comments on the instability of this way of life during the Cold War. The residents of the sleepy vistas that Charteris is guided through have remained 'dedicated [...] to mechanical thought and action, which keep the serpent sleeping' (*BH*: 35). Their nuclear families and modern homes have insulated them from the thought of atomic or psychological terror, yet the chemical bombs that are slowly transforming the consciousness of the populace has simultaneously infiltrated suburban defences against impending war and psycho-social transformation. Similarly to *The Drowned World* where Ballard overcomes the problem of representing thermonuclear apocalypse by encoding it within the text through the ever-expanding nuclear furnace of the sun, Aldiss here replaces nuclear war with global chemical warfare, which facilitates a critique of suburban pretensions – by showing their slow disintegration – and allows for the mapping of new post-apocalyptic identities.

Furthermore, Aldiss's protagonist is alien to the rituals and attitudes of English suburbia, with Charteris originating from Serbia and noting that 'we aren't allowed this sort of private property in Jugoslavia' (34). While his ancestral heritage clearly illustrates a definable Cold War divide between communist and capitalist visions of property, it also represents a telling disruption of the disaster fictions of Wyndham and Christopher. Honourable English suburbanites do not emerge heroically in Aldiss's novel, but instead are parodied as obsolete curiosities in a rapidly altering landscape. Just as Ballard represents the conventional and repetitive actions of Riggs in *The Drowned World* as ineffectual in the post-apocalyptic lagoon world, Aldiss quickly dismisses those who stand 'neatly and attentively in their gardens' (35) and celebrates Charteris's embrace – like Kerans in Ballard's earlier novel – of the

transformed post-disaster landscape. The chapter ends by declaring that 'there had been a war, a dislocation' (41), which signals the novel's imminent movement away from the outmoded patterns of British suburban living and into the multi-dimensional pathways of hallucinogenic topography.

It is worth noting, in this respect, an interesting parallel between the apocalyptic dislocation in Aldiss's novel and that seen in Wyndham's earlier texts. In examining Wyndham's disasters Jameson (2007) argues that the prospering of Wyndham's survivors represents a form of 'utopian wish-fulfilment' (199), with the protagonists finding a 'smaller and more liveable collectivity after the end of modernity and capitalism' (199). While Wyndham's fiction in this way achieves the desired destruction of post-war social democracy in favour of a definable middle-class community, Aldiss's post-apocalyptic novel imagines the destruction of suburban conformity and the growth of chemically-enhanced communes devoid of the trappings of bourgeois morality. Despite Aldiss's intended distancing from the Wyndhamesque, the possibility for utopian restructuring in the post-catastrophe moment represents a convergence that permeates British catastrophe writing more generally.

Whilst the 'dislocation' (41) in *Barefoot in the Head* exposes the apocalyptic utopianism of sixties counter-culture – which displays an interesting alignment with the conservative utopias found in Wyndham's catastrophe fiction – it also offers a formidable break at the level of form and style from the accessible post-disaster worlds of preceding works. As the chemical content of the atmosphere increases, linguistic meaning multiplies and the linearity of Charteris's journey disintegrates and increasingly becomes a voyage of psychological discovery:

> The words stoned him. Since he had reached England, the psychedelic effect had gained on him daily in gusts. Cities had speaking patterns, worlds, rooms. He had ceased to think what he was saying; the result was he surprised himself; and this elation fed back into the system. Every thought multiplied into a thousand. Words, roads, all fossil tracks of thinking. (83)

Michael R. Collings (1986) argues that *Barefoot in the Head* continues Aldiss's broader fictional desire for topographical exploration, but suggests that the novel's

psychedelic infusion extends this focus to examine how 'topography exists within the human mind as well' (38). Here, again, comparisons can be drawn between Aldiss's novel and the broader project of the British New Wave. Like Ballard's ecological disasters, which function to dismantle the technocratic order of the Cold War to facilitate a transportation to 'inner space', Aldiss uses the biological contamination of the atmosphere as a tool for breaking up the contemporary landscape and delving into the underlying workings of the psyche.

Indeed, just as Kerans dives into the landscape of 'archaeopsychic time' (44) in *The Drowned World*, Charteris also enters into revelatory liminal spaces as he hallucinates:

> Geology. Strata of different man-times. Tempology. Each decade of the past still preserved in some gaunt monument. Even the motorway itself yielding clues to the enormous epochs of pre-psychedelic time [...] All art, assuaging. Pylons, endlessly, too ornate for the cumbersome land, assuaging. Multiplacation. (*sic*: 84)

The hallucinogens consequently present Charteris with access to psychological spaces otherwise off-limits in the pre-war world of regimented order. In doing so, Aldiss's characters – who travel in a motorcade through the drug-filled remnants of Europe – are supplied with almost endless access to the inner space so craved by New Wave writers and members of the counter-culture alike. In this way, as Hewison (1986) points out: 'The conquering of inner space became a common theme in the alternative ideology of the underground' (85). Aldiss's SF novel therefore, like *New Worlds* during the same period, overlaps with wider cultural phenomena during the late sixties. Indeed, SF imagery would maintain a prominent position with the 'alternative ideology' of the counter-culture more generally. The influence of SF on Hawkwind has already been discussed and it is worth also noting the wider SF infusion within psychedelic 'space rock' during the late sixties, with Pink Floyd's early albums providing prominent examples of this. Furthermore, revelatory landscapes similar to those articulated in Aldiss's novel appeared on the front pages of underground newspapers (notably the *International Times* in 1968, see figure 6) highlighting, again, the sense that SF was the form most suited to documenting not only technological change, but also its social and political off-shoots.
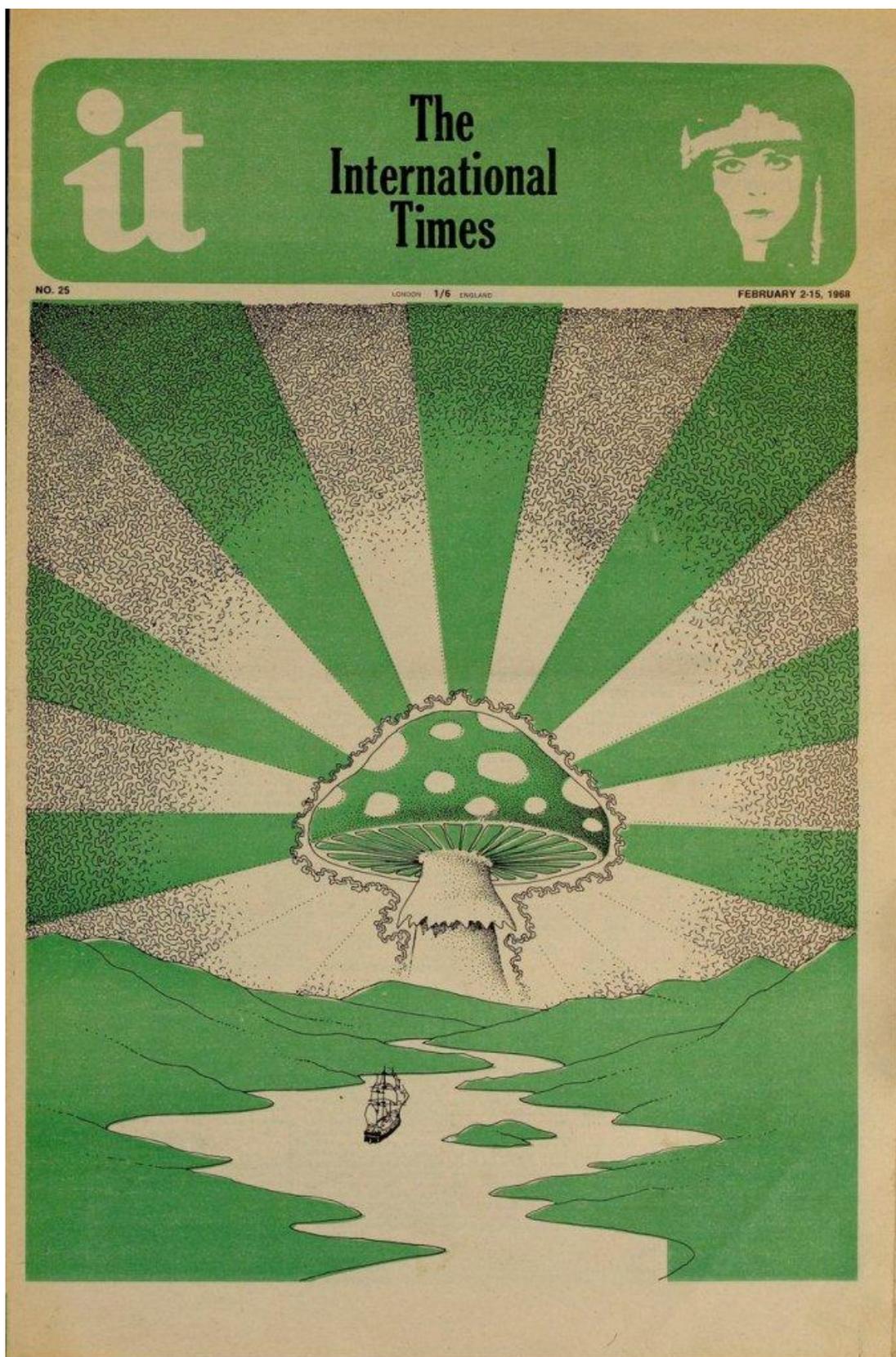
Figure 6. International Times, No. 25 (1968). Reprinted by permission of the editor.

Whilst the post-disaster world offers a sense of liberation and psychological revelation, Charteris and his group of followers nonetheless possess little definable purpose as they travel across Europe. Charteris's wife, Angelina, who occasionally finds some lucidity even as the drug effects intensify, begins to question the logic of their quest, explaining that the old order at least spared people widespread hardship: 'Okay, I agree as everyone must that there were many greedy faults but put at its lowest wesciv maimtamed in reasonable comfort a high population which now must die badly by plague and starve off to its last wither' (*sic*: 167). But Boreas, a filmmaker and follower of Charteris, contests Angelina, asserting that the new conditions represent a glorious liberation:

> No, no, no, *cherie*, concoursely, my High Point Y is an insproachmen of the old technological odour, which was only built up by reprunsion and maintained by everyone's anxiety, or dummied into inhabition. Okay, so it all go and no worries. (*sic*: 167)

Boreas's declaration explicitly attacks the trappings of Cold War social psychology. He directly equates the presence of destructive technology with the formation of a culture of repression and anxiety that forces people to retreat into the kind of suburban domesticity that Charteris found so abhorrent upon his arrival in England. Boreas's position is therefore directly counter-cultural. Just as Nuttall (1968) argued that the 1960s underground needed to exhibit its own 'sickness' (144) so the 'squares could either recognize it in us and themselves and cure it' (144), Boreas also advocates a concerted challenge, regardless of its coherency, to the crumbling old order as a means of exposing its own ingrained madness.

As the novel progresses there also emerges a general comment on the political impact of counter-cultural movements. Charteris's group slowly breaks apart, its purpose and meaning becoming increasingly defuse, whilst famines are recorded in some parts of Europe. Angelina soon reasons that 'they were all escaping from a state where the wrong things had mattered; but they were now in a state where nothing matters to us' (163-4). Placed in context, *Barefoot in the Head* offers a sceptical examination of the social and political climate of the late sixties, implicitly echoing what Hewison (1986) characterises as the practical challenges for alternative cultures:

As a system (or rather anti-system) of aesthetics, the counter-culture wished to destroy artistic categories altogether. [...] Noble as this project was in many ways, its consequences for the explorer could be heavy. The destruction of the categories of art could lead to the self-destruction of the artist, and the inner world would turn out to be purgatory rather than paradise. The risk of abandoning logic and language was that this could lead to nonsensical, catatonic silence. (86)

Indeed, just as Aldiss parodies the staleness of suburbia at the beginning of the novel, the incoherence of intoxicated groupies is equally ridiculed as they celebrate Boreas's film despite it not being broadcast at all. Boreas promptly cries: 'You stupid *godverdomme* acidheads and junkies all the same you live inside your crazy nuts and never see a thing beyond!' (*BH*: 183). Yet, what both Hewison's analysis of counter-culture and Aldiss's novel lack is a specific recognition of Cold War constructions of art and culture. Indeed, the problem the counter-culture faced was in producing alternative forms of art that resisted being subsumed by the dominant Cold War forces of western capitalism and Soviet totalitarianism. As Serge Guilbaut (1985) argues, this seeming impasse lead to Abstract Expressionism, for example, becoming 'an art of obliteration' (197) with the supposed 'freedom of expression and existential violence' (197) being 'products of fear and of the impossibility of representation' (197). Yet, as Saunders (2000) notes, the CIA viewed such forms of abstraction as being compatible with 'a specifically anti-Communist ideology, the ideology of freedom, of free enterprise. Non-figurative and politically silent, it was the very antithesis to socialist realism' (254). The breakdown of Chateris's alternative society in the novel does not consider these contextual points, but instead merely implies that the intoxicated citizens will ultimately fail to achieve a coherent solution. There is, then, a peculiar conservatism to Aldiss's stylistically radical text insofar as, in removing itself from a consideration of Cold War definitions of art and culture, it simply represents a pessimistic account of failed co-operation, which implies that the solution resides in the re-emergence of a form of middle-class managerialism to counteract the counter-cultural mayhem.

Greenland (1983) argues that looked at in relation to his wider oeuvre, *Barefoot in the Head* simply continues Aldiss's general fascination with both entropy and fragmentation:

> Aldiss is as conscious as any other *NW* writer of fragmentation. Organised activities disintegrate in *Barefoot*: 'All the known noon world loses its old staples an everything drops apart.' The fabric of space and time tears in *Frankenstein Unbound*, throwing mankind onto separate historical tracks. Many novels and stories concern the human race divided into tribes and factions, small and unco-ordinated groups who live by differing principles, each endeavouring to survive catastrophe according to its own responses. (79)

With this in mind, it may be possible to read the novel's conclusion alongside the general anxieties of British disaster narratives. Christopher's *The Death of Grass* represents small-scale tribalism as an expected pseudo-Darwinian response to the apocalyptic dysfunction of the preceding order, while *Barefoot in the Head* similarly assumes the formation of disjointed groups which fail to rival the defunct monolith of the Cold War state. Read in this manner, Aldiss's text reflects political doubts emerging at the decade's end, for as Nuttall (1968) concludes in his analysis of the political protests against the Vietnam War: 'As it was they achieved little more constructive than the arrest of Norman Mailer and Doctor Spock' (69). The novel presumes, with an allusion to Yeats, that 'things would fall apart this time from the dead centre' (*BH*: 162), and, as a consequence, Aldiss's narrative offers an ultimately pessimistic assessment of any form of political alterity that coherently deviates from the omnipotent presence of the military-industrial complex.

The disaster narratives of Aldiss and Ballard re-imagine the catastrophe genre through their stylistic experimentation and political gestures rather than via a complete rejection of earlier thematic patterns. Both texts break away from the linearity of Wyndham and earlier catastrophe novels in the Wellsian tradition, and instead experiment with form, pursuing the New Wave search for 'inner space'. Additionally, both works offer alternative political explanations which dislodge assumptions that humanity will simply rebuild after disaster. Ballard's work entertains the unsettling sentiment that catastrophe is unconsciously desired due to its unleashing of repressed libidinal forces, whilst Aldiss questions the prominence of English middle-class identity as the most suitable focaliser for visualising post-apocalyptic struggle. In this way, such works update the British catastrophe narrative to match wider social transformations. Yet, at the same time, their connection to the genre is not one of schism but of various interacting continuities and divergences.

Indeed, under Moorcock *New Worlds* also underwent a radical evolution rather than a ruptural break. The magazine continued to promote SF narratives (although favouring experimental forms over 'traditional' styles), but it also adapted to wider societal changes, acknowledging the science fictional nature of 1960s life itself through examinations of contemporary visual art, literary experimentation and developing scientific discourses.

Chapter Four: British Science Fiction Film and Television in the 1950s

Just as British literary SF has received comparatively little attention in comparison to American publications of the 1950s, British SF films of the period have also been regularly overlooked in scholarly assessments. This is, in part, a result of the rapid import of American films to British cinemas; as Tony Shaw (2006) rightly notes, in his history of British Cold War film between 1945 and 1965, 'Hollywood films dominated the British market from the beginning to the end of the period' (4). This import of American films to Britain served a political purpose in shaping attitudes towards the Cold War. Indeed, as Shaw continues, 'according to one estimate, between 1948 and 1962 Hollywood made 107 films in which the fight against communism was an overt theme, nearly all of which were released in Britain' (4). SF film experienced a noticeable boom during the decade, and American productions such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Forbidden Planet* (1956) remain potent visual symbols of an era which mixed fear of communism and nuclear war with utopian hopes for the technological conquest of other worlds. In attempting to unravel a specifically British response to the Cold War during this period it is productive therefore to focus on a selection of indigenous films and television programmes that were to some extent distanced from the watchful eye of superpower authority and their ideological preoccupations. Consequently, these British productions offered an alternative cultural response to the nuclear arms race, with their political reactions invariably filtered through a variety of domestic uncertainties during a decade of fundamental national transformation.

In this chapter and the one that follows, I come back, then, to the broadly chronological decade-by-decade account of the post-war development of British SF, which has been pursued in the previous three chapters in relation to literature, in order to look at its equivalents in the moving image over the same quarter of a century or so. In doing so, these two chapters also serve to condense and focus the changes apparent in SF's engagement with Cold War culture and politics during the

period, hence bringing out more clearly, it is hoped, the crucial shifts that mark the era.

For Peter Wright (2005), part of what is distinctive about British SF television, as opposed to much of its American equivalent, is the degree to which it consistently adopts the form of 'cultural criticism' (289), not simply reflecting the specific concerns of a particular period, but directly commenting on their social function and implications. This is a view supported by Peter Hutchings (1999) who writes, in his own assessment of British invasion films and their relationship with shifting social concerns during the early years of the Cold War:

> Importantly, these various changes did not manifest themselves uniformly across the western world. Consumerism, for example, meant something different in America from what it did in Britain [...]. It follows that any account of British sf, while needing to preserve a sense of the generic character of the alien invasion fantasy and how all such fantasies, regardless of their country of origin, share certain qualities, must at the same time take account of the socially and historically specific pressures exerted upon the fantasies by the context within which they were produced. (35-36)

In this section, I will incorporate both of Wright and Hutchings's assessments, highlighting how, at times, British productions – geographically and politically detached from the authoritarianism characteristic of both Soviet and American ideology – articulated an overt distrust of Cold War policy, whilst incorporating this broad ambivalence alongside narratives that commented on domestic politics and culture during the post-war years.

