CHAPTER 13

Intervening in the Present Through Fictions of the Future

Kristín Loftsdóttir

Introduction

A small robotic creature piles up endless stacks of trash in a desolated world. It is deprived of anything except fields of debris and trash that seem to stretch on forever. Huge dysfunctional TV screens show glimpses from the past—the screens being themselves left-overs of a life that once was—that presumably is our future, explaining the impending evacuation of the earth due to a manmade environmental catastrophe, where humanity will wait in space for the earth to heal and for it to be inhabitable again. The evacuation has clearly happened already, with no humans having returned for some reason. In a sense, all humans have been rendered refugees—and while the movie implies that this is due to generalized human actions and overconsumption, recent critical perspectives on the concept of Anthropocene reflect both the racialized and deeply unequal burden of the climate crisis, as well as responsibility for how it came about (Park and Greenberg 2020). Regardless, the first scenes of the film *WALL-E* (Stanton 2008)—premiering in 2008—are characterized by a deep sense

K. Loftsdóttir (✉)
University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland
e-mail: kristinl@hi.is

J. L. Hennessey (ed.), *History and Speculative Fiction*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42235-5_13

of loss. It is a sense of loss for something that has not yet taken place but seems inevitable. We have seen this narrative repeated in different forms; in fact the disaster where human beings end all inhabitation of the earth has been shown in so many forms that it almost seems to have happened already. The sense of the future as a catastrophe that is unavoidable is clearly seen in scholarly theories that have difficulties seeing solutions to our impending problems, especially in regard to the climate crisis. Sociologist John Urry remarks that there are "no good outcomes, only degrees of bad" (quoted in Tutton 2017, 489). In both a humble and powerful way, *WALL-E* reflects the intersecting crisis and "crisis-talk" characterizing the twenty-first century (Loftsdóttir et al. 2018), where the future is uncertain and even already lost. The phrase "crisis-talk" refers to engagements with diverse threats to the future—real or not—whether different types of environmental disasters, crises of multiculturalism, or economic stagnations, often due to a fight over scant resources. Precarious migrants—including refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants—are also often presented as a direct threat to the Global North's future.

This chapter focuses on fictions about the future as one site of intervention where key questions are voiced regarding social justice and who is entitled to what rights. Fiction about the future does not necessarily involve a vision or even a prediction of the future but can be seen as using the future as a tool to think about the present. Some of current fiction's depictions of the future and its intersecting crisis thus seems to revolve around a critical intervention into "present-day realities" (see Chaudhuri 2011, 191), making the presence visible in a new and sharper light. My discussion uses the concept of *concurrences* to think about narratives about the future in popular fiction, where concurrences can be seen as inviting an analysis of narratives or histories as concurrent that are usually seen as separate (Brydon et al. 2017, 3). The concept is multilayered, referring not only to a theory but a methodology for "identifying connections across categories that once existed as separate areas of investigation that seemed capable to sustaining inquiry wholly within themselves" (Brydon et al. 2017, 6). As Richard Tutton points out, the future can be seen as simultaneously "material and discursive," meaning that it should not be conceived of as a representation but as "enacted in practice" (2017, 485). Through the enactment of the future in various popular fiction, I see the future as acted on and intervened with. Using concurrences—here referring to the placement of different narratives of the future next to events

taking place in the present—can be seen as a part of the enactment of the future in the present.

The future itself has long been a tricky subject for scholars to analyze conceptually and empirically as reflected in the work of Richard Tutton (2017), who uses the phrase "wicked futures" to capture these difficulties for scholars in analyzing the future. The future is always something that has not happened, meaning that it is "wicked" in the sense that it is obscure and "difficult to do something with" (Tutton 2017, 480). I stress here how many fictions about the future are not necessarily about the future but rather, in the words of Ziauddin Sardar, time and space in the works are often "window dressing" (2002, 1). The placement of the future and present side by side creates a space of reflection and critical interventions on the present and the actual predicted future. To quote Sardar's work again, in the case of science fiction, even though appearing at first glance to be concerned with space and faraway galaxies, in fact "the space that science fiction most intimately explores is interior and human" (2002, 1).

