

WHAT IS

quiet defiance?

Quiet defiance chronicles the sustained forms of subtle resistance that don't exactly go unrecognized, but maybe aren't acknowledged as the powerful, effective methods of cultural change that they are. Revolutions are portrayed as noisy riots. Political identities are supposed to be stated in declarative sentences on social media. Organizers for social change are expected to work with the bullhorn as their primary tool, to paint with the palettes of crowds and campaigns. They're supposed to be tireless and loud to be 'effective'. But those who engage in acts of quiet defiance opt out of participating in the attention economy, don't follow the rituals for the cult of productivity, and reveal capitalist mythologies to be silly with their simple daily deviations. These quiet actions don't go unnoticed; they are apparent in the immediate families and friend groups and communities these reticent rebels are a part of. These writings describe the shape these ripples take. Perhaps this seditious pamphlet could be a ripple of its own.

This issue reveals the research process, media analysis, and synthesis of ideas that goes into writing speculative futures outside academic institutions.

ISSUE 7

INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR OF FUTURE FOLKWAYS

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I found myself wistfully wishing for a mentor the other day. A trusted individual who could read the partially drafted beginning of my new project, listen to the direction I hope to take it/issues I'm facing, and give me tips or encouragement from a place of wisdom based on personal or professional experience. I tried to imagine where this person might be, which fields of inquiry they might be engaged with, and even though I came up with a few people whose work I feel could be tangentially related to mine, I don't feel I have access to spaces where I could be in conversation with these people. It made me feel alone.

But I know I'm not alone. This year has been a great year for me recognizing and assembling my peers. A good group of people, across many countries—Finland to the Philippines—writing primarily speculative fiction. **We support each other in the work and appreciate a radical story well told.** That twinge of wishing for someone to give me guidance was something new though. That's not something I'd ever felt I wanted before; I've always been looking for collaboration. Teammates, not a coach. I might be anti-authority to my core, can't even imagine how to engage in a semi-hierarchical relationship. So even if there were someone willing to assess my work and allow me their time, would I listen to them?

I'M A TERRIBLE STUDENT

For a while, I considered myself to be self-taught. Autodidact or whatever it's called. I don't have any formal education in the things I'm best at—writing, translating, handicrafts, and... uhh, evaluating the interconnections of systemic forces—but I guess I did go to school a million years ago. A straight-A student, but never really considered good grades to be an indication that I was learning a lot. (I remember articulating in sixth grade that my scores only meant I was good at taking tests and anticipating what teachers were likely to ask about on said tests. That analysis I'd made when I was 12, that the school was “a game” I happened to be good at playing, was the basis of the education system in The Unidentified.) In my junior year, I was able to leave high school and take college courses at the community college across the street for dual credit. It's where I met my best friend still to this day (actually in an English Composition 101 class that had us analyze how science was portrayed in science fiction! I'd written a paper on cloning technology—it was the year Dolly the sheep made headlines—and the premises of movies like *Blade Runner* and *The Boys from Brazil*... seems like I had a third pre-1996 human cloning movie title, but it's lost to memory now.) So yes, I guess I did have some instruction in media analysis when I was 16, but when I graduated high school with a two-year Associate of Arts degree, people assumed I would use it to transfer to a university and stay in school. I didn't do this thing. I dropped out of a scammy art school, got a job at a library (issue #5) and told myself I'd go back to school when there was something I wanted to learn that I couldn't figure out on my own.

BUT I'M LEARNING ALL THE TIME

*my contribution to nancy's SXSU Intersectional Feminist Lens Classroom Toolkit zine, 2020.

POV

HOW THE SCHOOL SYSTEM FAILS EVEN ITS SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS

A PERSONAL NON-ESSAY BY RAE MARIZ

i was a straight A student. terrorized my English teachers in perfect essay format. graduated high school with 2-year college degree and the expectation to keep going with my pocketful of credits. dropped out of art school the very next year. worked in library dungeons assisting twelve research librarians. promised i'd go back to school if there was something i wanted to know that i couldn't learn on my own. self-taught world watcher. reading wide and random.

RUNNING START!

(NEVER WENT BACK)

i'm proud to be a drop-out. the best thing i could've done for my education. counter-intuitive, maybe. but when i list my failures, that's not one of them i see a foot deftly dancing out of reach before the trap snaps shut debt would've locked me to a conventional path, sure. but the greatest danger would've been mistaking the rules and rewards of academics for how the world works. i would've been taught to revere and respect. and i never learned that.

i am descended from island people. native hawaiians and migrants from the azores. and also their colonizers. portuguese and white europeans. i identify more with one side of my family, but can't deny the effects of the other. i didn't learn the details about the genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Americas until i was 23 and living abroad. i remember feeling the shock, the horror. and realizing the complete failure of my K-12 schooling up until that point.