I begin by focusing on the early decade film *Seven Days to Noon* (1950) before investigating Nigel Kneale's 1954 adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and concluding by analysing the Quatermass TV serials; *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *Quatermass II* (1955) and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9). A noticeable feature of SF productions for both the cinema and television during this period is their overlapping relationship with competing genres. In Marcia Landy's (1991) study *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960*, her analysis of Science Fiction appears in a chapter entitled 'Horror and Science Fiction', demonstrating the fusion of the two styles in many works of the period. Landy provides a suitably Cold

War explanation for this intertwining of genres, arguing that 'enthusiasm for rational solutions through science coexisted uneasily with fears of social disintegration and global conflict' (403). Hopes placed in scientifically-directed progress are thus represented alongside underlying anxieties about nuclear annihilation or the generally misguided application of scientific knowledge in the post-Hiroshima world. These competing tensions appear in each of the productions examined in this chapter. Professor Bernard Quatermass is, at certain moments, represented as a saviour through his methodical application of scientific knowledge, while in others, he is cast as the potential destroyer of civilisation through his unremitting experimentation. Winston Smith's wanderings in an eerily familiar, cinematic London are halted by the terror of an increasingly authoritarian state. At the same time, *Seven Days to Noon*'s representation of a scientist challenging state policy on atomic weaponry interacts with societal unease during the period as to the trustworthiness of both the state and those individual scientists participating in nuclear research on its behalf.

Seven Days to Noon (1950)

Released in October 1950, *Seven Days to Noon* has been analysed as both a contemporary Cold War thriller and as a near-future parable that confronts human psychological frailty in an era of nuclear proliferation. In his synopsis of the film for the British Film Institute's website, Jonathan Rigby states that '*Seven Days to Noon*, for all its overtones of Armageddon, is not a science fiction film',[50] but nonetheless concedes that the work did 'exercise a profound influence over several SF-horror hybrids turned out by British filmmakers in the years to come'.[51] Conversely, while Marcia Landy (1991) does not reflect on the film's genre, she places it firmly within her 'Horror and Science Fiction' chapter as a key work in the 'mad scientist' subgenre, whilst Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnston's chapter 'Film and Television, the 1950s' in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009) cites *Seven Days to Noon* as a significant British SF film of the early fifties.[52] As we will

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[50] Jonathan Rigby, n.d. Online synopsis of *Seven Days to Noon* for the British Film Institute. Accessed 21 August 2012: http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/508557/index.html
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] See Jancovich and Johnston (2009): 75 – 76.

see in this chapter, SF film during this period rarely inhabited a static generic position, but instead operated by combining and re-negotiating expected tropes from other popular genres. In this way, *Seven Days to Noon* is an important starting point for examining the development of British SF film. It develops the particular character of the troubled Cold War era scientist, commissioned to build destructive technology to fuel the military-industrial complex whilst wrestling with his informal moral duty to advance civilisation through scientific research and discovery. Yet, these grounded, contemporaneous concerns are combined with a speculative examination of potential nuclear threat. The film thus utilises the domestic settings synonymous with other popular forms (eg. contemporary thrillers or detective narratives) as the starting point for a broader exploration of the near-future.

Seven Days to Noon begins with the delivery of a letter to the Prime Minister from the film's protagonist Professor Willingdon (played by Barry Jones), a leading scientist at a major government research establishment. Willingdon's letter explains that he has stolen an atomic bomb and will destroy central London unless the government halts nuclear weapon production. The film subsequently tracks both government and military attempts to locate Willlingdon. We simultaneously witness the implementation of the evacuation plan along with the actions of the increasingly distraught scientist seeking to avoid capture. Both the scenery, infrastructure and the nature of the public organisations depicted reflect a contemporaneous vision of Britain in 1950, yet Willingdon's acquisition of a nuclear weapon also hints at a near-future setting where Britain has acquired an extensive arsenal of nuclear devices.[53] Resultantly, the film creates a disquieting mix in which the familiar landscape of early fifties Britain is juxtaposed with an unnerving vision of the impending nuclear threat to come.

The film also reacts to a commonly cited Cold War anxiety, particularly heightened in the early fifties, of treachery by scientists working on confidential atomic projects. Britain had been the source of a series of high profile cases in the years leading up to *Seven Days to Noon*'s release, starting with that of Alan Nunn May who confessed to supplying uranium isotopes to the Soviet Union upon his

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[53] As mentioned in Chapter Two, Britain did not explode its first atomic bomb until October 1952.

arrest in 1946, whilst former Los Alamos physicist and British citizen, Klaus Fuchs, was convicted of passing on atomic secrets to the USSR in early 1950. Additionally, the defection of Bruno Pontecorvo to the Soviet Union in 1950 (Pontecorvo had previously worked on Britain's nuclear bomb project at Harwell) further cemented an emerging sense of mistrust that persisted throughout the Cold War and spawned numerous literary and filmic responses. Despite these cases reawakening a well established fear of the 'mad scientist' running amok – dating back to *Frankenstein* at least – the broader implications of these events was found in the ways in which they unveiled the immense scale of the nuclear projects being developed. As Lawrence Badash (2003) notes, this proliferation of state funding for nuclear research had an unsettling effect: 'Earth no longer was threatened by an individual evil scientist of fiction, but by real, mostly anonymous, technicians whose work was sanctioned by the state' (244).

In *Seven Days to Noon*, Willingdon senses that he is being subsumed by just such a vast technocratic machine, recognising, as Max Weber ([1922] 1974) puts it in a famous early twentieth-century study of bureaucracy, that 'the individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus in which he is harnessed' (228). He therefore reasons that his only method for disrupting such a totalising system is to threaten its absolute destruction. Nonetheless, Willingdon struggles to assert his own individual voice against the prevailing social structure in the film. Once his letter to the Prime Minister arrives it takes government officials and superintendant Folland (Andre Morrell) a significant amount of time merely to discover who he is. Again, despite his prominent academic role, Willingdon's name is initially unknown within the expanding Weberian bureaucracy of the post-war state. The role of the state is directly questioned upon a visit to the home of Willingdon's local vicar. Folland is told that Willingdon had 'lost faith in the value of his work',[54] with the vicar then wondering whether 'we're to blame? After all Folland, we've placed on his shoulders this intolerable burden and left him alone to deal with it'. The vicar's defence of Willingdon and the testimonies of his family deflect attention from the suggestion that he is simply an individual madman, spy or potential defector, but instead points the blame towards a collective state policy which funds, yet

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[54] *Seven Days to Noon* (1950). [Film] Directed by John and Roy Boulting. UK: London Films.

psychologically isolates, scientists embroiled in atomic research and weapon production.

    Seven Days to Noon articulates, in this fashion, unease about the emergent character of the technocratic Cold War state itself. Willingdon is less the canonical Faustian genius depicted in Wells's scientific romances like *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The Invisible Man* (1897) than he is merely another technician contributing to the state's vast nuclear industry. And yet ironically it is within this overreaching governmental infrastructure that he is also able to enact his own individual plan without notice. The anxieties addressed here are twofold: on the one hand, the film implicitly questions, at an early moment in the post-war development of the welfare state, the logic of investing extensive public funds into the creation of apocalyptic weaponry, whilst, on the other, it contemplates the possibility that within this vast network there may be those who, against the technocratic management of scientific work, seek, as individuals, to defy state policy and use their research for their own personal or political ends. Indeed, following the famous atom spy cases, such concerns were so prevalent that the government introduced a rigorous vetting procedure for scientists working on official projects, as Simone Turchetti (2003) explains in relation to the Pontecorvo case:

> In turn the media campaign that followed Pontecorvo's defection promoted the reformation of atomic security and fostered the introduction of tighter measures of control at government laboratories, including the infamous 'positive vetting'. The construction of Pontecorvo's image as an 'atom spy' therefore served various political, media and security agendas. (392)

Willingdon's political protest is therefore in some ways subsumed by the less abstractly ethical anxiety of ensuring the secrecy and security of nuclear material. This is apparently exemplified in what happens once Willingdon seeks refuge in London. He enters a pub amidst a discussion about atomic war. He notices that his moral outrage at nuclear armaments has failed to transmit to the wider public when a drunk declares that 'we've been churning them out like pineapples for the last five years. Load the bloody planes and blast their big cities to hell'. Accordingly, the result of Willingdon's protest is not, as he hopes, a serious consideration of the moral value of nuclear weapons. Instead, government enables a vast array of military

and propaganda tools to preserve its dominance, while the masses are seen either to accept official orders or to indulge in jingoistic outpourings and fearful speculation.

Political critique within *Seven Days to Noon* is consequently nuanced rather than offering a straightforwardly polemical reaction to the early years of the Cold War. Willingdon's rebellion is viewed with some sympathy while contemporary fears of atomic security and the state's ability to control or comprehend the research it subsidises are played out persistently over the course of the film. As Landy (1991) suggests, the film ultimately expresses anguish at the condition of post-war society in general rather than attacking specific targets:

> The film does not present a reassuring picture of individual or collective effort. Rather, it dramatizes the blindness of the masses, the ubiquitous threatening sense of modern urban life and of modern technology and mass society. In particular, it casts a negative eye on the efforts to seek amelioration, portraying them as misguided. The film does not identify the Russians as the enemy; the enemy is modern life itself. (405)

Nonetheless, Landy over-emphasises the pessimism of the film here – even in its fractious vision of post-war Britain there is still considerable hope located in the efficiency of government in evacuating London, as well as the nostalgic resurgence of a 'Blitz spirit' in light of imminent danger.

The representation of Willingdon's mental health is important when assessing the film's political commentary. As already mentioned, the 'character statements' provided by his family, his assistant and his local vicar at the film's outset indicate that Willingdon is a moral man haunted by the realisation that his research may be used for destructive purposes. After his initial investigation, Folland sympathetically declares that 'repressing a fear is like trying to hold on to the lid of a boiling kettle; something's got to go eventually,' yet also states to Willingdon's daughter, Ann, that he believes her father may be mentally ill after reading a series of biblical and literary quotations on apocalypse that have been scrawled across his scientific reports. Previous assumptions that Willingdon was merely suffering from stress are thus overturned at this point, with the discovery of lines from Milton leading Folland to assume a dangerous mental breakdown. While the film therefore articulates general anxiety about the moral pressures placed upon scientists conducting nuclear

research, it expresses overt alarm at the idea of state technicians being infected by the 'madness' of literature and certain strands of theology.

Indeed, any sympathy towards Willingdon is further lost when he eventually enters the film displaying markedly sociopathic symptoms. He takes up a rented room and proceeds to pace about until the early hours of the morning plotting the likely blast radius on a London map whilst reciting passages from the Bible. The landlady soon becomes fearful of his unusual habits and calls the police upon reading the headline 'Landlady Killer at Large'. Furthermore, as the hunt by the police and military intensifies, Willingdon holds an acquaintance, Goldie, hostage in her flat and explains that she has no option but to co-operate with his plans:

> You're in no danger, please believe me, but you must do as I tell you. If you don't, if you make one move, or utter one word to betray me I shall be forced to detonate that weapon immediately, and for you and thousands of others in this area there will be no chance of escape.

Shaw (2006) argues that this representation of Willingdon's 'growing insanity and disregard for ordinary people's lives undermine his rational and humanitarian principles' (119). Despite, then, later expressing to Goldie his dismay at seeing his 'life's work used only for destruction', his initially threatening behaviour has made Willingdon a character to be feared rather than empathised with in the film. As Shaw puts it, this has the effect of directing sympathy instead towards the authorities who are seen as 'trustworthy guardians of the country's interests' (119) against the potential 'madness' of the individual.

Whilst *Seven Days to Noon* demonstrates discomfort at the direction of British culture during the early years of the Cold War and offers occasional swipes at the purpose of government-sponsored nuclear research, the attitude towards political and military authority is then, as Shaw rightly suggests, predominantly deferential. This is particularly noticeable as the evacuation effort begins, with numerous scenes showing the efficient distribution of people onto buses and trains. An American reporter for NBC is heard stating that the mass departure is 'proceeding smoothly and slightly ahead of schedule' before noting that the populace are carrying out their duties 'coolly, resolutely and without panic'. Such collective effort explicitly reawakens memories of wartime as a pair of railway workers recall how they had to

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carry out similar work during another crisis: 'Remember the last time we were doing this, Charlie? 1940, bringing the boys back from Dunkirk'. Collective memories and mythologies of the Second World War are seen, in this way, to sustain consensus and togetherness amongst the population, who meekly fall in line with government orders rather than contemplating Willingdon's political motivations. Nonetheless, by presenting Willingdon's views in partly sympathetic ways – despite his *personal* descent into madness – and visualising the vast effort required to distance people from the danger of a small atomic device, the film does question, albeit mildly, the rationality and security of nuclear proliferation, and hence the rationality of the state itself, which concurrently touched on emerging unease in the aftermath of the atom spy cases and the Soviet Union's first atomic explosion in August 1949. Shaw (2006) notes that the vast majority of British films in the early fifties 'corresponded with orthodox political opinion' (119) and whilst *Seven Days to Noon* certainly fails to deliver a penetrating counter attack against nuclear defence policy, its unsettling scenario does nonetheless provide an early example of SF's capacity to elucidate, in visual and narrative form, the inherent dangers of the atomic age and the continual, low-level anxiety it perpetuated.

This unease is particularly present in the images of a deserted London following the evacuation. Shaw (2006) claims that this creates an 'eerie realism' (118), yet the purpose of the montage is not purely mimetic, but instead borrows and updates the apocalyptic visions of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century scientific romance, notably the emptied cities of novels such as Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885) and M.P. Shiels's *The Purple Cloud* (1901). The combination of these science fictional motifs with the horror of Willingdon's plunge into madness would correlate, in this way, with the direction taken by other British SF film and television productions over the course of the following decade. Both Nigel Kneale's adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1954) and his Quatermass serials would, in particular, continue to interrogate contemporary phenomena in science and technology in order to unravel the psycho-social consequences of the nuclear referent, whilst the turmoil of Professor Quatermass would further highlight the dilemmas faced by individual scientists operating within the grip of the Cold War state.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1954)**

Before exploring the importance of the Quatermass franchise throughout the mid-fifties, it is productive to examine first Nigel Kneale's influential adaptation of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Broadcast live as a television play on Sunday 12th December 1954 between 8.35pm and 10.35pm, the production's striking visualisation of the novel's horror prompted a vociferous response from viewers who were stunned by the drama's willingness to display scenes of physical and psychological torture. As Daniel Lea (2010) observes: 'The production caused an unprecedented controversy with complaints to the BBC and newspapers reaching record levels. The broadcast prompted calls for restraint on TV programming, parliamentary motions and demands for alternative viewing options' (65). Indeed, Jason Jacobs (2000) notes that following a series of death threats towards the programme's producer, Rudolph Cartier, 'the BBC had to hire bodyguards to protect him' (155). The response was, in part, a reaction to the timing of the programme in the middle of Sunday evening prime time following the family orientated game show *What's My Line?* Yet, the broadcast also intensified a wider debate during this period about the role of television drama and, more broadly, the cultural function of television, which was viewed by some as a source of mass entertainment and by others as a vehicle for, in Lea's (2010) terms, 'didactic paternalism' (72) and intellectual stimulation. Whilst this public controversy has been extensively discussed by the likes of Lea (2010), Lez Cooke (2003) and Jacobs (2000), the political and philosophical content of Kneale's production itself also requires close scrutiny. For, despite remaining largely true to the original novel, the drama also summons an unnerving vision of a near-future Britain that reflected a variety of domestic uncertainties felt by a mid-fifties audience.

Similarly to Orwell's novel, Kneale's production can be read in straightforward Cold War terms as a polemic against Stalinism (although, in fact, significantly, the book itself took some of its initial inspiration from Orwell's reading of James Burnham's 1941 study of technocratic forms of governance, *The Managerial Revolution*). The drama replicates Orwell's ([1949] 2008) description of Big Brother as 'black-haired, black-moustachio'd, full of power and mysterious calm' (18), and

just as the novel recounts how reports on 'the production of pig-iron' (3) are continually churned out by the telescreen, Kneale's work also represents a world obsessed with the statistics of industrial labour. Yet, to read the drama (or the novel) solely in this manner misplaces the complexity of the production, which opens with the narrator presenting a far broader message about the vulnerability of civilisation to tyranny: 'Atomic war, famine, revolution, the collapse of a civilisation. And then, in its place, the formation of a new way of existence'.[55] Accompanying this opening address is the image of an atomic explosion and the scene of a ruined London. Whilst the sequence evokes general fears of nuclear decimation, the subsequent scenes that depict Winston Smith's (Peter Cushing) daily existence would presumably have been even more troubling for a fifties audience. The bomb-sites, damp bedsits and basic food within the canteen are not only the conditions of a post-apocalyptic world, but have a reflective power in so far as they also resemble austerity Britain in the years after the Second World War, a condition that had lingered until July 1954 when, as noted earlier, rationing finally ceased.[56] Part of the discomfort felt by viewers who complained to the BBC and national press may therefore be explained not just as a reactionary response to terror and horror on the small screen, but to the fact that the near-future dictatorship on display contained rather too many uncanny features of the present.

In his book *The Intimate Screen*, Jacobs (2000) picks up on a related theme, noting – in terms that recall Aldiss's account of the so-called 'cosy catastrophe' in Wyndham – that many previous live dramas had relied upon the creation of a polite theatrical spectacle that would not offend or challenge the sensibilities of the television audience. Kneale's production marked a move away from this set-up:

> Perhaps this indicates that the shift from less 'cosy' drama to that which pulled no punches in its representation of intense distress and discomfort had ramifications beyond the internal debate about technical etiquette; the audience could no longer trust the intimate screen.' (155)

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[55]*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (1954). [Television Film] Screenplay by Nigel Kneale, directed by Rudolph Cartier. UK: BBC.

[56]This is, of course, expressed in the novel too where London is described in the following terms: 'Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willowherb straggled over the heaps of rubble...' ([1949] 2008: 5)

Lez Cooke (2003) extends this argument by stating that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* marked 'a transitional moment between the more conservative "filmed theatre" of early TV drama and the new era which was about to dawn' (28). Kneale's screenplay uses the live production to create a 'nervous immediacy' (Cooke: 26) that heightens the sense of threat. In doing so, the drama unsettles its viewers, as the claustrophobia and angst of the text is transmitted by actors performing under intense duress. Indeed, this disorientation is purposefully used throughout the production as a series of pre-recorded scenes are positioned between live sections. This is particularly noticeable during Julia and Winston's first rendezvous in a bucolic woodland. The pre-recorded section resembles a typical romantic moment from popular film as the couple kiss and Julia declares that they should 'enjoy being alive.' This is then followed by a return to the live broadcast and Winston's supposedly clandestine dealings with Charrington in his dilapidated shop, with the cramped, intimate live setting reflecting the oppression and anxiety of operating within the police state. Similarly to *Seven Days to Noon*, and to English disaster fiction more generally, the power of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is found in its challenge to recognisable conditions through the introduction of a destabilising social force. In this form, Kneale's drama is in some respects a mimetic vision of post-war London – a stark image in itself – yet it is also disrupted and challenged by the disruptive force of nuclear war and the emergence of totalitarian terror, with the latter represented skilfully through claustrophobic live performance and the utilisation of the intimacy of the small screen.