My analysis of narratives about the future addresses different materials, both textual and visual. I do not try to analyze these materials in their complexities or totalities, but rather to give personal insights into how they *can* be interpreted as an intervention into present discourses. Furthermore, creative fictions—textual and visual—are also objects that travel and are mobilized at different times, and I will not limit my discussion only to narratives written in the present for the present, but also give some reflections on narratives coming from the past, which can be used to think about particular aspects in the present. Thus, the discussion critically asks how examples from fiction about the future can help us to gain deeper insights into some of the key issues that scholars deal with today, such as the "categorical fetishism" (Crawley and Skleparis 2018) often strongly characterizing discussions of refugees and asylum seekers.

I start the discussion with focusing on some of the contemporary proclamation of crisis, stressing in particular the so called "refugee crisis," where there was both a portrayal of refugees as posing a risk to the future, and a reaction to their dehumanization and the security measures taken against them. Then, I ask how current science fiction can be seen as intervening in discussions of refugees and crisis, and thus conceptualized as concurrent with these, and thus as more concerned with the present than the future. Finally, I draw attention to the role of the android as a figure that is good to think with, in regard to what it means to be human and to intervene in issues of the present.

The Future and Crisis

Walt Disney's theme park Disneyland is probably one of the clearest examples of how the idea of modernity stood for a promise of an almost magical future where technology was the key to prosperity, freedom, and the well-being of all (Loftsdóttir 2021). As reflected in that parts of the park were even named "Tomorrowland," it provided an optimistic view of the wonders waiting in the future. The collapse of this sense of the future is clearly signified in the artist Banksy's inversion of Disneyland, the theme park Dismaland where we see contemporary horrors displayed in different theme park scenarios presented by different artists. At the park, visitors experience securitization in action, as well as seeing displays with little boats crammed with refugees, a large distorted mermaid, as well as reminders of the horrors of meat industries in butchered horses at the carousels. Dismaland's overall atmosphere is of dark colors and shabby surroundings, with sullen, non-smiling staff, capturing the dream of modernity as worn out and/or transformed into dystopia (Loftsdóttir 2021). As such, it speaks to a decade that has been referred to as our "dark times" (Cantero 2017), reflected in the multiple eroding of rights through the process of neoliberalism, involving, among other things, a loss of welfare benefits and pension rights. These have gone hand in hand with an extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of few, along with a loss of faith in democracy itself (Moore 2018).

I have used the concept of "cancellation" to capture the essence of diverse and intersecting crises where it is impossible to predict when things will again go back to "normal" or if the cancellation will continue indefinitely. The concept of cancellation reflects how aspects that were associated with the future for many in the Global North, such as stable jobs, home-ownership, and consumption of various kinds, are now perceived as being at risk (Loftsdóttir 2019). The disappearance of predominant visions of this anticipated future of modernity has, as Andrea Muehlebach (2013) has argued, created a sense of loss for those who celebrated the project and process of modernization but also those who criticized its premises and content (see also Bauman and Bordoni 2014).

When the term "crisis" is evoked, it is important to engage with it analytically, asking critically why it is evoked and what proclaiming "a crisis"

does (Loftsdóttir 2016). A part of the allure and risk of use of the term crisis is that as a term it often seems self-explanatory (Roitman 2013, 3). Drawing on Mary Douglas' words in regard to "risk," the term "crisis" can be appealing since it is an abstract concept, universalizing, and powerful in its succinctness (Douglas 2003: 15). The so-called migration crisis clearly reflects the need to critically ask why a particular crisis is evoked. Narratives of a "migration crisis" have been visible in the European context for quite some time—earlier revolving around the crisis of multiculturalism (see the criticism of Lentin and Titley 2012)—but claims of a "refugee crisis" became particularly salient in the early and mid-2010s. In the aftermath of the so-called "Arab spring," people were fled from Libya and Syria as a result of a civil war that started in 2011. In Libya, these were not only civilians escaping but also citizens from other African countries staying in Libya for work (Morone 2017). The Italian government declared a state of emergency in 2011, with the E.U. reacting to this humanitarian crisis by sealing its borders. Scholars have pointed out that the proclamation of crisis in fact facilitated various reforms, involving different types of border controls and the detention of people seeking international protection (Pinelli 2018; Majcher et al. 2020). Italy and Greece become the main entry points for people fleeing war or escaping other intolerable conditions in 2013 (Pinelli 2018). When in 2015, migrants seeking to enter Europe became increasingly visible, the rhetoric of Europe as under "siege" due to illegal or criminal populations intensified as well (Hage 2016: 39).