Winston is part of a technical team charged with ensuring that the all-encompassing social and political grasp of the state remains intact. His angst is therefore acquired through the oppositional forces of government-directed orthodoxy and the hope of self-determination. As John R. Cook and Peter Wright (2006) point out, the lone figure of the scientist or technician would prove a characteristic feature of much British SF television – as exemplified early on by *Seven Days to Noon*.[57] Willingdon, and subsequently Bernard Quatermass, are both research scientists who

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[57] Cook and Wright (2006) mention this in a discussion of Robert Barr's 1949 production of *The Time Machine*, explaining that 'Barr's teleplay placed the figure of the scientist – the Time Traveller – in a central narrative position: a characteristic that would prove influential for the subsequent development of the genre on British television' (6).

grapple with governmental interference in the direction of their projects. The tension escalates when they recognise the unsavoury nature of government intervention, which calls into question their moral purpose as scientists. Winston is not a scientist, but a clerical/technical worker charged with rewriting history. Even so, like Willingdon and Quatermass he is perceptive enough to recognise the corruption inherent in his position as a state functionary. He soon wanders into the carnivalesque prole sector where he interrogates an old man (played by Wilfrid Brambell) on life before Big Brother: 'In 1925, you were a grown man. Try and remember, 1925. If you could chose, would you rather live then or now?' The old man fails to offer a suitable response, but his gleeful recollection of wearing a top hat – despite his lowly class position – reveals a past that had greater complexity than Winston can imagine. The purpose of this scene is not merely to sentimentalise pre-war Britain, but to highlight Winston's quest for authenticity in an age governed by state-sponsored illusion and propaganda.

As is also famously described in the novel, Winston becomes fascinated by the nursery rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons' to which Charrington introduces him. This initial scene in Charrington's shop presents a series of interesting socio-historical reflections. The near empty shop is populated only by redundant objects from before the revolution and when Winston asks to buy a snow globe he is requested to pay four dollars, with the currency used implying an anxious relationship with burgeoning models of consumption.[58] Winston finds solace in the scattered Victoriana of Charrington's shop as it offers empirical traces of a past otherwise repressed, while the nursery rhyme allows Winston to partially visualise an otherwise erased history. This sensation is described with particular poignancy in the novel: 'It was curious, but when you said it to yourself you had the illusion of actually hearing bells, the bells of a lost London that still existed somewhere or other, disguised and forgotten' ([1949] 2008, 103). What is evoked here is particularly relevant to a mid-fifties audience who were finally emerging from rationing and austerity. The redundancy of Charrington's quintessentially English antiques store offers a warning to the neglect of tradition when confronted with an

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[58] The dollar is also the currency used in the novel. It is first described in relation to Winston's clandestine purchase of a book: 'He had given a quick glance up and down the street and then had slipped inside and bought the book for two dollars fifty' ([1949] 2008: 6).

unceasing focus on the all-powerful present. Richard Hoggart's ([1957] 2009) concerns about the 'Americanising' spread of leisure culture in mid-fifties Britain – in opposition to an existing 'authentic' working-class culture – are echoed, in this way, in Kneale's production. Hoggart feared the emergence of 'unconscious uniformity' (309) where the 'emerging common man will be one who tends, by three simple gestures, a highly complicated machine, and who keeps in a centrally-heated locker a copy of the latest-mass produced sex-and-violence novel' (309). Whilst the Stalin-like figure of Big Brother persists as the terrifying face of dictatorship, Kneale's drama follows on from the novel's more implicit suggestion that an equally frightening future may lie within the incremental transformations of contemporary British culture itself.

Kneale's adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* maintains many of the anxieties towards post-war modernity that are exhibited in the novel from five years earlier. As will be explored more thoroughly through an assessment of the Quatermass serial, Kneale's television plays generally display uneasiness with regard to political and social trends in Cold War Britain, often expressing agitation at the rapidity of change. This is kept at the forefront of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the production emphasises the erosion of temporal relationships to objects and culture. Julia and Winston reside in Charrington's spare room guessing the age of the furniture before Winston states that 'you can't tell the age of anything these days'. Whilst Kneale does then, on occasion, evoke a nostalgic urge for the past, unlike the fictions of John Wyndham, for example, he does not call for an inverted revolution whereby a middle-class bucolic utopia emerges, but instead creates a warning against homogeneity. Just as Orwell ([1941] 1990) celebrated the eccentricity of a nation littered with 'stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossword-puzzle fans' (181), Kneale's adaptation – which lingers upon the beneficial effect of Charrington's artefacts on Julia and Winston – recoils at the prospect of a national culture devoid of eccentric clutter. In this way, Kneale continues Orwell's fear of Cold War stasis, outlined most clearly in 'You and the Atom Bomb' (1945), providing a bleak image of a world dominated by rigid ideologies that offer little outside of conformity and persistent anxiety. Indeed, over the course of three series spanning from 1953 until 1959, Kneale's Quatermass

franchise would develop these ideas independently to offer his own unique representation of British cultural life during a period of drastic domestic and international transition.

The Quatermass Serials (1953-59)

Whilst *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is often recognised as a pioneering drama that marked a move away from a 'cosy' consensus about the purpose and aims of television output, Kneale's collection of serials running through the mid-fifties have been regularly cited as the first major attempts at 'serious' Science Fiction drama on British television. The BBC's earlier adaptations of *R.U.R.* (1938) and *The Time Machine* (1949) marked occasional ventures into one-off performances of literary SF,[59] yet Kneale's first serial, *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), was the first major example of originally scripted, 'adult' SF to be produced for British television and has consequently remained an influential work for subsequent television productions. The success of the TV serials saw Hammer release big screen versions of the narratives, with the *Quatermass Xperiment* arriving in cinemas in 1955 before *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit* followed in 1957 and 1967. The cinema films are truncated versions of the stories contained in the lengthier TV serials and were viewed ambivalently by Nigel Kneale (1999), who complained that they 'suffered from shrinkage' (54). I will focus solely on the television serials, running between 1953 and 1959, as these, I would argue, maintain the most sustained and complex relationship to the socio-political conditions of the decade.

In the foreword to the 1979 reproduction of the script for *The Quatermass Experiment*, Kneale comments on the general atmosphere in 1953:

> 1953 was an over-confident year. Rationing was coming to an end. Everest had just been climbed, the Queen crowned, and our first Comet jets were being deceptively successful. A sour note seemed indicated. So – a space flight that blew horrifically back. (6)

In some ways, Kneale's comments reflect a typical uncertainty during this period that the nation – despite the grandeur of the coronation or the surge of indigenous jet

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[59] Derek Johnston (2009) adds to this by including a list of television dramas between 1948 and 1953 that contained certain elements of SF.

aircraft – could no longer sustain the geo-political reach that had been expected in the decades before the war. Yet equally, Kneale also touches upon more generalised fears surrounding the purpose of technology being developed during the Cold War and the unknown dangers of extending human exploration into space. Indeed, these two concerns feature prominently in *The Quatermass Experiment* which combines grounded observations about mid-fifties Britain with a series of broader questions about science, technology and their interconnection with the Cold War state.

The narrative begins with the crash landing of the first rocket into space, the product of Bernard Quatermass' British Experimental Rocket Group, and the discovery of only one of the three crew members, Victor Carroon. Carroon exhibits irregular biological symptoms and Quatermass soon realises that he and the other members of the crew have been forced into one entity by an alien life-form capable of destroying mankind. The climax sees the plant-like creature inhabit Westminster Abbey in preparation for the release of deadly spores, but Quatermass successfully appeals to the humanity of the three men trapped within the life-form who subsequently force the creature to destroy itself. Only the first two episodes of the six-part serial remain in existence. As Andrew Pixley (2005) explains, 'the third and subsequent episodes were not film recorded on 35mm film' (12) due to the quality of the previous recordings being 'judged to be poor, and the process was felt to be quite expensive' (12). Nonetheless, the script remains readily available and the two recorded episodes provide a useful indication of the overall tone of the programme.

What is immediately apparent in the opening sequences of *The Quatermass Experiment* is the tension between the anxious figure of Quatermass (played in this series by Reginald Tate), nervously tracking the descent of the rocket, and the harassing figure of the government official, Blaker, who is described in the script as 'a heavy-faced senior civil servant, whose professional pleasantness has worn very thin' (Kneale, 1979: 13-14). This establishes a relationship that would progress throughout the three serials, between the individual 'maverick' scientist, who uses logic, research and action to solve a series of deadly problems, and the irrationality of government and military officials whose old-fashioned prejudices and bureaucratic insistencies invariably lead to stasis. Yet, in *The Quatermass*

Experiment the heroic professor does not possess the personal confidence of subsequent productions, appearing, as Peter Wright (2005) states, 'an ambiguous figure' (291) due to the failure of his rocket and the alien infiltration. Therefore, whilst the government lackey Blaker is viewed as petty and bullying, Quatermass himself is portrayed as a tormented figure whose experiments have unintentionally resulted in possible apocalypse. This ambivalence has a further contextual relevance that filters into broader discussions about national identity in the early years of the Cold War. As discussed in relation to Clarke, Wyndham and Christopher, the fifties saw a rapid transformation in British culture, resulting from the social democratic reforms of the Atlee government, the rise of consumerism as austerity ended and the transition from the atomic age to the thermonuclear era. The ingenuity of Kneale's 1953 production is found in the precise representation of a nation dealing with such change. Quatermass seeks to carry out his research for the advancement of mankind, yet is constantly subjected to external manipulation, whilst the general populace is represented as psychologically conflicted, memorialising the triumphs of World War Two and, at the same time, glimpsing the new terrains of space travel and consumerism.

The crash site of the rocket demonstrates many of these social and cultural collisions, with the residents of the street gathering around the house damaged by the space craft and reminiscing about the war while one of the locals, Mrs Matthews, arrives on the scene and fearfully declares the rocket to be a nuclear weapon: 'It's one of them *things* – they finally dropped one! It's going to blow up – can't you see!' (24). While Mrs Matthews's nervousness embodies a general uncertainty about emerging technologies (which were reflected, as we have seen, in newspaper reporting of nuclear technology during the early fifties), the visualisation of the crash was in itself relevant, showing a bombed out house in a suburban London street. The eerie familiarity of the crash site directs the audience to collective memories of the recent world war – something that is particularly prevalent in the conversations, interviews and news reports that emerge from the crash. Significantly, these present a scene of co-operation, whilst Mrs Matthews happily conducts an interview with a reporter where she praises her husband who 'was out of the house in a flash' (34) in the same way as he was 'all through the blitz – never a moment's hesitation' (34).

Yet, the re-enactment of a recognisable scenario from the recent past also makes the presence of the metallic rocket all the more challenging, in so far as it throws a compelling symbol of the near-future in amongst the already mythologised visions and assumptions of the near-past. Hutchings (1999) picks up on this idea:

> One of the consequences of this mixing of familiar and strange, with the strange often concealed within the familiar and close to home, is that audiences are invited to look at their own world in a different light, seeing it to a certain extent as itself an alien world. (38)

This is correct, but there is also a further political dimension to this juxtaposition that relates to Kneale's comments about the 'over-confident year' (Kneale, 1979: 6) of 1953. The rocket's descent into suburban London highlights the over reliance on wartime notions of national identity that have not altered despite the drastic social and technological upheavals since 1945. In this way, the nuclear powered rocket is a missive from a new modernity delivered to a complacent society fixated with the memories of past glory.

Whilst the rocket crash scene functions as a critique of the nation's resistance to new social and technological formations, the features of this emerging social terrain are themselves criticised in a later episode of the serial. After escaping from the lab, the infected Carroon seeks refuge in a bomb site where he is temporarily befriended by a young boy. Eager to assist Carroon, the boy takes him to a nearby cinema which is showing an American SF film entitled *Planet of the Dragons*. The film is depicted as a crude adventure narrative devoid of intellectual content:

> No sign of Captain O'Casey. I guess he must have gotten his... from that dragon.
> *The Space Girl shudders:*
> How horrible!
> *Her companion goes on:*
> I reckon that's what happened. I saw it tail him into that dark ravine.
> *The Girl shakes her head:*
> Poor Captain O'Casey!
> *And the Lieutenant replies:*
> Yeah... he was a good guy! (120)

As is also emphasised in Kneale's adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the anxiety articulated here stems from a suspicion of new forms of cultural production, especially mass-produced popular culture radiating from the United States. Whilst

Kneale exhibits hostility towards those who nostalgically grasp for anachronistic models of national consciousness, he also expresses alarm – as was common amongst intellectuals and writers across the political spectrum during the fifties – at the influence of cultural forms manufactured as easily reproducible and standardised products. At the same time, the cinema scene also serves to distance *The Quatermass Experiment* itself from a particular brand of contemporaneous SF film and highlights Kneale's own broader ambivalence towards popular SF, which he described as 'often either facetious or mechanistic' (1979: 6).

Quatermass II (1955) continues this grounded style, set again in recognisably British surroundings – this time in a mixture of the countryside, an industrial plant and a prefab housing development – where a mysterious alien source has begun to manipulate the local population. The serial opens with a collection of meteorites falling to earth, which are soon discovered to have an unnerving effect on those who first pick them up. Meanwhile, Quatermass (played by John Robinson, following the death of Reginald Tate) is again in turmoil following a nuclear accident involving a new experimental rocket and fears that his plans for a civilian moon colony may be over. He soon becomes involved in investigating the meteorites and discovers that they contain an alien life form that latches on to humans and directs them to construct a massive industrial site around the former village of Wynerton Flats, which will form the base for a deadly invasion. *Quatermass II* engages with a wider set of social and political issues than the previous serial from two years earlier, tackling both domestic concerns relating to the reach of the technocratic state to wider contemplations of technology's impact on human interaction and labour.

The intricacies and technical details of Quatermass's rocket experiments are particularly present in this second serial and they offer an interesting political message that would be subsequently complicated in the final serial *Quatermass and the Pit*. Quatermass learns that his rockets have developed a fault that has led to a catastrophic nuclear explosion at a test site in Australia. The drama cuts away to inserted film footage of a nuclear conflagration, which gestures towards contemporary fears about nuclear annihilation and the unpredictable nature of atomic technology. However, Quatermass does not recoil at the nuclear terror and loss of

life, but instead asserts that the lack of long-term government investment has ultimately led to the breakdown of his project. He melancholically describes how the plans for a moon base were 'too ambitious',[60] especially as gloomy financial signs had 'been there for a long time. Cuts here, cuts there, delays in vital expenditure.' Nonetheless, by the conclusion of the serial, Quatermass's rocket has been resurrected as he successfully flies to the alien hub and destroys it through detonating the ship's nuclear powered motor.

The relationship with nuclear technology is therefore, in part at least, redemptive within *Quatermass II*, being initially the source of destruction before a similar nuclear explosion prevents an apocalyptic alien invasion. *Quatermass II* does not offer an absolute rejection of nuclear research following the disaster in Australia, but instead highlights the generalised nervousness aroused by such technological experimentation. Whereas in *Seven Days to Noon*, the arguments of Willingdon are counteracted by the mobilisation of an ostensibly benevolent state profiting from the general deference of the population, *Quatermass II* visualises the trauma of nuclear accident but ultimately places faith in the individual scientist driven by curiosity and duty rather than the socialised state. If this therefore raises a series of fundamental questions about the extent of monetary support for nuclear research and the correct hands to place such expenditure in, what it does not do is offer any substantive critique of nuclear defence policy as the country headed boldly into the era of the all-powerful hydrogen bomb.

Even though Quatermass's nuclear rocket ultimately rescues the world from invasion, his troubled assistant, Dr. Leo Pugh, initiates a deeper psychological examination of a world increasingly reliant on technology. Whilst sitting in the lab, frustrated by the lack of answers relating to the meteorites, Pugh tells Quatermass's daughter, Paula, that he was a 'mathematical genius' as a boy but decries that he now just sits in front of complex machinery: 'Too many machines, that's what we've got. They spoil one from grasping a clear concept'. In part, Pugh's frustration is fuelled by his secondary role as a mere assistant to the heroic Quatermass, which may

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[60]*Quatermass II* (1955). [TV serial] Written by Nigel Kneale, directed by Rudolph Cartier. UK: BBC. .

explain his peculiar death at the end of the serial where he inexplicably wanders onto the alien mother ship before stumbling and falling hopelessly into space. Yet, his anguish also accommodates a broader comment on the nature of Cold War technocracy. Pugh recounts his teacher informing him as a child that his mathematical talent would provide him with 'the power to benefit mankind', but he is soon reduced to a role which merely requires him to 'press buttons.' As with Wyndham's contemporaneous protagonists, Pugh shows aggravation at being a cog in a technocratic machine rather than the pioneering individual he hoped to be in his youth. In this way, Kneale's second serial continues to analyse homogenisation, but this time moving away, in part, from a focus on mass culture and cultural memory towards the problems posed by a rapid proliferation of computerised technology and professional standardisation.

As with *Seven Days to Noon*'s tentative exploration of overbearing bureaucracy, *Quatermass II* also examines, then, the effects of rationalised technocracy upon individuals. Hutchings (1999) comments on the way in which the Quatermass serials depict a world inhabited only by technicians, figures of authority and occasional workers: 'In the world of Quatermass, there are scientists, soldiers, policemen, politicians, journalists, workers, but few lovers or families and, to a certain extent, no free-standing individuals either' (39). Other than Quatermass himself, who hovers between the role of scientist and detective, the majority of the characters occupy rigidly defined positions. This can, in part, be read as a comment on the inflexibility of the British class system, but the overwhelming array of government officials and military personnel suggests that Kneale's target was as much the technocratic nature of the British state during the Cold War. This is emphasised, for example, by Quatermass's interaction with an old man who he questions in a pub near to the alien factory. The man decries the demolition of the former village that he visited as a child and proclaims that 'when there was less government about things were better. I know that.' The massive industrial site, although later confirmed as the product of hostile invaders, acts as a symbol for a supposedly intrusive state, which crushes tradition in order to meet its industrial targets.

This oppressive vision of authoritarianism is continued within the prefab town that houses the workers commissioned to labour at the factory by infected senior personnel. Hutchings (1999) notes that the posters scattered around the town which state 'Secrets Mean Sealed Lips' offers a 'war-like slogan' (38) that is reminiscent of morale boosting notices during World War Two. However, the constant patrols by armed police, and the brisk removal of Quatermass when he questions an official in the town, suggests a more sinister authority. Links to Soviet-style totalitarianism are clearly marked, yet once more, the prefab housing and surrounding countryside conjures a recognisably British setting, which necessitates a reflection on the creeping presence of authoritarianism within the most ostensibly tranquil of locales. Furthermore, the large-scale urban programme that 'invades' an otherwise rural community touches on concerns regarding state planning. As seen in *The Day of the Triffids* where the seemingly burdensome social-democratic state is gleefully dismantled by the Triffid apocalypse, the construction of the vast industrial plant and prefab housing estate by alien forces may be implicitly analogous to post-war state expansion.

Whereas *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Quatermass II* provide sustained, but relatively nuanced critiques of social and political phenomena, *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9) offers a more polemical take on the direction of Britain in the late fifties. There is good reason for the overt politics of the third serial as the period leading up to its broadcast had seen a variety of high profile events that would have been difficult to ignore. As mentioned previously, the Suez Crisis of 1956 had seriously dented Britain's ability to operate independently on the international stage, whilst a year later, the fire at the Windscale nuclear plant had raised serious new questions about the safety and security of nuclear power. Added to this, Britain entered the thermonuclear arms race in May 1957 through the alleged hydrogen bomb tests on Christmas Island, while growing national unease at nuclear proliferation would crystallise in the formation of the CND in early 1958. Broadcast over the Christmas and New Year period of 1958-9, *Quatermass and the Pit* comments on these emerging tensions by challenging official Cold War policies through a continuous satire of the absurd orthodoxies sustained by political and military men, while Quatermass (now played by Andre Morrell), along with his ally

Dr. Matthew Roney, become dissenting voices amongst the illogical posturing presented as characteristic of the period.

Quatermass and the Pit moves away from the alien invasion motif of the previous two serials and instead creates a scenario whereby aliens have been on earth for millions of years. The serial begins with the discovery of hominid remains on a building site, with Roney (a Palaeontologist) and his team brought in to examine the scene. He soon finds a strange metallic object on site, which is first thought to be an unexploded World War Two bomb. Quatermass, disillusioned by a government takeover of his rocket group, investigates the mysterious capsule and upon entering the object locates perfectly preserved alien corpses. Quatermass and Roney then theorise that the age of the hominids and aliens suggests that human evolution was influenced by the Martian life forms uncovered in the capsule. Military and government personnel refuse to listen to their explanations, believing instead that the capsule is an experimental Nazi propaganda tool, yet the terrifying conclusion, whereby the capsule uses telekinetic energy to force Londoners to riot and kill, proves Quatermass's theory of an aggressive Martian strain within the human subconscious.

While mediations on evolutionary history – typical, as we have seen, of the legacy of scientific romance in British SF - are pronounced in *Quatermass and the Pit*, the ongoing disputes between Quatermass, Whitehall officials and the parodic Colonel Breen provide the most distinctive Cold War critique of the three serials. In the opening episode, Quatermass attends a meeting with a government minister and army generals where he is informed that the rocket research will be repositioned to meet distinctly military objectives. Colonel Breen subsequently outlines the change in policy:

> The setting up of permanent bases on the Moon and possibly Mars also, is a certainty within five to seven years. Those bases will be military ones. The present state of world politics leaves no doubt about that [...] Whoever plants those bases can police the earth. Ballistic missiles will be stored there: slave missiles, designed to react automatically to, well, activity on

earth. Even if an aggressor should totally wipe out a neighbour in a nuclear attack, they will themselves be obliterated by missiles from space.[61]

Quatermass immediately rebukes Breen's plan, proclaiming – in a manner reminiscent of Clarke's optimistic views of space travel – that humanity should view the exploration of space as an opportunity to 'leave our vices behind us, war first of all', yet is quickly dismissed by the government minister as being 'naive'. Unlike the previous two serials where Quatermass is briefly harassed by civil servants, or occasionally inclined to decry delays or cuts to funding, here he stands in direct conflict with those advocating a military purpose for his research.

Wright (2005) argues that by the third serial Quatermass is therefore no longer an ambiguous figure, instead being 'the voice of reason' (291), and consequently his involvement with 'scientific ventures no longer force a crisis of conscience as they did in *Experiment*' (291). While Quatermass does indeed stand alone as a symbol of rationality in an increasingly nationalistic and aggressive world, Wright fails to mention the anxiety still displayed towards scientific enterprise in Kneale's series. Indeed, the news that Breen is to become joint director of the rocket group exasperates Quatermass who insists that the project is designed 'for peaceful scientific research.' In previous serials, the Quatermass rockets were the source of uncertainty: problematic due to the volatility and unknown nature of the nuclear technology they utilised, but also a symbol of hope for humanity in that they aimed for the non-violent exploration of other worlds. In *Quatermass and the Pit* however, the takeover of the research group by the government and military has dissolved the project's utopian impulse and reinvented it as a tool for aggressive expansion. Quatermass may be entirely trusted by the third serial, but he is also increasingly isolated by the state which has hijacked his 'rational' research in order to advance the 'irrational' spectacle of nuclear build-up.

Unlike previous serials which envisage an external threat disrupting an otherwise familiar and, in part, 'cosy' representation of 1950s Britain, *Quatermass and the Pit* characterises contemporary culture as itself chaotic and threatening. Following

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[61]*Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9). [TV serial] Written by Nigel Kneale, directed by Rudolph Cartier. UK: BBC.

Colonel Breen's explanation of the military moon bases, which Dave Rolinson and Nick Cooper (2002) describe as representing a 'pre-Reaganite desire to aim missiles at Earth' (162), the ageing generals congratulate him on his strategy that works like the Sword of Damocles. To Quatermass's dismay, they then begin, jokingly, to discuss naming the project 'Operation Damocles'. This bleak satire, which pre-empts in some respects the style of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), highlights the dangerous logic that was perceived to be accepted practice amongst military strategists of the late fifties as the proliferation of thermonuclear weaponry intensified. The meeting is followed by a news bulletin heard on a portable radio at the building site. The newsreader outlines how a conference on nuclear disarmament 'remains deadlocked by failure to agree an agenda' while the proceeding headline explains that 'Birmingham was peaceful last night after almost a week of racial disturbances.' The nuclear deadlock confirms the geo-political situation as outlined by Breen in the previous scene, while the story of racial tensions would have resonated with late fifties audiences following the race riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham in the summer of 1958.[62] The Britain on display in this final serial is not merely anxious, but in a state of pre-apocalyptic tension.

The final revelation that human behaviour has been governed by an aggressive Martian strain placed within our ancestors millions of years previously is therefore integral to the broader socio-political message of the serial. Hutchings (1999) makes an important observation about the alien life forms in the Quatermass franchise, arguing that beneath the advanced technological shell 'the aliens themselves are revealed as ultra-natural, defiantly organic, even primordial' (41). The discovery of the insect-like corpses and Quatermass's subsequent revelatory take on evolutionary theory therefore forces society to confront natural processes it had come to ignore, and, in a similar way to many works of British disaster fiction, and science fictional invasion narratives more generally, places human society within an evolutionary framework otherwise assumed to have been superseded.

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[62] See Hennessy (2007) where he notes the impact of the riots on race relations: 'Things were never the same again. The comfortable shared notion within a nation which prided itself on its tolerance and civility that race riots were a blemish on other societies such as South Africa or the southern USA was gone for ever' (501).

By expressing the threat to humanity as embedded within itself rather than merely present in an external Other, *Quatermass and the Pit* also opens up a form of psycho-social investigation that pre-empts the concerns of the New Wave. Quatermass wonders whether knowledge of the Martian race was buried 'somewhere in the subconscious' before later explaining that they had also implanted a 'shared memory of killing' within the human psyche. As Rolinson and Cooper (2002) suggest, the violent riots induced by the alien capsule can be 'configured as a psychological disturbance enacting in Freudian terms the return of the repressed' (162). By inverting the invasion narrative, Kneale's serial thus anticipates new forms of representation in British SF that would move away from expressing Cold War anxiety metaphorically through a variety of hostile species and towards a psychological excavation of internalised time systems and the psychical affectations of biological memory.

Chapter Five: British Science Fiction Film and Television in the 1960s

During the 1960s a collection of SF productions appeared that have remained firmly embedded within popular consciousness. Anglo-American films such as *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), both directed by Stanley Kubrick, are notable examples of SF works from the decade that persist as exemplary markers in the genre's cinematic evolution, while the arrival of *Doctor Who* in 1963 would see the creation of one of the most recognisable characters in television history. Yet, in Britain at least, any idea that SF film and television was experiencing a boom during the sixties is, perhaps, misleading. In fact, as Robert Murphy (1992) notes: 'science fiction, which had been an important genre in the 1950s, became a poor relation of horror in the 60s, and the few big-budget science fiction films made then now appear shrunken and insignificant' (179). While it is perhaps unfair for Murphy to dismiss the achievements of at least certain SF films during the decade, he is right to outline the prominence of horror and, in particular, the dominant position of Hammer, who produced films that were not only popular but economically lucrative. *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) was, for example, 'made for around £65,000 and grossed around £300,000 in Britain, £500,000 in Japan and more than £1 million in America', as Murphy reports (162).

Nonetheless, SF's apparently subsidiary position to other popular film and television mediums did not result in its disappearance, but rather its diversification. Kneale's Quatermass serials spanned a large part of the previous decade and the first series was broadcast two years before the arrival of ITV. In this way, characters such as Professor Quatermass and the style of television SF pioneered by Kneale have remained in popular consciousness due to the relative paucity of other British SF productions on the small screen during this period. By the sixties, ITV was also broadcasting a regular collection of SF programmes,[63] the most memorable of these being juvenile series such as Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* (1965–66) and *Captain*

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[63] Johnston (2009) explains that ITV, from the outset, displayed a commitment to broadcasting SF, with 1956 seeing 'over 34 hours of science fiction programming' (206).

Scarlet and the Mysterons (1967–68), while BBC Two was formed in 1964, providing a further home for SF productions. Within this three channel terrain SF television and film would diversify significantly as it competed with a wide collection of other popular genres. As will be examined in this chapter, 'serious' SF drama would nonetheless continue through BBC Two's *Out of the Unknown* (1965–71) series, while films such as *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) engaged with the styles emerging from British New Wave cinema and Peter Watkins's *The War Game* (1965) experimented with the documentary form to speculate on the consequences of nuclear exchange. Additionally, Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and Richard Lester's surreal post-apocalyptic comedy *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969) take up SF conventions to form part of their satiric attacks on civil defence policy and conservative forms of national identity.

The Day the Earth Caught Fire (1961)

Of the early sixties SF films produced in Britain, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* stands out as a work that engages with both domestic social transformations and speculates – somewhat fantastically – on the dangers of nuclear testing. Directed by Val Guest, who had previously worked as director on Hammer's adaptations of the first two Quatermass serials during the fifties, the film subsequently won a British Academy Award for best screenplay. Set in contemporaneous London, the story primarily follows *Daily Express* journalist Peter Stenning (played by Edward Judd) as he investigates increasingly unusual weather patterns throughout the world. Along with his colleague Bill Maguire (Leo McKern), Stenning discovers that the meteorological changes have been triggered by concurrent hydrogen bomb tests by the Soviet Union and the United States (each registering 50 megatons), which have knocked the world off its axis and sent it spinning towards the sun. The film concludes as a series of gigantic 'corrective' bombs are exploded in an attempt to realign the earth's position. The closing scene displays two separate newspaper headlines reading 'World Doomed' as well as 'World Saved'. With this plot, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* successfully combines apocalyptic action – mysterious fog and tropical storms engulfing London – with social and political analysis, as CND protest marches are pictured along with a beatnik riot at the end of the film.

Formally, fast-paced dialogue and depictions of frantic activity in the newsroom sustain a vision of a rapidly changing world heading towards potential catastrophe.

Many of the social and political tensions addressed by the film are focalised through the main protagonist, Stenning. A lower-middle class journalist who nonetheless harbours ambitions to be a 'serious' writer, Guest's anti-hero aligns with the masculine characterisations often seen in British New Wave cinema of the period, regularly arriving late to work due to his alcohol dependency and exhibiting a notable contempt for authority. The bustling newsroom is also supplied with a *cinema verite* quality through the inclusion of Arthur Christiansen, former editor of the *Daily Express*, playing a version of himself.[64] More broadly, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, much like *Seven Days to Noon* from the start of the previous decade, demonstrates the malleability of SF film as it overlaps with contemporaneous filmic visions of masculine culture as well as detective and spy narratives – Stenning at one stage, for example, surreptitiously accesses offices at the meteorological centre. At the same time, there is a link that can also be drawn between *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* and Nigel Kneale's serials from the previous decade. Just as Quatermass and his assistant, Matthew Roney, battle independently of government propaganda exercises and military ventures to find the truth about a mysterious metallic capsule in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-59), the storyline of Guest's film follows Stenning and Maguire as they seek out the reality behind government platitudes about meteorological phenomena. Aired as the thermonuclear era headed towards the Cuban Missile Crisis, the film represents government actions as simultaneously duplicitous and reckless. However, unlike *Seven Days to Noon* and the first two Quatermass serials, in which there is a reluctance to denounce political authorities, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* exhibits a wider cynicism towards the trustworthiness and effectiveness of the state, with both government officials, and figures of authority more generally, satirised for their ineptitude in addressing the social and political transformations underway.

For I.Q. Hunter (1999), 'this sideways, journalistic perspective lends his [Guest's] film an irreverence and lively cynicism which prevents it from merely celebrating

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[64]For full details of Guest's directorial style see I.Q. Hunter (1999): 100 – 101.

science and the military' (102), and this is demonstrated through a series of occurrences spanning the production. In the opening scene, Maguire is seen sitting at his desk attempting to write a feature on new treatments for thrombosis when a junior member of staff piles 'more protest letters'[65] about hydrogen bomb tests into his in-tray. This is then followed by images of a vociferous CND protest, which results in skirmishes between anti-nuclear activists and counter-protestors who support Britain's nuclear defence programme. As is outlined at the start of Chapter Three, the sixties represented, in many ways, a time of collision between competing models of British identity as well as being a period of vast technological achievement – often fuelled by the Cold War – and *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*'s success lies in the manner in which it interrogates contemporaneous social, political and technological forces.

One of the most striking features of *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* is, in this respect, its hostile depiction of the Cold War state, with mention of government defence policy invariably prompting derision and mockery. Upon receiving confirmation from Stenning that the world has been knocked from its axis by the nuclear tests, Maguire condemns 'the stupid, crazy, irresponsible bastards! They've finally done it.' Similarly, Stenning reacts angrily to the news, informing the editor of the absurdity of imprisoning his source, Jeannie Craig (Janet Munro), when 'the human race has been poisoning itself for years with a great big smile on its fat face.' As the news subsequently breaks to the public, the Prime Minister addresses the nation to announce that nuclear tests will now be suspended, to which Maguire wryly responds: 'what they'll do to get votes'. Furthermore, attitudes towards nuclear weapons themselves have drastically altered from those apparent in many fifties film and television productions. Here, the bomb is not the source of a generalised anxiety that sometimes leads individual characters to articulate their moral objections, but instead is at the heart of public debate and protest. The CND rallies that are continually glimpsed throughout the film as well as the general cynicism of the journalists at the *Daily Express* – a newspaper that had previously celebrated Britain's H-bomb programme (see the front page reproduced in Chapter

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[65]*The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961). [Film] Directed by Val Guest. UK: Pax Films.

Three) – creates an image of a nation troubled and restless at having to experience an extended period living beneath the shadow of increasingly powerful weaponry.

The bomb accordingly emerges as the ultimate cultural-political symbol of government and military (and, hence, state) irresponsibility in the film, while the subsequent apocalyptic crisis that emerges after the ill-judged atomic tests allows Guest to explore a series of supplementary social issues that dominated early sixties Britain. Hunter (1999) rightly notes that, as with many British films of the fifties and sixties, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* primarily 'looks backwards' (104) to the Second World War for clues as to how to handle the emerging crisis. This is particularly noticeable when the government, in the film, imposes water rationing and places signs reading 'Water is life. Save it.' outside refill stations. Yet despite official attempts to reignite a Blitz spirit, Londoners instead argue with volunteers and amongst themselves whilst queuing, and preceding clips show exhausted citizens clutching withered ration books. The scene thus tackles two competing themes. On the one hand, the lack of national or local unity as rationing begins pre-empts certain revisionist histories of the Second World War, most notably seen in Angus Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991). But, more prominently, the scene also provides a snapshot of changing social attitudes developing as a consequence of Cold War politics. Unlike at the start of the Blitz in 1940, when the recognisable enemy of Nazism provided a reason for national solidarity, the crisis within *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* is caused by the collective policy of nuclear build-up. The enemy is thus not identified as an external aggressor, but rather as the Cold War state itself, be it Soviet, British or American.

Following on from this, the film's depiction of the CND protests and a Beatnik riot also signifies increasing dissatisfaction with governmental action. As outlined in Chapter Three, in the years immediately after its formation, the CND attracted sizeable support, particularly amongst the young. As Kate Hudson (2005) notes, at the 1959 Easter march 'over 40 per cent of the marchers were under 21' (57), while Jeff Nuttall (1968) recalls how Beatniks were a lively part of the CND rallies and seemingly 'appeared from nowhere in their grime and tatters, with their slogan-daubed crazy hats and streaming filthy hair' (51). With this in mind, it is

unsurprising that the CND protestors and Beatniks would appear as the major youth movements within the film. However, while the CND are assimilated within the narrative through stock footage of peaceful protest marches that appear as expected and rational reactions to the catastrophic nuclear tests, the rioting Beatniks, who a baffled policeman understatedly labels as a group of 'teenage kids kicking it up a bit', signify a more troubling cultural phenomenon. The group of youngsters are witnessed smashing windows, stealing water supplies and overturning Stenning's car before finally breaking into Jeannie's flat and tormenting her as she cowers in the bathtub. The scene follows immediately after the Prime Minister's final address to the nation prior to the detonation of the corrective weapons, with his solemn, Churchillian rhetoric appearing misplaced and outmoded as national togetherness loosens considerably.

Through these competing scenes Guest foregrounds the conflicting cultures present within British society of the 1960s. The perfectly pronounced speech of the ageing Prime Minister is indicative of a certain model of British identity, rooted in wartime and appealing to collective memories of previous hardships. The Beatniks however, exemplify, in the film at least, emerging cultural attitudes amongst a younger generation who do not maintain the same wartime nostalgia and have instead only known life beneath the bomb – an experience that has helped establish new forms of social identity. The riotous crowd depicted in the film are nearly all semi-naked and joyfully partake in intimate contact with each other. Such sexual openness corresponds to what Celia Hughes (2012) – in her study of masculine identities in socialist youth movements – describes as a 'growing sense of social and sexual agency' (186) developing through the sixties that further challenged traditional forms of national cultural identity. In a somewhat different vein, Colin MacInnes ([1958] 1986) also charts the rise of this 'generation gap' in his 1958 essay 'Pop Songs and Teenagers', noting that

> in this decade, we witness the second Children's Crusade, armed with strength and booty, against all 'squares', all adult nay-sayers. An international movement, be it noted, that blithely penetrates the political curtains draped by senile seniors, as yet unconscious of the rising might of this new classless class. (47)

Correspondingly, Hunter (1999) argues that the riots in the film occur amongst youth who feel 'alienated by the tired, repressive, dangerous values of the older generation' (108), with their behaviour demonstrating 'that the national self-image is frayed and unravelling' (108). By the film's climax the nation has not united in aid of a common cause, but become increasingly fractious, with the crisis triggering the eruption of social divisions lingering beneath the post-war consensus.