The so-called refugee crisis in Europe in the mid-2010s also made more visible to many living in Europe the growth of the security state. This has involved the cancellation of civil rights and liberties of racialized others under the pretext that this was necessary to protect the citizens of the states in the Global North. Scholars have pointed to the "War on Terror" in the U.S. as important in enabling authorities to act on suspicions against potential enemies and invalidate the basic rights of potential suspects. Subjects were regularly defined as "unlawful combatants" or "detainees," which excluded them from the protection of the Geneva Convention for prisoners (Chaudhuri 2011, 193). Through the proclamation of State of Exception, return to systematic violence and torture by the U.S. state was justified (Puar 2018, 113; Höglund 2017, 290–291). Within Europe, scholars and activists criticized how the strengthening of institutions such as Frontex has led to a militarization of Europe's borders (Pinelli 2018, 729), where the distinction between rescue operations and the pushback

of migration becomes blurred (Davitti 2019, 1175). "Crisis talk" was important in justifying such pushback actions and securitization, as crisis talk in general stimulates and calls for affective reactions, reactions that can mobilize support for various state policies and interventions. As phrased by Loftsdóttir et al.: "[C]risis talk can be one approach to win social consent and build or reactivate a certain common sense" (Loftsdóttir et al. 2018, 22).

The proclamation of a refugee-crisis in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008 facilitated, furthermore, the increased infiltration by populist groups of the political sphere in Europe (Decker 2016) by making it easier to imagine the nation as under threat by racialized others, i.e., refugees (Thorleifsson 2018). Within different discourses, "economic anxieties" were translated into "ethno-religious grievances" (Thorleifsson 2018). As Hakki Taş (2020) shows, populist leaders seek to regulate time in particular ways where different segments of time are stretched, compressed or hidden from view. Populists' predictions of the future can thus be seen as generating a vision of an "alternative world" of the future—i.e., a world of chaos, where the racialized others have taken over (Loftsdóttir 2019). This sense of crisis has contributed to increased polarization in the social sphere where refugees are framed either as a threat or as victims (Hameleers 2019, 219).

As indicated earlier, expressions of solidarity with refugees were also quite significant, sometimes along with strong criticism of the European refugee system and securitization. Particular events such as the death of the toddler Aylan Kurdi in 2015 have been seen as causing a paradigm shift in general discussions about refugees (Siapera 2019, 248), reflecting how solidarity with refugees has been shifting in accordance with particular events popularized through the media (Brändle et al. 2019, 722). Nevertheless, in the mid-2010s, heated debates have taken place around the issues of solidarity with refugees, actions on Europe's external borders, and the responsibility of different member states by politicians and the public alike (Brändle et al. 2019; Bock and Macdonald 2019).

Thinking About the Present Through Science Fiction

So how can we think through and across the "crisis" of migration by using fiction about the future? The concept of *concurrences*, first of all, draws attention to the fact that some of these fictions—while taking place in the future—are convergent and entangled with the present. Gunlög Fur's (2014) work shows how the tendency to treat particular histories as separate—even though they actually take place in the same time and space—often conceals entanglements and power imbalances. The scholarly project of concurrences must thus partly involve exposing these power imbalances. Similarly, fiction about the future that tells stories to be concurrent with particular events in the author's present can be seen as taking part in exposing particular power dynamics and inequalities. Furthermore, by locating their narratives as taking place in the future, authors manage to move beyond dull party-political debates into the core of the issues at stake. The future or alien setting can thus more be imagined as a backdrop—or "window dressing" in Sardar's (2002) words—making it easier in some sense to insert charged political issues into popular discourse.