As with much British SF film and television of the fifties and sixties, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* remains consistently ambivalent with regard to technological transformations. When a group of journalists are provided with a pseudo-scientific explanation of how the earth has been knocked from its axis, someone proclaims that 'it's all science fiction', which is rebuked with another voice declaring that 'so were rockets to the moon and satellites.' In this scene, scientific invention is both the source of great achievement (rockets and satellites) and the path to annihilation (the H-bomb tests that have knocked the world toward the sun). Furthermore, as is seen in *Quatermass II* (1955), where a nuclear rocket is at first responsible for a catastrophic accident before saving humankind in the closing episode, here, too, a redemptive use for nuclear technology is found as the Prime Minister explains that 'four thermonuclear bombs, the largest ever devised' will attempt to right the wrongs of previous explosions. At the same time, however, there are also continuities with the attitudes conveyed in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9), which envisages the co-opting of nuclear material by the military. Just as the final Quatermass serial confronts the logic of the military's nuclear defence policy, in *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* the vast majority of characters express distaste for both nuclear weapons and, more generally, government itself. Sardonically responding to the news of international co-operation in the launch of corrective weapons, Maguire comments: 'Bravo, it's only taken half a million years'.

As with the representation of emerging youth cultures within the film – which challenge dominant, yet increasingly anachronistic forms of national identity – the dissenting attitude towards nuclear weapons expressed by Stenning, Maguire and their colleagues indicates a more general distrust of government defence policy as

the thermonuclear era started to take shape. Tony Shaw (2006) provides some contextual evidence for this, citing a 1958 Gallup poll which

> showed that 80 per cent of the British public expected less than half of Britain's population to survive a nuclear war, generating an increasingly cynical attitude towards Civil Defence publicity, and prompting questions in certain quarters about how much the public really knew and had the right to be told. (135)

By the time of the film's release in November 1961, international tensions had increased significantly following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion by CIA-backed troops in April of that year, which was subsequently followed by the erection of the Berlin wall in August and finally the Soviet testing of Tsar Bomba, the largest ever hydrogen bomb (the explosion was recorded at fifty megatons) in late October. Set against an increasingly unstable political background, it is unsurprising, then, that *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* expresses such apprehension with regard to nuclear proliferation and imagines the potential fragmentation of civil society. Even so, the joint international effort at the end of the film implies that humanity remains capable of co-operation, and, at a national level, as Hunter (1999) suggests, there is more than a little sentimentality in the final shot as it pans 'up to the spire of St Paul's, that icon of wartime resistance' (111), which evokes memory of 'earlier threats to national identity' (111) as a means of resisting the current crisis.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)

Released in January 1964, Stanley Kubrick's macabre comedy *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* does not articulate the kind of hopeful message to be found in the closing scenes of *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*. Instead, a nuclear crisis results, at the end of the film, in the destruction of the world by a Soviet doomsday machine that is triggered after a renegade Air Force General, Jack D. Ripper (Sterling Hayden), orders his squadron to launch a surprise nuclear attack. Largely American in terms of characters, fictional setting and content, *Dr. Strangelove* was, nonetheless, filmed at Shepperton studios in London and enlisted former Goon, Peter Sellers, in three of the lead roles, with one character, the bumbling RAF officer, Group Captain Lionel Mandrake, proving particularly relevant to this thesis's concerns. The film was based on British writer Peter

Bryant's 1958 thriller *Red Alert* (Bryant's real name was Peter George and the novel was also distributed as *Two Hours to Doom*), with Bryant also contributing to the script for the film. Bryant's novel is a serious exploration of procedure, outlining the protocol followed by bomber crew in the event of nuclear war, but by using the same premise of an Air Force General inexplicably ordering an attack, the text touches upon human fallibility and unpredictability, which would operate as a useful satiric starting point for Kubrick. As a consequence of the novel's intricate exploration of American defence strategy, the film also lends itself to this kind of examination. However, for the purpose of this thesis there are two particularly salient issues that are worth specifically exploring. Firstly, the film's juxtaposition of military hardware with consumerist objects provides a powerful critique of co-existing phenomena in both British and American society during the early sixties, while, secondly, the satirical role of Captain Mandrake provides an especially interesting insight into changing conceptions of British identity during the thermonuclear era.

As with earlier atomic thrillers, notably *Seven Days to Noon*, Kubrick's film is set contemporaneously, or in the very near future, and broadly satirises the absurdities arising from the period's policies of deterrence and Mutually Assured Destruction. Nonetheless, as in *Seven Days to Noon*, which assumes the imminency of Britain acquiring atomic weapons, *Dr. Strangelove* also makes a speculative leap by contemplating the existence of a doomsday machine. This is made clear in the opening scene of the film where the narrator describes the Soviet device:

> For more than a year, ominous rumours have been privately circulating among high level western leaders, that the Soviet Union had been at work on what was darkly hinted to be the ultimate weapon, a doomsday device. Intelligence sources traced the site of the top secret Russian project to the perpetually fog shrouded wasteland below the arctic peaks of the Zokov islands. What they were building, or why it should be located in a such a remote and desolate place, no one could say.[66]

Such a concept has its roots in military planning and is discussed in detail in Herman Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War* (1960),[67] but by imagining its actual design and use

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[66] *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). [Film] Directed by Stanley Kubrick. US: Columbia Pictures.

[67] Indeed, Kahn's ([1960] 1969) description of a hypothetical doomsday machine is comparable to the one triggered in *Dr. Strangelove*: 'The device is protected from enemy actions (perhaps by being put thousands of feet underground) and then connected to a computer which is in turn connected, by a

the film firmly enters the terrain of SF. As pointed out in Chapter Four, throughout the fifties and sixties, film and television drama invariably crossed generic boundaries, with many SF productions of the period closely aligned with horror, for example. *Dr. Strangelove* succeeds through its seamless combination of satirical comment with an apocalyptic SF setting. It is thus through the imagination of a slightly fantastical, but scientifically plausible scenario that the film positions itself to contemplate the consequences of Cold War military planning and satirise their grotesque potentials.

The main characters of *Dr. Strangelove* are purposefully presented as absurd caricatures of military and political men, whose names often serve to equate their egotism and militarism with different forms of sexual perversion. As Charles Maland (1979) usefully delineates:

> Jack D. Ripper [...] recalls the sex murderer who terrorized London during the late 1880s. The name of Army strategist Buck Turgidson is also suggestive: his first name is slang for a virile male and his last name suggests both bombast and an adjective meaning "swollen." Major King Kong, pilot of the B-52, reminds viewers of the simple-minded beast who fell in love with the beautiful blonde. Group Captain Lionel Mandrake's last name is also the word for a plant reputedly known for inducing conception in women, while both names of President Merkin Muffley allude to female genitals. (704-5)

Such lampooning of the macho language and iconography of the Cold War produces a satirical exposure of how lustful obsession with the bomb has induced the nuclear arms race, and is further indicated at the start of the film when Major Kong looks at the image of a *Playboy* centrefold whose buttocks are covered by a copy of *Foreign Affairs*.[68] Later, Kong also examines the contents of his survival pack, which contains a surprising mix of objects:

> Survival kit contents check. In them you will find: one 45 calibre automatic, two boxes of ammunition, four days concentrated emergency rations, one drug issue containing antibiotics, morphine, vitamin pills, pep pills, sleeping pills, tranquilizer pills, one miniature combination Russian phrase book and Bible, one hundred dollars in rubles, one hundred dollars

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reliable communication system, to hundreds of sensory devices all over the United States. The computer would then be programmed so that if, say, five nuclear bombs exploded over the United States, the device would be triggered and the earth destroyed' (145).

[68] The model is Tracy Reed who plays Turgidson's secretary Miss Scott in the film and the copy of *Foreign Affairs* is reported to be the January 1963 edition (Vol. 41 No. 2). See Grant B. Stillman (2008): 491.

in gold, nine packs of chewing gum, one issue of prophylactics, three lipsticks, three pair of nylon stockings – shoot, a fellah could have a pretty good weekend in Vegas with all that stuff.

Both moments provide intriguing insights into the film's satiric intentions. The hedonism of consumer culture is juxtaposed with the policy of deterrence, which are seen to constitute a peculiar alliance. The macho posturing of military men cohabits with sexualised consumer objects (*Playboy*, lipstick, nylon stockings) to provide a comedic, but also unsettling, representation of a world as lustfully addicted to the bomb as it is to consumerism.

Significantly, in this regard, Ripper is visualised as a character who has, above all, been unable to reconcile the simultaneous existence of these competing forces of (masculine) militarisation and (apparently feminising) consumerism. He orders the attack as he believes a communist conspiracy is underway within America, identifying the fluoridation of water as the ultimate realisation of this paranoid fear, asking Mandrake whether he realises 'that fluoridation is the most monstrously conceived and dangerous communist plot we have ever had to face?' Ripper's behaviour accordingly correlates with Richard Hofstadter's ([1964] 1996) definition of the 'paranoid style' dominant within American politics during the fifties and sixties, which regards

> a "vast" or "gigantic" conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events. History *is* a conspiracy set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what is felt to be needed to defeat it is not the usual methods of political give-and-take, but an all-out crusade. (29)

Ripper's paranoia is in this way facilitated by the complex social landscape of sixties America that he is unable to piece together through, in Hofstadter's terms, 'political give-and-take' (29). Ripper can only connect large-scale government investment with nationalistic military ventures, whereas innovative public health schemes (such as the fluoridation of water), and emerging modern social phenomena more generally, are viewed with suspicion, particularly if they fail to line-up alongside patriotic orthodoxy. Indeed, Hofstadter ([1964] 1996) explains how the campaign against the fluoridation of water specifically adopted this paranoid style, describing the movement as 'catnip for cranks of all kinds' (5), which may explain why Kubrick selected the issue as the major source of Ripper's paranoia. Ripper's derangement thus emerges through his inability to separate nationalistic paranoia

from genuine social transformation, which leads him to mistakenly believe that large-scale public projects must be fundamentally linked to clandestine Soviet expansion.

Appearing alongside the absurd and unsettling figure of Ripper is the British RAF officer Mandrake (played by Sellers), who has been working at the Air Force base as part of an 'officer exchange programme.' While Ripper represents a new and dangerous type of Cold War subjectivity emerging from a militarised world of nuclear brinkmanship and political paranoia, Mandrake is depicted as a figure from the past, maintaining both the appearance and mannerisms – perfectly kept moustache and upper-class accent – stereotypically associated with British Second World War pilots. His outdated persona accordingly makes him largely impotent when trying to reason with or disobey the increasingly psychotic Ripper. Upon discovering Ripper's plan, Mandrake stands up and salutes the general before declaring that 'as an officer in Her Majesty's Air Force, it is my clear duty, under the present circumstances, to issue the recall code, upon my own authority, and bring back the wing.' He then attempts to leave the room only to discover that Ripper has locked the doors, to which Mandrake responds by politely asking for 'the key and the recall codes. Have you got them handy, sir?' Subsequently, when Ripper pulls a machine gun from his golf bag and requests Mandrake's help in feeding the weapon with ammunition, the latter can only bumble a nervous response: 'I haven't had very much experience, you know, with those sort of machines, Jack. I only ever pressed a button in my old Spitfire.' It is Mandrake's parochial Englishness that is, in this way, mocked for both its timidity and anachronistic nature. Faced with an aggressive American General, the solitary British figure within the film is ridiculed for his adherence to obsolete protocol and allegiance to past glory. Despite nearly saving humanity by providing President Muffley with the recall codes after examining Ripper's notebook, his presence as the only British official, and the frustration he later experiences in explaining to Colonel Bat Guano that his 'suit' is in fact an official RAF uniform, exemplifies the broadly peripheral role that Britain would occupy during the major flashpoints of the thermonuclear era. Indeed, Muffley does not at any point consult his British counterpart in Downing Street and Mandrake

only accesses the President through a torturous exchange with the operator as he attempts to call him from a payphone.

Interestingly, Bryant's *Red Alert* ([1958] 2011) also makes little mention of Britain's role in the nuclear crisis. Bryant was himself a former RAF lieutenant and member of CND,[69] but his novel contains no British characters, and the nation is only mentioned on one occasion, with regard to its strategic importance in a Soviet assault:

> The destruction of the cities was not regarded as essential, except in one case. They would be destroyed to assist in the general disruption of communications. The exception was London. The Russians were under no illusion about the fighting quality of the British. A considerable proportion of their missile and fighter-bomber strength would be devoted to London, and to the offensive bases of all kinds in Britain. (e-book: location 478)

Here, Bryant's novel reveals a view that was increasingly entering the popular imagination in the early sixties – that should thermonuclear war take place, Britain would be a prime target for Soviet attack, while simultaneously the nation's geo-political role was becoming more and more subsidiary to the overwhelming force of the two superpowers.

In both Bryant's novel and Kurbick's subsequent satirical re-imagining, Britain has become, then, a minor player in global power politics. Nonetheless, in *Dr. Strangelove* the satiric representation of Mandrake's archetypal Britishness is productively juxtaposed with the brashness of Ripper. Whilst Ripper sends a fleet of B-52s to attack the Soviet Union, and General Turgidson (George C. Scott) enthusiastically argues that 20 million deaths might be considered 'modest and acceptable', Mandrake quietly contests the logic of such thinking, suggesting that there's 'something dreadfully wrong somewhere'. In this way, Mandrake becomes a rather heroic (if slightly tragic) figure in so far as his adherence to cordial, gentlemanly practice sets him apart from the other military men who have readily accepted the new order of the nuclear arms race. Mandrake and, by implication, Britain as a whole are envisioned as 'psychologically' removed from such brinkmanship and, accordingly, Mandrake's detachment from this kind of military thinking, facilitated by vast weapons systems, contributes to what Maland (1979)

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[69] Shaw (2006): 125.

describes as the film's wider critique of 'the blind faith man places in technological progress' (705).

The comedic and political effectiveness of the film lies in its utilisation of Bryant's precise detail of military procedure in *Red Alert* and the placing of such knowledge in the hands of characters depicted as madmen. In this way, as Dan Lindley (2002) points out, the film 'alternates between realism [...] and zaniness' (666) so as to underline both the complexity and sophistication of Cold War weapon systems as well as to challenge the sanity of those who have unconditional faith in such apocalyptic technology. As with *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, which combines a series of generic tropes to create a speculative narrative that continually interrogates contemporary phenomena, *Dr. Strangelove* also disrupts and entangles competing generic styles to enable collisions between a more or less 'realistic' documentation of nuclear strategy and surreal comedy. The lengthy procedures carried out by the crew of the B-52 provide insight into the technical process of nuclear attack, which is offset by the cartoonish behaviours of Major Kong at the climax of the film. Additionally, Mandrake appears as the archetypal hero of a British Second World War film, yet is dropped into the paranoid terrain of Cold War America, while Dr. Strangelove himself is, in part, a satirical characterisation of nuclear strategists while also being comparable to the eponymous villain of the spy thriller *Dr. No* (1962), or a member of the team of ex-Nazi scientist employed by America as part of Operation Paperclip. It is through this combination that the film manages to expose some of the contradictions of sixties Cold War culture – where hi-technology and consumerism overlap and intersect with military technocracy, while paranoia facilitated by defence policy rubs up against more traditional models of national identity.

The War Game (1965)

If Britain's geo-political position is characterised as essentially ancillary to that of the United States in *Dr. Strangelove*, Peter Watkins's 1965 speculative docu-drama *The War Game* supplies a precise and, at times, polemical attack upon domestic civil defence policy. *The War Game* was banned from television upon completion, when

the BBC officially declared it 'too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting'[70] due to its graphic representation of nuclear holocaust. Nonetheless, the film was provided with a limited cinema release the following year and would eventually appear on television in 1985. The film fuses a series of styles, with the authoritative narration by Michael Aspel and Peter Graham providing accurate information about government defence plans and the likely extent of a Soviet attack on Britain, while there are also a collection of 'authentic' interviews with members of the public who are asked questions about the effects of fallout and the retaliation they would like to see in the event of nuclear attack. This documentary style is combined with the enactment of a fictional, but plausible military scenario where American threats to use tactical nuclear weapons in south Vietnam[71] have been countered by a Soviet invasion of West Berlin. The subsequent firing of an MGR-1 'Honest John' nuclear rocket by NATO forces provides the appropriate flashpoint for the Soviets to launch a limited nuclear attack upon strategic targets in Britain and Europe. The film's final section portrays the likely features of a post-nuclear war Britain, and as James M. Welsh (1979) argues, whilst it is, in this sense, 'in many ways a "factual" film' (29) it nonetheless relies on a 'plot device [...] borrowed from science fiction, evaluating events in Britain in a hypothetical future state' (29).

The tone of the journalism in *The War Game* is similar to that represented in *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* as Watkins uses quotations from a variety of sources to suggest the duplicity, complacency and absurdity of those in positions of authority. This is exemplified when the film moves on to the topic of radioactive fallout. As bemused members of the public struggle to explain the likely consequences of fallout, the narrator details how the Home Office had previously declared its intention, in 1959, to enhance 'public education in matters of radioactivity'.[72] Similarly, religious organisations are attacked for their acceptance of nuclear armaments and implicit support for state strategy. Following footage of a firestorm ripping through Rochester in Kent, the film cuts away to a blank screen containing a quote by a Catholic bishop which states that 'our nuclear weapons will be used with

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[70] Quoted in Shaw (2006), 137.
[71] America had launched Operation 'Rolling Thunder' in March 1965.
[72] *The War Game* (1965). [Television programme] Directed by Peter Watkins. UK: BBC.

wisdom.' But more broadly, Watkins's uncompromising exposition of the likely devastation caused by even a limited nuclear attack also supplies a critique of a perceived reluctance to discuss the issue of nuclear war in Britain; something expressed most ferociously at the end of the film when the narrator states that 'there is now almost a total silence' on the issue of thermonuclear warfare in the media.