I want to start my discussion with Shohini Chaudhuri's (2011) excellent analysis of the film *Children of Men* (Cuarón 2007), where the intention is clearly to draw attention to contemporaneous hostile migration regimes or to the context of when the film was made, i.e., "The War on Terror." The film's central plot revolves around the apocalyptic vision of a near future where sudden and unexplained infertility strikes the world. It simultaneously locates the story within extremely hostile U.K. government actively criminalizing and tracking down migrants. This position of migrants is not so much explicitly explained in the film—and in fact, the main protagonist, Theo, seems to avoid looking at what is happening around him—but rather the migrant part of the story takes place in the background. Nevertheless, Slavoj Žižek has explained that the background of the film is actually its "true focus" (see discussion in Chaudhuri 2011, 191). Thus, alongside scenes somewhat typical of action films where Theo is trying to save a woman who is the first human to become pregnant in years, the background depicts chilling but familiar images of racism, such as migrants in cages awaiting deportation and references to photographs taken in Abu Ghraib prison, including the "hooded man" (see Chaudhuri 2011, 199). Through these background images, as well as various powerful metaphors within the film itself—such as that the woman who becomes

miraculously pregnant and thus the last hope to save humankind is a Black refugee—the film can be seen as using concurrences as a method in various senses: by intervening in its current political context, and by placing two stories (the one in the front and the one in the background) side by side. Scenes from the recent present known to the viewer, such as references to torture, are inserted clearly in the narrative.

The movie *Children of Men* vividly shows how the cancellation of the human rights of some people through extreme measures can appear acceptable to some because they believe that they will not be affected themselves. Or as phrased by Chaudhuri, it involves "activating traditional forms of racism in the belief that only 'others'—the Muslims, Arabs, Asians and Blacks—will be affected" (Chaudhuri 2011, 194). The film clearly demonstrates the shared vulnerability of both those defined as others and those who are not (Chaudhuri 2011, 201). In this film the populist vision of the future can be seen as turned upside down with the security state and tough measures on migration, creating an alternative world (Loftsdóttir 2019), but exposing the links to totalitarian regimes and the vulnerability of citizens and migrants alike. While I position this film mainly as intervening in its present, narratives of the future of course do not only cross space but also time. The theme of *Children of Men* became even more relevant ten years later, or as one film critique proclaimed in the mid of the migrant crisis during the year 2016, the film's "version of the future is now disturbingly familiar" (Barber 2016).

The film *Valerian* (Besson n.d.), which also came out in 2017, is made within a completely different genre, characterized by a fast and action-packed story for a younger audience. The film is full of aliens and androids and contains no complex discussion of their boundaries, nor humanity's boundaries with alien others. The story centers to some extent around the love relationship between the two main characters Valerian and Laureline but is mainly an action film. While the comic book series that the film seeks inspiration from, published in the 1970s, predicts an apocalyptic future for humanity, we see here a distant future of friendly relations with different species—humanoids and others.

Most of the film follows a somewhat standard storyline for such action films with images of dance clubs, a car chase, and so on. While not strongly emphasized for most of the film, a story about justice and refugees can still be seen as embedded in the plot. The planet Mül was destroyed several decades earlier as unnecessary collateral damage in a war between humans and alien powers.[1] At the end of the film, the human officer who ordered

the destruction of the planet Mül explains that he needed to kill all of the few survivors from the destroyed planet to hide that that this total destruction was not necessary, but rather that the human leaders decided to sacrifice Mül's inhabitants as it was more convenient way to win the war. This has to be hidden in order for his people to avoid being liable to pay reparations. Significantly, humanity's supremacy in galactic relationships would also be weakened if the truth came out. He explains that: "Our council saw fit to protect our citizens first and foremost…" He asks Valerian and Laureline: "would you […] risk wrecking our economy for the sake of a bunch of…." When his voice trails off Laureline adds questioningly and provocatory: "savages?" Here it is tempting to draw a parallel between the economic arguments of populist leaders at the time in justifying the inhumane treatment of refugees and their detention and exclusion from the space of Europe under the slogan "our people first" (Hameleers 2019, 813). Part of the film's message at the end is an emphasis on "doing the right thing" where sometimes even the laws that people respect need to be broken to do what is right. The film's ending reflects this when Valerian and Laureline break the law of their government to help the refugees to have a future, and thus to follow what they know is the right action when the law fails them and the survivors from Mül. It should be pointed out that even though making this point, the film can also be criticized for various stereotyping such as the simplistic portrayal of rigid ethnic boundaries, the use of different racist Western imaginary of African savages, where some are noble and other ignorant and laughable.

The political environment in which the film was made was not simply characterized by hateful discussions about refugees by populist leaders, but also strong criticisms of Europe's regime of mobility, which facilitates the mobility of some, while rendering others immobile, as well as the criminalization of people seeking shelter within Europe. It is difficult not to think of instances where our regime of mobility has sought to penalize people fleeing, but also those who help them. This became particularly evident during the crisis in 2016, where ordinary citizens in Europe were arrested and punished for actions like giving hungry people food and driving old or tired people short distances, which has been referred to as the criminalization of solidarity (Fekete 2018).

Androids and Being Human

Androids are a part of many fictions of the future and—to refer to Sardar's comments in regard to aliens in general—androids can also be useful to "demonstrate what is not human the better to exemplify that which is human" (2002, 6). The android is not only another version of a monster in popular fiction but rather has an in-between or liminal position as both man and machine and neither of these, which allows for complex and creative questions. For example, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* often used the android *Data* as essential figure in pondering difficult key questions of what it means to be human along with ethical dilemmas and responsibilities of human beings. As I show in the examples below, we can say in the spirit of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss when referring to animals and totems (1963, 89) that androids are "good to think with" in regard what it means to be a human being.

Some recent science fiction films have engaged critically with their era of dispassion and inhuman bureaucracies through emphasizing compassion, where androids are important way to enter into critical discussion about the present. The dystopian *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2017) depicts a technological future of isolated human beings shaped by environmental catastrophe. Androids, or replicates as they are called in the movie, have taken the role of disposable humans. Through visual imagery characterized by haze and dull colors, as well as the somewhat disturbing monotonous soundscape of the film, we get the sense of a world empty of compassion and life. Here, the androids take the position of the subaltern, and like the migrants in *The Children of Men*, the androids are "unpeople," to use Mark Curtis' phrase; their lives are as worthless and expendable (Chaudhuri 2011, 192). In one scene of the film, we are led to an abandoned casino standing empty in a radioactive area. In this space of past luxury and affluence, we hear Elvis Presley sing, which further intensifies the sense of a future lost—a future that is hauntingly familiar as it is our recent past. Contrary to the modernist dream, it is not the more advanced technology that carries hope for our dystopian future, but the acknowledgment of the humanity of others—in this case shared humanity with the replicates/androids. The film does not mention refugees and asylum seekers, which were quite visible in the media at the time of its making, but it is easy to draw that connection from the critical emphasis of the film on securitization and the devaluation of the life of others. The androids/replicates can be seen as standing in for those seeking refuge and

new opportunities in the Global North—in both cases the issue being compassion and recognizing shared humanity of some kind. The focus on the aspects of the film which are relevant to the discussion here is not to trivialize how the film also reproduces salient stereotypes, especially in regard to its projection of women as sexual objects tied to men, in addition to depicting graphic violence against women.

Now I would like to turn from fictions of the future as concurrent interventions into the time when they are made toward emphasizing more how the relevance of their critical perspective on dehumanization can cross both time and space. Thus, fictions about the future can be equally or even more relevant one or more decades later as they often try to struggle with broad key questions of being human. The insights of science fiction pioneer Isaac Asimov can be mentioned in this context. Some of his books think through different paths that human societies could take in the future and what that would mean for the kind of lives lived. In my discussion here, I briefly like to mention Asimov's intervention into what constitutes a rights-bearing person, thus giving insights into what scholars have called "categorical fetishism" (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). This term describes how people are seen almost as a different kind of human being if they are classified as refugee or asylum seeker. These are legal categories that have taken on a life on their own when policymakers highlight the importance of distinguishing between people in "real" need and those who are "frauds" and thus not in real need. Asimov's books are famous for his laws of robotics where the robots have three key laws so integrated into their minds that it is impossible for them to kill human beings.[2] These laws can be seen as one of the key premises in many of his fictional works. In *Robots and Empire* (1985), the last book in the Robots series, a group of robots, however, suddenly can and does kill human beings. As is revealed later in the book, robots cannot be changed and these rules cannot be bent to make it possible for the robots to kill a human being. Rather what has been changed is the definition of what constitutes a human being. Or as one character in the novel explains to another, the androids were changed in such a way that they were "geared to respond to a person as human only if he or she spoke with a Solarian accent." Others who did not fit that criteria of speaking with this particular kind of accent were not considered humans and thus disposable (167, 244). I have no idea what Asimov's intentions were when writing this, but to me it captures how legal definitions that seem on the surface to make all human beings equal can still allow for the reduction of some people to non-status or "bare"