Shaw (2006a) picks up on this by noting that whereas 'newspaper editors, film producers, playwrights, novelists, even musicians, gorged themselves on a myriad of themes, from espionage to space races, and "hot" wars to defecting ballet dancers' (1354) during the Cold War, the subject of nuclear war and its consequences was rarely subject to any prolonged scrutiny in itself:

> On closer inspection […] during the first two decades of the 'atomic age' especially, the British media's coverage of nuclear issues was extremely selective. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Fleet Street barely reported the Attlee governments' nuclear weapons and energy programmes. [...] When newspapers broached the subject a little more freely following Britain's entry into the 'nuclear club' in 1952, they invariably lent implicit or explicit support to official policy, either by playing down fears of a nuclear war or by claiming that Britain's nuclear deterrent was an essential ingredient of the nation's world power status. (1354)

As explored in this thesis, British SF works from this period contain varying degrees of direct engagement with nuclear themes, with certain works encoding a generalised atomic anxiety within their narratives, whilst others, such as the Quatermass serials, express shifting and conflicting perspectives on nuclear technologies. Within this context it is therefore unsurprising that Watkins would seek to create a work that explicitly articulates and forensically examines the likely results should nuclear war take place. In doing so, it is noticeable that as much as the film makes use of the documentary form, it also combines this with a post-catastrophe narrative that draws heavily on SF conventions. Watkins thus produces an unsettling mix where *actual* defence policy provides a suitable and plausible vehicle for a *speculative* story. Similarly to *Dr. Strangelove*, Watkins's film grounds itself in the language of Cold War policymakers and military strategists, uncovering how their behaviour assists the creation of scenarios that had previous been the property of science fictional narratives.

Indeed, *The War Game* is useful in the context of this thesis to the degree that – in some respects like *Dr. Strangelove* - it does not necessarily *aim* to be an SF film, but the real threat of nuclear warfare consequently compels Watkins to speculate on the possible shape of a post-apocalyptic Britain. Commenting on Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Welsh (1979) picks up on this theme, arguing that nuclear build-up provided a tangible material source for the apocalyptic imagination:

> In our present century, eschatological anxiety is closely linked to an all too vague but general awareness that the nuclear technology now exists to bring about the apocalypse. What once had been a function only of the imagination has now been literalized through mankind's technological expertise. Nuclear devices have been detonated and the consequences have been filmed, giving a clear picture of our own self-destructive potential, a concrete image of what in former times would have only been a mental construct. (25)

Equally, as previously discussed in relation to J.G. Ballard's fiction, the rapid technological changes brought about over the course of the Cold War – the proliferation of household gadgets, the space race, atomic and thermonuclear weapons, satellite technology, super computers, and so on – created a widespread sense that, as Ballard ([1971] 1997) himself points out, 'everything is becoming science fiction' (205). However, unlike Ballard's short fiction during the late sixties (culminating in the publication of *The Atrocity Exhibition* in 1970) – which sought to intricately examine contemporaneous hi-technology and expose its dystopian functions – the technological tools of the Cold War are largely absent from Watkins's production. In fact, beyond explaining likely UK targets and briefly outlining a military flashpoint, the film exhibits little concern for the technological procedures of nuclear emergency itself. As Barry Curtis (2008) writes, the film's title ironically 'refers to the military, computer-enabled playing out of scenarios of "mutually assured destruction" and "acceptable loss"' (127), yet at the same time, 'resolutely refuses any consolations of technology, referring its audience relentlessly to the primal scenes of loss and suffering that always shadow the disturbing modernities of Cold War culture' (127).

By focusing on a speculative post-nuclear scenario – rather than examining the technocratic structures of the Cold War itself – the film can therefore be compared to other British apocalyptic film and television productions from the fifties and early

sixties, in which the representation of near future events combines memory of the past with a nervous exploration of what may follow. By depicting the selective evacuation of London and the subsequent issuing of 'Emergency Ration Books', for example, the film relies upon memories of the Second World War to create a recognisable sense of crisis, whilst a later scene showing firemen tackling the expanding inferno in Rochester is overlaid with a voiceover explaining that 'this happened after the bombing at Hamburg, at Dresden, at Tokyo, and at Hiroshima.' Such a terrifying, but recognisable vision of cities under attack is juxtaposed with information about how thermonuclear warfare will be very different. After explaining the evacuation plans, the film subsequently remarks that even supposedly safe areas will be vulnerable in this new form of warfare, stating that 'if there were a war, at least 20% of even the areas in to which people had been evacuated would themselves be rendered totally uninhabitable by the resulting radioactive fallout.' Here, in line with the film's quasi-documentary form, the outmoded nature of civil defence is critically exposed, while the subsequent visualisation of a post-nuclear Britain further seeks to overturn assumptions about the cohesiveness of state and society in the event of thermonuclear attack. In this respect, Watkins's vision of life after the war draws heavily on post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, with the representation of food riots and the ruthless execution of criminals by the army and police inviting comparisons with works such as Christopher's *The Death of Grass*.

Yet, regardless of its bleak visualisation *The War Game* still holds back from representing the full desolation of nuclear war. The fictional scenario results in a severely limited Soviet attack with one megaton weapons fired at specific military targets. This horrendous, but potentially survivable raid is nonetheless countered by the diagrams and statistics which inform the film's viewer of the likely results of a full-scale assault. At the beginning of the film, a map of Britain outlines the major military and civilian targets in the event of war with the narrator explaining that 'each of these cities and each of these airfields combine to crowd into Britain more potential nuclear targets per acre than any other country in the world.' By displaying the horror of even a restricted nuclear exchange and supplementing it with information about all-out war, Watkins presumably seeks to demonstrate what P.D. Smith (2008) calls the 'insane logic of the arms race' (27); a logic emphasised in the

film's closing narratorial remarks which lament the doubling of thermonuclear weapons 'in the last five years' to the extent that there is 'the equivalent of about 20 tons of high explosives to every man, woman and child on the planet.' Strikingly, the statistical information which accompanies the speculative images of post-apocalyptic Britain also provides confirmation of the fears often expressed in British SF during the early years of the Cold War – specifically, that Britain was an increasingly helpless target positioned between two immense geo-political forces. Indeed, Watkins's combination of the factual with terrifying speculation may help, in part, to explain the transformations in British SF during the sixties. With thermonuclear weapons becoming so numerous and powerful, imagining future world wars required writers and filmmakers to contemplate nearly absolute annihilation (hence Watkins's focus on a limited exchange). As seen in both *Dr. Strangelove* and New Wave SF also, new modes of representation based around the absurd and the psychological affect of nuclear weapons emerged as a response to the unnerving prospect of an almost 'unrepresentable' thermonuclear disaster.

Even so, Watkins's film unsettles through its polemical attack upon government mismanagement and grim representation of life after nuclear war. Unlike the New Wave in SF, or indeed some of the late sixties films that will be explored shortly, Watkins does not contemplate the cumulative effect of nuclear tension upon contemporary subjects. Consequently, Watkins does not psychologise the threat of nuclear war in a fashion similar to that described, for example, by Martin Amis ([1987] 2003) in his essay 'Thinkability':

> I was born on August 25, 1949: four days later the Russians successfully tested their first atom bomb, and *deterrence* was in place. [...] It was a nuclear world. To tell you the truth, I didn't feel very well at all. I was terribly sleepy and feverish. I kept throwing up. I was given to fits of uncontrollable weeping...When I was eleven or twelve the television started showing target maps of South East England: the outer bands of the home counties, the bull's eye of London. I used to leave the room as quickly as I could. I didn't know why nuclear weapons were in my life or who had put them there. I didn't know what to do about them. I didn't want to think about them. They made me feel sick. (7)

Watkins's aims are instead journalistic, inventing a part-factual, part-speculative pseudo-documentary to outline the folly of the arms race. Through rational exposition, Watkins confronts the antithetical absurd logic of deterrence and nuclear

strategy. More overtly fictional productions would, however, subsequently extend Watkins's attack on Cold War policy and incorporate the psycho-social into their analyses of sixties life under the Bomb.

Out of the Unknown (1965-71): 'Some Lapse of Time' (1965), 'Level Seven' (1966)

Running between 1965 and 1971, the BBC television series *Out of the Unknown* broadcast a collection of one-off SF television plays, many of which were adapted from novels or short stories.[73] The programme's creator, Irene Shubik ([2001] 2004), set out to broadcast 'stories that dealt with important or intriguing ideas' (5) and over its four series included adaptations of works by prominent SF writers including John Wyndham, Isaac Asimov, John Brunner, Ray Bradbury and J.G. Ballard, with the focus principally on 'serious' forms of speculative writing. The adaptation of John Brunner's short story 'Some Lapse of Time' from series one and J.B. Priestley's screenplay of Polish writer Mordecai Roshwald's 1959 novel *Level 7* are of particular relevance to this chapter, with Priestley's dramatisation continuing the work of both Kubrick and Watkins in questioning the wisdom of military planning in the event of thermonuclear war, while Leon Griffiths's adaptation of Brunner's story examines the psychological strain of living in anticipation of atomic attack.

   Griffiths's screenplay of 'Some Lapse of Time' remains largely true to Brunner's story, which was originally published in *Science Fantasy* in 1963. Broadcast on 6th December 1965, the narrative follows a medic, Max Harrow, as he experiences powerful nightmares following the death of his son. In the last of these he sees someone performing a shamanic ritual whilst holding aloft a human finger bone. Upon awakening he finds a policeman at his front door who asks if he can treat an ill tramp he has found nearby. Inspecting the tramp, Harrow realises that he is the figure from his dream, still clutching the finger bone. Subsequent tests carried out by Harrow's colleagues at a nearby hospital show that the tramp has been exposed to huge levels of radiation. After enlisting a philologist to decipher the peculiar language of the tramp, who calls himself Smiffershon, and having his own finger

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[73]For a full history of the creation of *Out of the Unknown* see Mark Ward (2004).

bone removed after it is slammed in a car door, Harrow concludes that Smiffershon is a time traveller who has been transported back to the present from a post-nuclear society whilst carrying the finger bone of Harrow – the only link he has to the world before the holocaust. Harrow consequently suffers a nervous breakdown as he is offered a glimpse of a bleak future at the same time as the Minister for War, Mr. Fitzprior, is admitted to the hospital for minor surgery and deferentially ushered into a private room. The climax sees Harrow enter the operating theatre where the Minister for War is having his knee cap replaced and stealing the politician's defective bone before burying it in nearby woodland. In doing so, Harrow hopes that future generations will find a bone from the person responsible for nuclear atrocities and subsequently haunt Fitzprior from the future.

Both Brunner's short story and the television adaptation focus, predominantly, on Harrow's psychological demise, but the social rather than merely personal causes of his psychosis are also implied throughout the screenplay and his vitriolic attacks on governmental use of nuclear technologies supplies a further example of dissenting attitudes in British SF productions of the mid-sixties. As in *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, the production flags up contemporary issues through glimpses of newspaper cuttings or dramatic set-pieces. At one point the camera lingers on a headline on the front page of a newspaper, which reads 'Atomic Weapons Base: New Student Demonstrations'.[74] This is then closely followed by Harrow's first sighting of Fitzprior entering a private room at the hospital. After learning that the Minister is set to have his kneecap removed Harrow angrily declares that he wishes 'it was his head!' before launching an attack on the lack of research undertaken in evaluating the damage caused by radiation, which he suspects was the underlying cause of his son's death: 'All these congenital metabolic disorders are caused by radiation damage to the developing embryo and it's swine like him that put the radiation there.' Similarly to Stenning in *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, who routinely mocks those in positions of authority within the state for their inability to foresee or even react to events, Harrow articulates his frustration that someone who authorises potentially unsafe nuclear tests is subsequently treated with grandeur in a

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[74] *Out of the Unknown* (1965). Series 1, Episode 10, Some Lapse of Time [Television Programme]. BBC Two, 6th December.

hospital housing a patient suffering from radiation poisoning. Harrow's anger is particularly interesting due to his social status as a respected middle-class doctor, in that it suggests a general breakdown of deference in British SF films from this era that can be traced back to Quatermass's vehement rebuttal of government-backed military interference in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9).[75]

While these moments provide useful contextual points about the changing nature of British culture, the exploration of post-nuclear language as well as the investigation of personal psychosis also signals a change in style during this period. Brunner's work has been strongly connected to the British New Wave, and, as has already been investigated in Chapter Three, such works invariably turned inwards towards what Ballard termed 'inner space' in order to express the *psychological* consequences of the nuclear age. Both 'Some Lapse of Time' with its haunting post-apocalyptic time traveller, and the adaptation of J.G. Ballard's story of a grounded spacecraft, 'Thirteen to Centaurus', in the following week's episode, demonstrate the growing influence of this developing sub-genre. Moreover, by exploring Harrow's psychology and Smiffershon's peculiar language, 'Some Lapse of Time' moves beyond the near indescribable terror of thermonuclear warfare itself – the central subject of both *Dr. Strangelove* and *The War Game* – to explore instead the existential trauma of living in anticipation of disaster.

In this way, the representation of Harrow's breakdown may be taken to be stylistically analogous with New Wave SF. Speculating on Smiffershon's world, Harrow embarks on a lengthy, vivid exposition of what post-nuclear war Britain may look like, describing an 'island when cities have gone when fires one hundred miles wide consume the fields and forests and nothing's left.' This post-apocalyptic nightmare is expressed more vividly through the third person narration of Brunner's (1963) original story, which emphasises the struggle Smiffershon would have endured:

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[75]As Sinfield (1997) rightly notes, following the Suez crisis of 1956 a sense of '"establishment" hypocrisy and incompetence was validated' (233) for those who felt that an ageing elite were mismanaging a rapidly changing world; something that finds a vivid articulation in the shifting social attitudes expressed within British SF from the late 1950s onwards.

>   Smiffershon must be a long way from the disaster itself – otherwise he would know rags, at least. And the fact that he didn't pointed to further conclusions.
>   Humanity must be fighting a losing battle. All hope of rebuilding had been sapped away; now the ambition was no higher than simply to stay alive.
>   [...]
>   An ocean of terror was drowning Max Harrow now. (48)

Harrow therefore looks into the far future to inform his critique of the contemporary. He criticises the idea of being a good citizen by declaring, in the television adaptation, that 'this is where your uncomplicated devotion to duty leads... Smiffershon!', and criticises civil defence advice by muttering that 'a few anti-burn dressings and a bit of brown paper over the windows couldn't save him.' At the same time, the hopeless future that Smiffershon resides within also marks a move away from the mainstream British disaster tradition. As with Ballard's sixties disaster novels, which envisage humanity dying out in transformed post-apocalyptic landscapes, Harrow's psychosis is a response to a vision of the world increasingly hostile to human survival. Unlike the novels of Wyndham or Christopher, there is nothing to rebuild in the wastelands of Smiffershon's Britain, which is, rather, heading inevitably towards extinction.

The reductive form of English that Smiffershon speaks to the philologist, Dr. Danville, in 'Some Lapse of Time' is comparable with later speculations on post-nuclear war society and language, notably Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980), especially as Danville concludes that Smiffershon is 'speaking our language as if it's undergone a series of extreme changes'. Indeed, similarly to *Riddley Walker*, Danville notes how Smiffershon uses phrases that could easily be synonyms for contemporary terms, as demonstrated when he utters 'keon' whilst pointing at a blanket. Danville explains to Harrow that 'blanket could quite easily be a synonym for skin. Now by drawing a mutation of the intrusive vowel, skin easily becomes "keon".' This description sticks with Harrow as he imagines Smiffershon using animal skin to keep warm in a nuclear winter and as he begins his descent into madness he asks a colleague if he can 'imagine a world where the only word for covering means something like an animal hide?' Harrow is then further troubled by the thought that in 'seven, eight, nine generations after the bombs' most people 'will

stop using words like blankets, shoes, pints of beer, cigarettes'. In this sense, 'Some Lapse of Time' does not so much examine the precise physical devastation of a future war, but rather considers its social and linguistic implications, with Harrow terrified not only by the 'extreme changes' in language, but also by the effective eradication of contemporary culture and its complex layers of relational meaning. The production in this way communicates, in a singularly literal way, what Jacques Derrida (1984) describes as the '*fabulously textual*' (23) nature of nuclear war itself, which relies, in Derrida's terms, 'upon structures of information and communication, structures of language, including non-vocalizable language, structures of codes and graphic decoding' (23). Harrow's polemic, which interrogates the vocabulary of defence policy, is juxtaposed here with Smiffershon's regressive forms of communication. Both underline how nuclear apocalypse is invariably codified rather than overtly discussed. Harrow expresses the sheer enormity of nuclear transformation through the likely withering of language and culture – lamenting the future eradication of words such as shoes, beer or cigarettes due to their material disappearance after atomic war – while Smiffershon references the war through cursing the finger bone of the perceived antagonist from earlier generations.

Harrow's outbursts and subsequent breakdown also aligns with emerging counter-cultural attitudes. When questioned about his mental health he invariably responds through declarations that resemble the rhetoric of advocates of anti-psychiatry, as seen in his confrontation with his colleague, Gordon Faulker, who questions Harrow's stability. Harrow responds by criticising 'the usual diagnosis for the doctor faced with a problem patient' and then accuses Faulkner of following 'the traditional way out' in labelling him as mentally unstable as soon as he expresses 'something uncomfortable'. Whilst Harrow is subsequently placed in a mental hospital towards the end of the screenplay, he is nonetheless vindicated when Danville manages to conduct an interview with Smiffershon who tells the story of his transportation from a post-apocalyptic world. Unlike the breakdown of a character such as Willingdon in *Seven Days to Noon*, whose mental instability ultimately takes on a psychopathic form that presents him as a source of terror, this later production depicts psychological stress in a more challenging way. Harrow's tirades are disturbing and his behaviour becomes increasingly frantic, peaking with the burial of Fitzprior's

kneecap. However, whereas Willingdon is merely written off as someone simply unable to deal with the stress placed upon the individual scientific worker, Harrow's breakdown is represented as an expected, and in some sense 'rational' response to a society pursuing its own insane agenda. Indeed, Harrow's descent is connected to a wider sociological malaise that is neatly summarised in R.D. Laing's contemporaneous assessment in *The Politics of Experience* (1967):

> In the last fifty years, we human beings have slaughtered by our own hands coming on for one hundred million of our species. We all live under constant threat of our own annihilation. [...] Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization apparently driven to its own destruction. Perhaps to a limited extent we can undo what has been done to us, and what we have done to ourselves. [...] We have to begin by admitting and even accepting our own violence, rather than blindly destroying ourselves with it, and therewith we have to realize that we are as deeply afraid to live and to love as we are to die.[76]

In this context, Harrow's breakdown becomes part of a more general challenge to a culture of deference and duty that prevents his colleagues from questioning the absurd policies of nuclear weapons testing and proliferation. Harrow's madness is thus seen as a visceral uncovering of the violence and cruelty underlying an ostensibly ordered society of the kind that Laing and others describe.

This outlook would see its most prominent articulation in the Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation held in London in 1967. David Cooper (1968), who coined the term 'anti-psychiatry', explains how one of the major aims of the conference was to confront doctors who 'attach the label "schizophrenia" to the diseased object and then systematically set about the destruction of that object by the physical and social processes that are termed "psychiatric treatment"' (7-8). Instead, Cooper and the delegates wished to expose how this method 'seemed to us to relate to certain political facts in the world around us' (8). 'Some Lapse of Time' is therefore interesting as it not only shows how Harrow's individual psychosis may be directly linked to a broader political situation, but also usefully demonstrates a feature of the British New Wave in SF, which, like anti-psychiatry, sought to show the complex entanglement of personal psychologies with wider sociological contexts.

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[76]Quoted in Zbigniew Kotowicz (1997): 54.

Such quasi-psychoanalytic questioning of the sanity and repressiveness of the Cold War state re-emerges in J.B. Priestley's adaptation of Roshwald's *Level 7* from the second series of *Out of the Unknown*. Broadcast on 27th October 1966 the screenplay follows a British military officer as he is relocated to a deep level facility where he will join a large team of workers as they prepare for a possible nuclear war. Roshwald's novel does not specify a particular national setting, but Priestley's adaptation is clearly set in Britain with the scenes on the surface containing, for example, signposts pointing out that they are on Ministry of Defence property. Once underground, the military personnel are assigned numbers rather than names with the protagonist acquiring the number X127 and is subsequently talked through his job should war begin. In the event of attack he may be called upon by the General to push a series of buttons – button one releases five megaton missiles, two launches fifty megaton weapons, button three fires devices that will detonate underground, whilst the fourth button fires an even more devastating hydrogen weapon that spreads a maximum amount of radioactivity. Directed by Rudolph Cartier, who had previously worked on Nigel Kneale's 1954 adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the production emphasises the authoritarian nature of life within the military bunker, while, similarly to 'Some Lapse of Time', the inhabitants are also confronted with the psychological pressure of living in a state of nuclear crisis.

As in Roshwald's novel, the screenplay focuses on the automation expected of personnel within the facility and particularly those who operate in level seven, which houses the control centre for a nuclear strike. The staff are bombarded with continual announcements over the tannoy which reminds them of their duties in the bunker and its supposed benefits compared to life on the surface: 'Level seven, deep underground, offers to a privileged few a new way of life, free from insecurity, anxiety and the menace to health of a mass urban existence'.[77] The staff are dressed in drab overalls containing just their assigned number and are served basic, vacuum-packed food; a dystopian counterpoint to the consumerist-technological hopes of the space race. The production is, of course, reminiscent of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with

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[77]*Out of the Unknown* (1966). Series 2, Episode 4, Level Seven [Television Programme]. BBC Two, 27 October. The television adaptation replaced the numerical '7' for the word 'seven' in its title.

staff under constant surveillance whilst propaganda messages radiate from speakers on the walls. Yet, the role of X127 as an operative in the firing of nuclear missiles also echoes Orwell's broader concerns about nuclear technology as expressed in 'You and the Atom Bomb' ([1945] 1968), discussed in Chapter One. Following James Burnham's ideas in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), Orwell sensed that the technocratic structures that emerged in super states to manufacture the bomb would correspondingly result in the robbing of 'the exploited classes and peoples of all power to revolt' (9). The devastating force and financial expense of the nuclear arsenal in 'Level Seven' has correspondingly led to the suspension of democratic institutions to be replaced by a militarised, authoritarian form of state dictatorship, which monitors and indoctrinates its workers and punishes those who stray from orthodoxy.

By setting the adaptation in Britain, Priestley's production does not then confine the threat of totalitarian control to Soviet-style states, but highlights its creeping presence through the burgeoning military-industrial complex of western, liberal nations. In this respect, the Britain represented in 'Level Seven' is comparable in its structure to the influential account of industrialised nations during the post-war period outlined by another contributor to the Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation, Herbert Marcuse ([1964] 1986):

> By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole. Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and distribution which may well be compatible with a "pluralism" of parties, newspapers, "countervailing powers," etc. (3)

There is an interesting parallel to be drawn in this regard with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which expresses totalitarianism largely through the representation of an all-powerful, 'terroristic' state, but also, for the Proles, as a self-regulating system that ensures that the masses never think to question state orthodoxy through creating an illusion of freedom. Similarly, the military commune in 'Level Seven' sustains itself, in part, through nationalism and propaganda, but it is, overall, a 'softer' form of

totalitarianism. The military personnel are informed that it is their moral character which has determined their selection within the facility, whilst they are also informed of the superior quality of life within the complex, with the Commandant, A15, declaring that 'life on the surface was nothing. Mobs of aimless people, crowded streets, noise, fumes, newspapers, television.' It can be inferred, therefore, that the nation outside the military installation is essentially a pluralistic, urbanised Britain, yet what the production emphasises is the increasing power of a dictatorial, military elite who possess an unnerving hold not only over their personnel, but also over nuclear policy and strategy.

Despite the largely 'soft' totalitarianism of the facility, the personnel are nonetheless treated severely should they begin to question the rationale behind their mission. This is emphasised when X127's colleague, X117, becomes increasingly alarmed by the general's insistence on obedience and begins to consider the value of level seven, which is apparently unknown to the enemy but capable of absolute destruction: 'If the other side don't know we've got a level seven, then level seven can't stop anything. It can only ruin everything.' When an alert rings out and X117 is required to sit in the control room poised to press the nuclear buttons he breaks down and is later replaced by a new X117, with the original operative appearing again, briefly, as a lobotomised cleaner. By contrast, X127 remains largely untroubled due to his compliance in taking up the recommendation of marriage. However, when he is finally required to press all four buttons in a real nuclear attack he freezes and only does so when the General pushes his hand down. Watching the map above him turn black as it registers detonations, X127 enters a state of shock and looks at his hand whilst wondering if 'that might be turning black soon'. Both the paralysing fear felt by the original X117 and X127's trauma after carrying out the commands, demonstrates the disconnect between the automation required by the war machine and the personal stresses felt by its human operatives, and emphasises the psychological dimensions of Cold War society that are foregrounded in the film. Despite listening to the daily propaganda broadcasts that declare level seven to be a haven, neither X117 nor later X127 can reconcile this ordered, underground existence with the prospect of life above the surface being entirely destroyed. Even the psychotic General – who is comparable to Turgidson in *Dr. Strangelove* and

delights at the sight of 2,000 missiles hitting their targets – and the strict A15, struggle to cope with the realities of the post-apocalyptic world. After receiving a video from the surface where the presenters describe 'another dead planet', A15 drowns herself in the hydroponics room, whilst the General hangs himself as he learns that the radiation is seeping through to each level of the bunker. Even whilst buried beneath the surface, the psychological torment of nuclear holocaust cannot be overcome.

Anti-nuclear sentiment is harrowingly evoked in both the novel and in Priestley's screenplay, as was to be expected considering Priestley's involvement with CND and his earlier treatment of nuclear war in his screenplay *Doomsday for Dyson*, which aired on ITV in 1958. However, in discussing the novel, David Seed (1994) argues that *Level 7* also warns, more generally, against a particular form of subservience to technology for which specifically Cold War processes are exemplary:

> Roshwald's original title for this work was *The Diary of Push-Button Officer X-127* which appropriately stressed the issue of robotization, partly problematizing the individual's relation to technology and partly using that technology as a metaphorical expression of the individual's conformity to prescribed roles. (227)

In this way, Priestley's screenplay articulates a form of technological anxiety that invariably arises in British SF and permeates Cold War culture more broadly. The emerging technologies on display in *Level Seven* offer potentially utopian solutions – vacuum-packed food, an underground, managed society controlled by complex computer systems and hydroponic methods for creating oxygen. Yet, these changes may also be used, simultaneously, to promote unsavoury political solutions – an authoritarian surveillance culture that demands absolute compliance. Accordingly, the screenplay not only shows the unsurvivable nature of an all-out nuclear exchange (the radiation eventually penetrates level seven), but it also provides a cautionary message about the individual's submission to technology in a decade characterised by its hi-tech 'white heat'.

The Bed Sitting Room (1969)

While the above episodes of *Out of the Unknown* soberly examine the psychological strain of the thermonuclear era, *The Bed Sitting Room*, directed by Richard Lester and based on the play of the same name by John Antrobus and Spike Milligan, provides a satirical vision of a post-apocalyptic Britain that surpasses even the 'zaniness' of *Dr. Strangelove*. Distinctly lacking in any conventional plot development, the film instead offers an ensemble of survivors who aimlessly wander amongst the debris of a fallen civilisation. Each character engages in surreal activities and occasionally finds that they themselves become part of the discordant wreckage. The quality of the comedy is patchy, hovering between the brilliance of *The Goon Show* and the uninspiring sex comedies that would emerge in the mid-seventies. However there are moments of satirical insight that pertinently examine British cultural life, whilst the cinematography and design is particularly striking in its resemblance to, say, Independent Group collages or the surreal landscapes of J.G. Ballard's disaster fiction.

In *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, John Brosnan and Peter Nicholls (2011) emphasise the film's surreal comedy by describing how 'dazed survivors wander about pretending that nothing has happened, even when some of them mutate into wardrobes, bed-sitting rooms and parrots'.[78] Yet, as Michael Brooke (2009) points out, the post-nuclear war setting also produces a darker feel that 'is closer to the bleak vision of Samuel Beckett, whose assorted bowler-hatted tramps (*Waiting for Godot*), dustbin-dwellers (*Endgame*) and cheerful but immobilised housewives (*Happy Days*) could be transported here without anyone batting an eyelid' (1). Evan Calder Williams (2011) has also cited the film as an early example of 'salvagepunk',[79] with its post-apocalyptic setting seeking to be 'more apocalyptic than the apocalypse: clearing away the clutter to reveal the true hidden-in-plain-

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[78] John Brosnan and Peter Nicholls (2011). The Bed-Sitting Room. In: John Clute, David Langford, Peter Nicholls and Graham Sleight (eds.)*The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction.* London: Gollancz. Accessed online 16 March 2013: http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/bed-sitting_room_the

[79] Williams (2011) defines salvagepunk as 'the post-apocalyptic vision of a broken and dead world, strewn with both the dream residues and real junk of a world that was, and shot through with the hard work of salvaging, repurposing, détourning, and scrapping. Acts of salvagepunk strive against and away from the ruins on which they cannot help but be built and through which they rummage' (20).

view, namely, the deep permanent antagonisms on which capitalism runs and the untenability of that system's capacity to still run on' (56). In this sense, the film's cluttered landscape provides the arena in which old social relations are distorted and reshaped in ways that even nuclear war itself had failed to achieve.

Furthermore, the collection of makeshift shelters, televisions in deserts, motorways covered in dust, as well as the shabby bed sitting room that Lord Fortnum morphs into, combine to create visualisations that are comparable to artworks such as Alison and Peter Smithson's *Patio and Pavilion* (1956), which itself resembles a potential post-nuclear structure (see figure 8). This combination of a landscape that resembles a surrealist painting or Pop Art collage and shelters devised from the detritus of a deceased consumer culture, appropriately facilitates the confused behaviour of the characters who, despite attempts to maintain and rebuild the structures of the pre-war world, find themselves vulnerable to becoming objects in the newly formed landscape (as well as Lord Fortnum's transformation, Mother becomes a wardrobe, whilst Father turns into a parrot).

These metamorphoses add, in part, to the surreal and bawdy humour – numerous characters climb into Mother once she becomes a wardrobe, with sexual innuendos invariably accompanying their actions – yet they also provide a useful metaphoric substitute for death. Whereas *The War Game* and later docu-dramas such as *A Guide to Armageddon* (BBC, 1982) and *Threads* (BBC, 1984) graphically explore the gruesome consequences of thermonuclear war in a more or less naturalistic mode, *The Bed Sitting Room* instead emphasises the visual wreckage of a post-apocalyptic world, demonstrating, metaphorically, how people will become as much the debris of nuclear war as the randomly scattered commodity objects that surround them. As Brooke (2009) notes, Lester, tellingly, 'shuns graphic violence, conveying the bombs after-effects through metaphorical images of melted dolls, piles of shoes, floating false teeth and abandoned film, a culture's visual record turned into useless decorative ribbons' (2). Yet, coupled with the transformation of characters into objects, the scattered paraphernalia and crumbling buildings supply a vision of lost endeavour as the people that built the copious items of civilisation disappear while their products remain.

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Figure 7 (top). *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969). Image from *Accompanying Notes to DVD* (2009), 19.

Figure 8 (bottom). Alison and Peter Smithson, *Patio and Pavilion. This is Tomorrow* exhibition (1956), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.
©John Maltby / RIBA Library Photographs Collection.

While there is little in the way of a clear plot, the film does nonetheless satirise British culture and class through a collection of stock characters. Lord Fortnum is the only surviving member of government and continues to flaunt his supposed class superiority, at one point asking a passer-by 'what class of person are you? I'm top draw, to put it mildly'[80] before later continuing to drive a rust-laden Rolls-Royce as it is towed by a horse. The BBC are represented by a single journalist who is dressed in a dinner jacket and politely reads the news whilst peering through discarded frames of television sets. Similarly, the character played by Marty Feldman is named National Health Service and proceeds to survey the physical condition of survivors whilst dressed as a nurse and issuing peculiar bureaucratic documentation, including handing Mother her death certificate despite her still being alive. He consoles Father by explaining that even though he has lost his wife he has 'gained a certificate.' Spike Milligan appears as a civil defence officer who is largely redundant, only occasionally required to deliver packages and haul unexploded bombs across the wasteland.

The satire is predominantly playful here and supplies an irreverent rather than an aggressively polemical take on the oddities and hypocrisies of British society. The stereotypical British family of Mother, Father, their daughter Penelope (played by Rita Tushingham) and her boyfriend, Alan, continue to trudge around the apocalyptic desert as though on a daytrip, occasionally stopping to picnic. Their curiously untroubled behaviour is a gentle parody of British reserve, which is then dissected as Father turns into a parrot that is subsequently eaten, Mother becomes a wardrobe and Penelope gives birth to a mutated child that dies a few days later. Characters are typically reluctant to mention nuclear war itself, referring to it instead as 'this rude thing', or the 'unfortunate incident', indicating, once more, a form of social conservatism that refuses to acknowledge directly the scale of the social transformation. The film accordingly takes swipes at what Asa Briggs ([1982] 1990) defines as 'the Englishman's natural sense of order' (191), demonstrating the instability of such an outlook when living with the threat of nuclear attack. Yet, unlike other productions examined in this chapter, *The Bed Sitting Room* does not explicitly confront nuclear defence policy or expose the gory physical consequences

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[80] *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969). [Film] Directed by Richard Lester. US: United Artists.

of atomic war, but instead revels in the absurdity of its contemporary culture, where tradition persists despite the looming threat of annihilation.

Williams (2011) expands upon this, providing a possible contextual reason for the unruly, but not entirely revolutionary attack on British class and culture within the film: 'The end of the British '60s lacked the sense of imminent change, of real social unrest and the possibility of systemic collapse, that marked France in 1968 and Italy in 1969' (57). Williams continues by emphasising how 'Britain's 68-69 came in 73-74 [...] the years of mass strikes, bloody IRA violence, economic turmoil, and the return of Harold Wilson and the Labour government' (58). As discussed at the beginning of Chapter Three, Britain's rigid class structure was undoubtedly challenged, to an extent, during the sixties by emerging social identities, whilst technological change brought transformations to domestic and public life. But, even so, by the decade's end the old organising forces remained and the Conservatives would regain power at the 1970 general election. Despite lamenting the small 'c' conservatism of the British during this period, Williams (2011) nonetheless points out the film's lingering political antagonisms, picking out Lord Fortnum's metamorphosis as a key moment:

> It is not incidental that this transformation gives the films its title, for the bed sitting room itself is at once the center of its arc, the site of hope, and the casualty of the ruling order's destruction of that hope. If salvagepunk represents an attempt to think lost social relations via relations to discarded objects, in this instance, we witness the process in a very particular reversal: the social parasite – the aristocratic Lord Fortnam (sic) who slept blissfully through the bomb – becomes a site of ultimate use-value, shelter from the nuclear storm. In becoming object, he becomes the direct negation of his social role [...] in the material form of a site for collective social relations, for [...] post-nuclear families to take shape. (62)

In turning social hierarchies upside down the film therefore serves an important purpose in prompting contemplation of the power structures of the Cold War state, or to use Marcuse's ([1964] 1986) words, it asks, through Lord Fortnum's attempts to maintain his social status, whether 'atomic catastrophe which could wipe out the human race also serve(s) to protect the very forces which perpetuate this danger?' (ix). As with the 'found object' artworks of the Independent Group and Pop Art, or the overloaded landscape of J.G. Ballard's 'The Terminal Beach', *The Bed Sitting Room* rummages through the litter of modernity and looks to piece together new

forms of habitation, or reinvented machinery, or jarring juxtapositions that simultaneously re-imagine social and political relations.[81]

Yet, the film also supplies a political contribution beyond this. The cinematography produces an arresting vision of Britain as a desert-like wilderness and as the production reaches its climax a darker tone overcomes a number of characters. This is most keenly felt as a radioactive fog descends and Alan says to Penelope that they have to keep going 'because we're British'. Penelope responds bluntly saying: 'British? What a lot of use that is. We don't even know who's won the war. We've run out of food, no medicine and we're eating our parents.' The film ends with the fog suddenly lifting and Peter Cook, in the role of a Police Officer, inexplicably declaring that the fog will now cease and instead the 'earth will burgeon forth anew'. The BBC journalist then announces that 'Britain is a first class nuclear power again' as triumphant music plays behind. Appearing immediately after the production's bleakest moment, Peter Cook's victorious speech is delivered with an ironic smile, and, as Brooke (2009) notes, 'in no way suggests that mankind is about to turn a more optimistic corner' (6). Just as the surreal visualisation of motorways submerged beneath dust brings to the fore a collision between glossy modernity and visions of its own destruction, the final two contrasting scenes of the film illustrate, at first, the likely horrors of post-nuclear war life before overlaying them with a concluding vision of unquestioning patriotism and social complacency that may allow the horror of nuclear war to surface again.

The Bed Sitting Room is an intriguing film with which to conclude a study of SF film and television in the sixties as it touches upon a variety of themes that emerge consistently throughout the decade. The nomadic and comedic wanderings of the survivors within a surreally-constructed landscape stretches the scope of representation for post-apocalyptic narratives, while, as with the depiction of Mandrake in *Dr. Strangelove*, the film mocks the impotence of traditional constructions of Britishness in an era of thermonuclear power politics (Lord Fortnum's metamorphosis underlines this). The backwardness of Britain is satirised

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[81]Williams (2011) describes the challenge for salvagepunk to be in answering 'how to make from the broken same the livelier constructs of something other' (69).

perhaps most effectively through the continuation of the monarchy despite forty million people dying in the nuclear war, with Mrs Ethel Shroake of 393a High Street, Leytonstone subsequently being crowned Queen. While the comedic targets are sometimes missed, *The Bed Sitting Room* neatly continues the work of *Dr. Strangelove* in highlighting the potentially deadly absurdities that are unique to the Cold War, whilst, as with the selected episodes of *Out of the Unknown* and the broader aims of the New Wave in SF, it experiments with new artistic methods to overcome the problem of representing the sheer scale of thermonuclear devastation.