life, as Giorgio Agamben would phrase it—lives that are seen as lacking value or not deserving political status (see the discussion in Chaudhuri 2011, 192). Categorizing some people as "bogus refugees" reduces potential suspects to bare life, either in their countries of origin or within camps, and stateless persons seem to slip through the cracks of human rights law, somehow not existing at all.

To take another example, *Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep?* (Dick 1968), the book on which the 1982 movie *Blade Runner* (Scott 1984) was based, was published in the context of the Vietnam War. The author, Philip K. Dick, said that during this period he felt as if "we had become as bad as the enemy" (Sammon 2007, 243). The story follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter, in a post-apocalyptic world, where almost all animals have died out. His job is to find androids that have escaped to earth from the "outer" colonies on other planets. Elaborate tests are used to find renegade androids that are otherwise impossible to distinguish from humans—even when it means that innocent individuals will be sacrificed as well. The androids may act, speak, and feel as human beings but are in fact not, making it is crucial to expose and exterminate them. Dick was notably not using the androids as a metaphor for people discriminated against but rather to symbolize actual human beings who were "physiologically human but behaving in a non-human way" and thus "cruel," "without-empathy," and "less-than-human entities" (Sammon 2007, 244, 262). According to Dick, the context of the Vietnam War made him feel that the important question was not if it was justified to kill people who were so cruel (like the replicants) but rather the dilemma was: "Could we not become like the androids [inhuman, without sympathy] in our very effort to wipe them out?" (Sammon 2007, 244). One of the book's key points can thus be brought to the present by asking critically what it means to refuse the right to life to people who look and act as humans; what does it do to those who are the "real" humans—how does their humanity become disputable as well? It asks critically what kind of society "we" will be left with if everyone is a potential threat, and a potential target?

A similar point is addressed in an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994) where the legal status of Data—the android—is under dispute. A Starfleet officer from the central command wants to claim Data, take him away from his friends and home in order to dismantle and experiment on him in order to gain knowledge that could possibly be beneficial for Starfleet. On the surface, the issue seems to be whether Data should be seen as a human with the rights that this entails or as someone's

property, but the episode extends the issue more broadly with questions regarding people defined as disposable. The linking of Data's positionality with slavery and dehumanization of identifiable groups in history is especially evident when one character, Guinan, points at the economic benefits of placing particular people outside humanity, directly connecting to the history of slavery:

> In the history of many worlds there have always been disposable creatures, they do the dirty work; they do the work that no one else wants to do because it is too difficult or too hazardous, and an army of Datas all disposable; you don't have to think about their welfare; of how they feel, a whole generation of disposable people. (Season 2, episode 9, ca 35 min after the beginning of the show)

It is probably no coincidence that Guinan is played by a Black actor, Whoopi Goldberg, which brings more clearly out its connection to the historical legacy of slavery. Like the book *Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep?* the episode draws attention to the positioning of people outside the spectrum of humanity as a result of particular practices of categorization and the wider consequences of creating disposable people without any rights or compassion.

To link with Asimov's discussion earlier, Asimov draws attention to how by a slight shift of hand, issues that were seen as intrinsic and non-negotiable are all of sudden possible, as illustrated in today's reality where we see the sudden positioning of refugees outside of basic human rights and obligations. Universal ethical obligations, such as saving someone from drowning or not torturing people, are suddenly set aside as irrelevant.

Concluding Remarks

While the future can constitute a "wicked" subject for scholars to analyze (Tutton 2017), it is a productive resource for various fictional engagements and interventions. As I stress in this essay, one of the magical properties of the future is precisely that it can be a material to "do something with," to use Tutton's phrase in relation to the difficulties in approaching the future itself analytically (2017, 480). In a sense, in speculative fiction, it is not only androids that are "good to think with" but also the future itself.

My discussion here has pointed out that narratives of the future can, furthermore, be a powerful way to talk about the present, making the future concurrent with events in the present, but also engaging with larger questions of responsibility, sympathy, and discrimination that have relevance regardless of their particular historical time. Some of the speculative fiction that I have addressed took place around the same time as the refugees and asylum seekers became strongly visible in the European context in the early and mid-2010s, with a strong emphasis on securitization and portrayal of Europe as under "siege" (Hage 2016: 39). The concerns of many works of speculative fiction with these larger questions of what it means to be human—often through emphasis of non-humans or androids—travel across time and space, as is reflected in how older science fiction often has relevance for issues debated in the present.

Asimov's works draw attention to how key ideals do not have to be changed in order to make the killing or discrimination of others in accordance to the law or universal treaties seeking to protect the right of people, just the key categories that they are based on. The book *Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep* along with the film *The Children of Men* pose important questions about the wider effects of dehumanization, which not only harms the victims that it targets but also the wider society that it is supposed to be necessary to protect. Thus, one of the questions posed by these fictions is what the cancellation of the humanity of those seen as "others" does to the future that we are entering and the kind of humanity which we ourselves embody.

Notes

1. This storyline differs in many important ways from the book in which it is loosely based.
2. The first rule states that a robot cannot harm a human being, or allow a human coming to harm; the second that it should follow orders, except when they are in conflict with the first law; the third stresses self-preservation, except when in conflict with the other two laws (see, for example, Clarke 1993).

References

Barber, Nicholas. 2016. Why *Children of Men* Has Never Been as Shocking as It is Now. *BBC Culture,* 15 December. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20161215-why-children-of-men-has-never-been-as-shocking-as-it-is-now.

Bauman, Zygmunt, and Carlo Bordoni. 2014. *State of Crisis.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Besson, Luc, dir. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets.* EuropaCorp et al.

Bock, Jan-Jonathan, and Sharon Macdonald. 2019. Introduction. In *Refugees Welcome?: Difference and Diversity in a Changing Germany*, ed. Jan-Jonathan Bock and Sharon Macdonald, 1–40. New York: Berghahn Books.

Brändle, V.K., O. Eisele, and H.J. Trenz. 2019. Contesting European solidarity during the "refugee crisis": A Comparative Investigation of Media Claims in Denmark, Germany, Greece and Italy. *Mass Communication and Society* 22 (6): 708–732.

Brydon, Diana, Peter Forsgren, and Gunlög Fur, eds. 2017. *Concurrent Imaginaries, Postcolonial Worlds: Toward Revised Histories.* Leiden: Brill.

Cantero, Lucia E. 2017. Sociocultural Anthropology in 2016: In Dark Times: Hauntologies and other Ghosts of Production. *American Anthropologist* 119 (2): 308–318.

Chaudhuri, Shohini. 2011. Unpeople: Postcolonial Reflections on Terror, Torture and Detention in *Children of Men*. In *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, ed. Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, 191–204. Abingdon: Routledge.

Clarke, R. 1993. Asimov's Laws of Robotics: Implications for Information Technology-Part I. *Computer* 26 (12): 53–61.

Crawley, Heaven, and Dimitris Skleparis. 2018. Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (1): 48–64.

Cuarón, Alfonso, dir. 2007. *Children of Men.* Universal Pictures.

Davitti, Daria. 2019. Biopolitical Borders and the State of Exception in the European Migration 'Crisis'. *The European Journal of International Law* 29 (4): 96–1173.

Decker, Frank. 2016. The "Alternative for Germany": Factors Behind its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party. *German Politics and Society* 34 (2): 1–16.

Dick, Philip K. 1968. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* New York: Doubleday.

Douglas, Mary. 2003. *Risk and Blame.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Fekete, Liz. 2018. Migrants, Borders and the Criminalisation of Solidarity in the EU. *Race and Class* 59 (4): 65–83.