Conclusion: J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) and the Evolution of British Science Fiction

An initial glance at British SF in the late sixties – and in particular works such as Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* (1969) or Lester's *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969) – would suggest a radical and formidable move away from the tradition of scientific romance that had influenced the style of SF in Britain up to the mid-fifties. Such a reading would not be unjustified, in so far as New Wave writers certainly looked to shift their political focus towards psychologised interpretations of the underlying structures within contemporary culture, with a concurrent reconsideration of form. Nonetheless, it would also be to ignore the notable continuities and dialogues between different SF texts that have been traced throughout this thesis, and reinforce the kind of historical schism that has been resisted throughout.

Whilst this study has therefore mapped out the development of post-war British SF through a series of decade studies that have explored the 'types' of writing prominent during specific periods, it has also attempted to elucidate the interconnection between preceding or subsequent styles. Consequently it has sought to move away from the kind of rigid demarcation that Ruddick (1993), for example, offers in his historical examination of British SF, which provides specific dates alongside ascribed styles:

1. The Descent of Scientific Romance (1478 – 1894)
2. The Wellsian Synthesis (1895 – 1936)
3. British Science Fiction (1937 – 1961)
4. New Wave S(peculative) F(iction) (1962 – 1978)
5. The British Fantastic (1979 – 1990) (Ruddick: 13)

Ruddick argues that the era of 'British Science Fiction', from the late 1930s to the beginning of the 1960s, saw the 'expansion of Wellsian scientific romance in new directions' (14), with writers like Wyndham able to combine the 'mundane British backdrops of scientific romance with the more sensational American pulp motifs to produce bestsellers on both sides of the Atlantic in the age of a new kind of anxiety produced by the Cold War' (14). Yet, while acknowledging that his apparently rigid periodisations 'overlap with one another more than the apparently precise dating can

suggest' (13), he nowhere reflects upon how 'New Wave S(peculative) F(iction)' emerged *from* this earlier period, instead situating its arrival in a revolutionary break marked by Ballard's 1962 *The Drowned World*, arguing that 'Ballard is as important to this period of British science fiction as Wells was to that of the age of scientific romance' (14). As this thesis has attempted to show, however, any such reading is problematic if it suggests that Ballard can be marked off from a previous epoch in SF's development. In fact, the influence of American popular culture and pulp SF upon Ballard himself, combined with his selection of the genre of catastrophe fiction as the basis for his early literary experimentations, suggests more alignment with earlier forms than is often recognised in accounts such as Ruddick's.

Later in his book, Ruddick points out that Ballard's work does indeed emerge from 'the British disaster tradition' (153) and supplies an insightful examination of *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962) to illustrate this point. However, for Ruddick, the uniqueness of Ballard's apocalyptic fiction is in demonstrating that 'human beings desire catastrophe' (154). This is a perfectly acceptable analysis, which pinpoints one of Ballard's most powerful disruptions of traditional disaster fiction, yet it also fails to spot the dialogue between Ballard's writing and earlier forms. As we have seen throughout this study, Ballard's fiction was not unique in showing catastrophe as desirable, with Wyndham's work, for example, enacting what Jameson (2007) describes as a kind of 'utopian wish-fulfilment' (199) in imagining the collapse of social democracy and the seeming liberation of his middle-class protagonists. Instead, what is new in a novel such as *The Drowned World* is that, while, Wyndham's fiction does not interrogate these unconscious drives themselves, Ballard exposes the underlying forces behind disaster narratives in general, creating fictions that are almost entirely *about* such latent psychologies. Ruddick's restrictive differentiations between historical styles in British SF leaves him little room, however, to elaborate on such dialogues between Ballard's disasters and earlier narratives of catastrophe. In a broader sense, this results in the New Wave being represented as a clear break from fifties writing, limiting, in turn, any examination of the New Wave's contested function in a wider history of SF. In fact, as Rob Latham (2008) notes, there continues to be considerable debate concerning the extent to which the New Wave may be regarded as 'a coherent movement or a shapeless

coalition, whether its intent was revolutionary or merely reformist, whether it radically split and transformed the field or caused only minor scars and surface adjustments' (202). With this in mind, it becomes difficult to disentangle the New Wave from a wider discussion about the evolution of SF in post-war Britain.

In this concluding section I want to focus briefly, then, upon Ballard's novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) in order to look back on British SF's development from the end of the Second World War to the close of the 1960s. In doing so, the convergences and divergences between the new experimentalism of Ballard's text and earlier SF writings will be drawn out, while the novel will also be discussed in relation to its radical interpretation of late sixties cultural life. Additionally, Ballard's text is, I will suggest, historically useful in pointing to the influence of the New Wave on later works, which will signal, in turn, areas ripe for further research in tracing the growth of British SF over the entire period of the Cold War.

Despite being published and distributed as a novel in 1970, *The Atrocity Exhibition* consists of 15 short, fragmentary sections, each of which were originally published individually in a collection of literary magazines, including *New Worlds*, *Ambit* and *Impulse*, between 1966 and 1969. Written as a series of seemingly disconnected paragraphs, Ballard's work has been compared to the 'cut-up' style of William Burroughs – a writer Ballard admired – as is emphasised in the 'Author's Note' supplied by Ballard for the 2001 Flamingo edition, where he instructs readers to resist reading the text in a linear sequence and instead encourages turning pages 'until a paragraph catches your eye' (2001: vi). Gasiorek (2005) argues that the 'heteroglossic and open-ended' (58) nature of Ballard's text, which contains an immense array of scattered encounters with found objects, real and imagined atrocities and evocative dreamscapes, contributes to the artwork's overall impression of working 'on multiple levels' (58) whilst refusing 'the closure of meaning' (58). Accordingly, Luckhurst (1997) and Baxter (2009) have skilfully examined Ballard's novel in relation to a wider avant-garde tradition. Such readings are important in so far as they attempt to decode the broad collection of artistic and literary influences that inform the text, yet they simultaneously mark a tendency to move away from examining Ballard's novel in terms of its relationship to SF. This is understandable

considering the novel's continual nods to Surrealism, Pop Art and Burroughs, in which SF apparently becomes increasingly subsidiary in Ballard's purposeful move towards a radical literary aesthetic. Even so, in line with Chapter Three's contemplation of the links between Ballard's disaster fiction and the Wyndhamesque catastrophes of the 1950s, it seems important to consider, from this late sixties' viewpoint, Ballard's continued engagement with British SF tradition, and, in particular, to examine how his move towards the avant-garde was necessitated, on his account, by wider contextual changes in which the imagery of SF came to be increasingly co-opted by everyday modern culture itself.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Ballard's ecological disasters of the mid-sixties functioned as intriguing counterparts to the popular disaster narratives of the 1950s not only because of their formal and political inversions – Kerans shows no desire to rebuild the world after the catastrophe in *The Drowned World* and instead delights in the psychological revelations of apocalypse – but also because they tend to write *within* the form rather than completely breaking away from its structures. Extending such an analysis, it is also worth considering, then, the residue of earlier SF forms within *The Atrocity Exhibition*. In fact, a notable point of comparison is to be found in the opening section of the novel as a whole. Entitled 'The Atrocity Exhibition', the section originally appeared in *New Worlds* in September 1966 and contains numerous references to nuclear war and weaponry, which is momentarily interrupted by the protagonist, Travis, fleeing to a suburban house in Shepperton (where Ballard himself lived). Travis does so in order to escape from 'the forbidding figure of the bomber pilot' (*AE*, [1970] 2006: 8), who, like Traven's visions of crashing aircraft in 'The Terminal Beach' (1964), haunts his consciousness as a spectral image of both past and future atrocities. However, upon arrival in the seemingly mundane location, Travis finds that an encounter with a neighbour prompts further psychological traumas:

> He sat in the empty sitting-room overlooking the shabby garden. From the white bungalow beyond the clapboard fence his middle-aged neighbour dying of cancer watched him through the long afternoons. Her handsome face, veiled by the laced curtains, resembled that of a skull. All day she would pace around the small bedroom. At the end of the second month, when the doctor's visits became more frequent, she undressed by the window, exposing her emaciated body through the veiled curtains. Each

day, as he watched from the cubular room, he saw different aspects of her eroded body, the black breasts reminding him of the eyes of the bomber pilot, the abdominal scars like the radiation burns of the young woman. (8)

There is a recognisable echo here of the Wellsian disaster – especially *The War of the Worlds* (1898) – as well as Wyndham's early fifties catastrophes and Christopher's *The Death of Grass*, which imagine the estrangement of suburban routine by external forces. However, whereas Wyndham and Christopher capitalise on contemporary suburban anxiety by contemplating a terror that disrupts an otherwise stable world, Ballard imagines the seeming tranquillity of Shepperton to be already harbouring internal psychoses that are provoked by sixties life itself. The unexpected display of the physical scars of cancer treatment by Travis's next-door neighbour accordingly triggers, once again, Travis's ongoing visions of radiation burns and nuclear bomber pilots. Rather than symbolising a place of order, stability and tradition, the suburbs instead reveal their own unique psychopathologies to Travis, who reciprocates by following the funeral procession for his neighbour in a white Pontiac.

As in 'The Terminal Beach', Ballard looks to unpick here the uniqueness of living after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, simultaneously, prior to the potential apocalypse of World War Three – a temporalization of the present which leads to the encoding of the nuclear referent within the minutiae of everyday suburban existence. This representational use of suburbia thus poses a challenge to the supposed stability of the likes of Masen in *The Day of the Triffids* whose middle-class, provincial mores provide the necessary emotional fortitude to resist disaster. Instead, Ballard associates suburban existence with destabilising paranoia and perverse psychologies in a way that pre-empts his later, more formally conventional suburban fictions, notably 'The Enormous Space' (1989), which imagines the home as the site of psychological introspection and degeneration, and his final novel *Kingdom Come* (2006), in which a fascistic movement emerges from a suburban shopping centre.

Furthermore, *The Atrocity Exhibition* also enters into a dialogue with SF form through its pervasive incorporation of scientific language. As has already been discussed, Ballard's disaster fiction distorted the pseudo-scientific explanations of

catastrophe in traditional disasters by using them to articulate the workings of the apocalyptic imagination. This is continued in *The Atrocity Exhibition* as Ballard litters the text with cuttings from fictionalised scientific reports which reveal underlying codes of meaning beneath contemporary phenomena. This works in the novel to produce a stark contrast with the kinds of scientific discourse that informed scientific romances, which had the function of containing the fantastic elements of the fiction within a seemingly naturalistic framework. As a device, this is clearly deployed at, for example, the start of Wells's *The War of the Worlds* ([1898] 2008) where he outlines the precise nature of Mars prior to using such knowledge to conjure a fantastical Martian invasion: 'The planet Mars, I scarcely need remind the reader, revolves around the sun at a mean distance of 140,000,000 miles, and the light and heat it receives from the sun is barely half of that received by this world' (9). The invasion is thus extrapolated from seemingly rational, empirical data, which consequently makes it appear in some way 'plausible' to the reader.

By contrast, throughout *The Atrocity Exhibition* science operates to further underline the *irrationalities* of the Cold War world, with the section 'Love and Napalm: Export U.S.A.' adopting, in Gasiorek's (2005) terms, a '*faux*-scientific language' (68) to expose the unreality of late sixties culture. Framed as paragraphs from scientific reports, the section articulates how scientists have supposedly proved the validity of the Vietnam War through observing its role in regulating psycho-social relationships:

> Sexual intercourse can no longer be regarded as a personal and isolated activity, but is seen to be a vector in a public complex involving automobile styling, politics and mass communications. The Vietnam war has offered a focus for a wide range of polymorphic sexual impulses, and also a means by which the United States has re-established a positive psychosexual relationship with the external world. (*AE*: 148)

Unlike Wells's demarcation between empirical, scientific data and extrapolated fantasy, Ballard's text reveals the apparent collapse of any such distinction. Gasiorek (2005) argues that this represents 'an example of Bakhtinian double-voiced discourse' (68) which simultaneously 'cloaks the author's subversive intent in its straight-faced deployment of scientific language, while exposing the role it plays in sustaining the military-industrial complex' (68). Whilst the political content of this

section is therefore encoded through an experimental mode of satirical representation, it is noticeable that the attack upon the close interconnection between science, military and government – what Edgerton (2005) has labelled the 'warfare state' (101) – bears comparison with the distrust of technocratic order that radiates throughout many of the earlier SF texts examined in this study. *The Atrocity Exhibition* in this way evokes the potential dystopian results occurring from state manipulation of scientific discourse. Nonetheless, whereas many of the works examined in this thesis look to full-scale nuclear war as the terminal point in the interlinking of science and the Cold War state, Ballard implies that the result may be less an actual war than the increasing proliferation of pseudo-scientific *fictions* to serve various social, political and cultural ends. Indeed, as Ballard ([1970] 2012) himself argues in an interview with Lynn Barber: 'almost anything you care to name nowadays is really fiction, serving someone's imaginative end, whether it's a politician's, or a TV executive's, or a scientist's' (26).

As social critique, then, *The Atrocity Exhibition* centres on an emergent media culture, in which consumerist visions combine with images of war and destruction to produce a spectacular world which is itself a form of 'Science Fiction'. In his 1995 introduction to *Crash* ([1973] 2011) Ballard notes: 'Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy. Thermo-nuclear weapons systems and soft drink commercials coexist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudo-events, science and pornography' (i). Using the tools of Pop Art and Surrealist collage, *The Atrocity Exhibition* thus assembles the 'terminal documents' (*AE*: 1) of these coexisting mediaspaces, which Travis pins up in a vast display across the wall of his office:

> ...(1) Spectro-heliogram of the sun; (2) Front elevation of balcony units, Hilton Hotel, London; (3) Transverse section through a pre-Cambrian trilobite; (4) 'Chronograms,' by E. J. Marney; (5) Photograph taken at noon, August 7th, 1945, of the sand-sea, Qattara Depression, Egypt; (6) Reproduction of Max Ernst's 'Garden Airplane Traps'; (7) Fusing sequences of 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Boy', Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-Bombs. (1-2)

Travis's collage aims to piece together the discordant 'overlit realms' of late sixties culture where a trilobite fossil cohabits the same space as the Hilton Hotel, while the 'spectres' of atomic explosion linger overhead. Ballard himself attempted to

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historicise this prescription, stating in an interview with Carol Orr in 1974 that 'twenty or thirty years ago the elements of fiction, that is politics within consumer society or within one's private life, occupied a much smaller space. [...] But now I don't think this is the case. I think we have seen the invasion of almost every aspect of our lives by fictions of one kind or another' ([1974] 2012: 62). He thus continues by describing the writer's job as one of attempting to 'put in the reality' (62) through analytical interrogation of the overwhelming collection of fictions that dominate late twentieth-century culture, operating as a kind of archaeologist in pursuit of fragments of a reality increasingly subsumed. Writing at the close of a decade which had narrowly avoided nuclear annihilation, produced filmed footage of a Presidential assassination, witnessed the first televised war and placed a man on the moon, Ballard neatly articulates how distinctions between fantasy and observable reality were become ever more disturbed within societies saturated by hi-technology.

Whilst, then, Ballard's mode of artistic representation is unique and challenging, its social commentary does correlate with a number of contemporaneous SF works. It is therefore unsurprising that in the accompanying notes to *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Ballard should, for example, praise Kurbrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) for recognising the 'carnival air' (14) associated with television pictures of nuclear bomb tests. And, indeed, *Dr. Strangelove*'s persistent examination of peculiar overlaps between military technology and popular culture is echoed in Travis's collages, whilst Aldiss's hallucinogenic apocalypse in *Barefoot in the Head* (1969) and Lester's (1969) post-apocalyptic comedy *The Bed Sitting Room* both create landscapes that align with Ballard's bricolage of late twentieth-century ephemera. More broadly, the decline in deference and drive towards polemic within the SF film and television productions considered within this thesis illuminates a changing cultural terrain that facilitated Ballard's attempted decoding of what Gasiorek (2005) calls 'the world's new subterranean faultlines' (67). This is not to minimise the singularity of Ballard's achievement within *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which represents a unique and triumphant combination of SF motifs and avant-garde aesthetics. Yet it is also vital to recognise its position as part of the rapid and distinctive evolution of British SF more generally since 1945.

In this way, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, along with Ballard's earlier re-workings of disaster fiction, also points towards future movements in British speculative writing. So, for example, M. John Harrison's *The Committed Men* (1971) and Christopher Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island* (1972) would continue the evolution of the Wellsian disaster which began, in the post-war years at least, with Wyndham and passed on to Ballard in the sixties, while Priest's exploration of the psyche in works such as *The Affirmation* (1981) continue the Ballardian exploration of 'inner space'. Equally, the New Wave's fusion of literary experiment and the speculative imagination would influence later British writers working outside SF. The early works of Ian McEwan, notably the short story 'Solid Geometry' (1975), Salman Rushdie's *Grimus* (1975) and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991) are all examples of texts that would incorporate elements of New Wave SF, especially in their evocation of collapsing relationships with time and space. At the same time, Ballard's and the New Wave's more general recognition of SF's proliferation beyond genre fiction – its 'migrat[ion] from the bookshelf to daily life', as Ballard describes it in one 1968 interview (2012: 12) – would solidify further. 'One sees the landscapes and imagery of SF', Ballard goes on to remark, 'playing a part in the world of pop music, of film, even that of psychedelic experiences' (12), and certainly, as already mentioned, SF's presence within, for example, British popular music of the 1960s and 1970s was substantial, finding its most notable articulation in David Bowie's changing personas throughout the seventies.

The Atrocity Exhibition is a useful text, then, with which to conclude this thesis, in that it also represents an important pivot which helps to highlight some of the major developments in British SF over the period of the Cold War. Looking back from the perspective of Ballard's media-saturated landscape one realises the contextual issues that aided specific responses to the Cold War at particular moments. The utopian urges within the fiction of Heard, Stapledon and Clarke can be contextualised as direct responses to a post-Hitlerian, post-Hiroshima world, with each text agonising over the appropriate form of political organisation to overcome the atrocities of the Second World War and the coming threat of nuclear annihilation. Wyndham's disaster narratives, or a film such as *Seven Days to Noon* (1950), express anxiety towards the post-war settlement, whilst nervously contemplating the impact of

weapons systems developed by a burgeoning 'warfare' state. Additionally, a series of political moments in the mid-fifties – the Suez crisis (1956), Britain's development of the H-Bomb (1957), Macmillan's 'never had it so good' speech (1957) – contributed to a fresh emphasis in British SF and aided the emergence of the New Wave's aesthetic, which looked to investigate the juxtaposition between post-war affluence and the parallel phenomena of the Cold War. In this way, Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956), Kneale's Quatermass serials and the polemical responses to governmental defence policy in early and mid-sixties television and film, represent important precursors to the experimental aesthetics and radical political postures adopted by Moorcock, Aldiss and Ballard in the late sixties. Placed within this context, *The Atrocity Exhibition* thus contributes to a definable trajectory in the development and proliferation of British SF, and in its responses to the shifting trajectories of the Cold War.

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