Fur, Gunlög. 2014. Indians and Immigrants-Entangled Histories. *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33 (3): 55–76.

Hage, Ghassan. 2016. État de Siège: A Dying Domesticating Colonialism? *American Ethnologist* 43 (1): 38–49.

Hameleers, Michael. 2019. Putting Our Own People First: The Content and Effects of Online Right-wing Populist Discourse Surrounding the European Refugee Crisis. *Mass Communication and Society* 22 (6): 804–826.

Höglund, Johan. 2017. Can the Subaltern Speak Under Duress?. Voice, Agency and Corporeal Discipline in Zero Dark Thirty. In *Concurrent Imaginaries, Postcolonial Worlds: Towards Revised Histories*, ed. Diana Brydon, Peter Forsgren, and Gunlög Fur, 281–301. Leiden: Brill.

Lentin, Alana, and Gavin Titley. 2012. The Crisis of 'Multiculturalism' in Europe: Mediated Minarets, Intolerable Subjects. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (2): 123–138.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. *Totemism*. Translated by Rodeny Needham. Boston: Beacon.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín. 2016. Building on Iceland's 'Good Reputation': Icesave, Crisis and Affective National Identities. *Ethnos* 81 (2): 338–363.

———. 2019. Crisis, Migration, and the Cancellation of Anticipated Futures. In *Orientations to the Future*, ed. Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight, *American Ethnologist* website, March 8. http://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/orientations-to-the-future/crisis-migration-and-the-cancellation-of-anticipated-futures.

———. 2021. *We are all Africans Here: Race, Mobilities, and West Africans in Europe*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín, Andrea L. Smith, and Brigitte Hipfl, eds. 2018. *Messy Europe. Crisis, Race and the Nation–state in a Post-colonial World*. London: Berghahn.

Majcher, I., M. Flynn, and M. Grange. 2020. *Immigration Detention in the European Union*. Cham: Springer.

Moore, Martin. 2018. *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil And Information Warfare in the Digital Age*. London: Oneworld.

Morone, Antonio M. 2017. Policies, Practices, and Representations Regarding Sub-Saharan Migrants in Libya: From the Partnership with Italy to the Post-Qadhafi Era. In *EurAfrican Borders and Migration Management*, ed. Paolo Gaibazzi, Alice Bellagamba, and Stephan Dünnwald, 129–155. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Muehlebach, Andrea. 2013. On Precariousness and the Ethical Imagination: The Year 2012 in Sociocultural Anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 115 (2): 297–311.

Park, Thomas K., and J.B. Greenberg, eds. 2020. *Terrestrial Transformations: A Political Ecology Approach to Society and Nature*. Lexington Books.

Pinelli, Barbara. 2018. Control and Abandonment: The Power of Surveillance on Refugees in Italy, During and After the Mare Nostrum Operation. *Antipode* 50 (3): 725–747.

Puar, Jasbir K. 2018. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, London: Duke University Press.
Roitman, Janet. 2013. *Anti-Crisis*. Duke University Press.
Sammon, Paul M. 2007. Out Blade Runners, PKD, and Electric Sheep. In *Blade Runner (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?)*, ed. Philip K. Dick, 243–265. New York: Del Rey Books.chay.
Sardar, Ziauddin. 2002. Introduction. In *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar and Sean Cubitt, 1–17. London: Pluto Press.
Scott, Ridley. 1984. *Blade Runner*. Warner Bros.
Siapera, Eugenia. 2019. Refugee Solidarity in Europe: Shifting the Discourse. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22 (2): 245–266.
Stanton, Andrew, dir. 2008. *WALL-E*. Pixar.
Star Trek: The Next Generation. 1987–1994. Paramount.
Taş, Hakki. 2020. The Chronopolitics of National Populism. *Identities* 29 (2): 127–145.
Thorleifsson, Cathrine. 2018. *Nationalist Responses to the Crises in Europe: Old and New Hatreds*. London, Abingdon: Routledge.
Tutton, Richard. 2017. Wicked Futures: Meaning, Matter and the Sociology of the Future. *The Sociological Review* 65 (3): 478–492.
Villeneuve, Denis, dir. 2017. *Blade Runner 2049*. Columbia Pictures et al.