WAYFINDERS VS EXPLORERS

(FIRST CHAPTER BY A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, READ IT)



in our current system, a student must submit to authority. not the teachers, not the actual people standing there each day, investing their energy into kids' futures. kids get cozy with a disembodied authority. they become well-versed in conventional wisdom. exposed to an impoverished point of view over and over, side-by-side until it forms an oppressive and inescapable worldview. common knowledge.

JUST "THE WAY THINGS ARE"

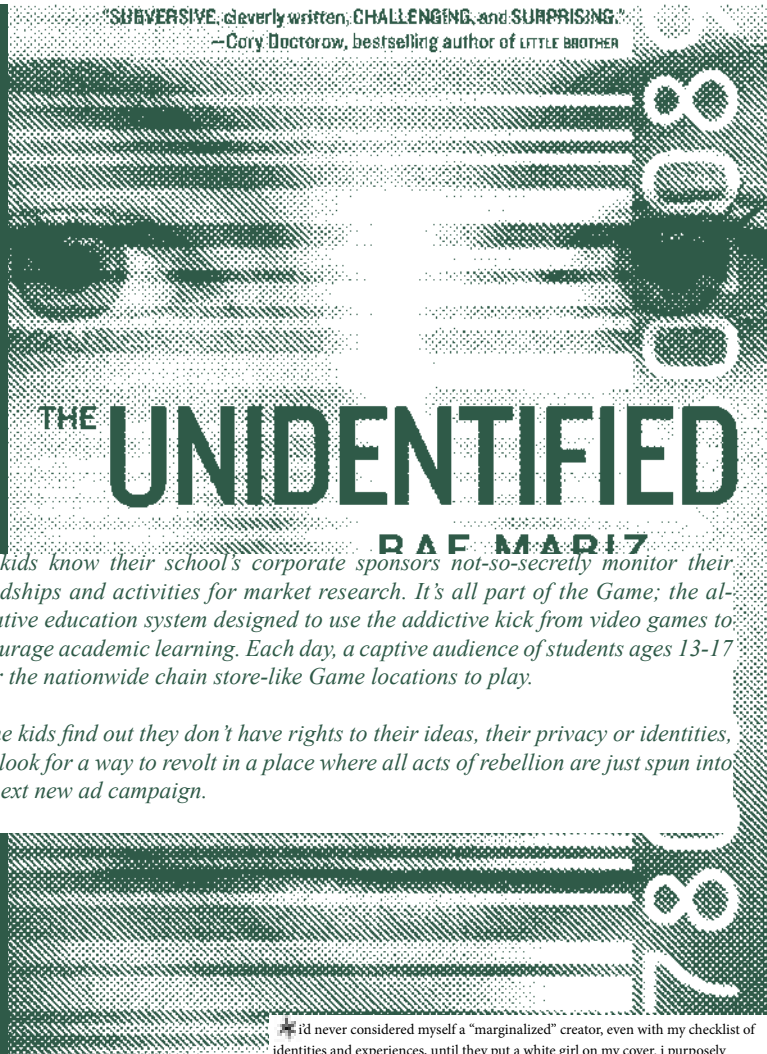
By the time I began teaching and writing, I had no illusions about "objectivity," if that meant avoiding a point of view. I knew that a historian (or a journalist, or anyone telling a story) was forced to choose, out of an infinite number of facts, what to present, what to omit. And that decision inevitably would reflect, whether consciously or not, the interests of the historian.

- HOWARD ZINN

FROM THE AFTERWORD OF

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES 1492 - PRESENT

i wrote a book as a thought exercise. to reimagine the educational system in the US. THE UNIDENTIFIED (2010). a YA sci-fi. i thought there had to be a better way to engage learners. things quickly devolved into a familiar dystopia:



"SUBVERSIVE, cleverly written, CHALLENGING, and SURPRISING."
—Cory Doctorow, bestselling author of LITTLE BROTHER

THE UNIDENTIFIED

RAE MARIZ

The kids know their school's corporate sponsors not-so-secretly monitor their friendships and activities for market research. It's all part of the Game; the alternative education system designed to use the addictive kick from video games to encourage academic learning. Each day, a captive audience of students ages 13-17 enter the nationwide chain store-like Game locations to play.

As the kids find out they don't have rights to their ideas, their privacy or identities, they look for a way to revolt in a place where all acts of rebellion are just spun into the next new ad campaign.

i'd never considered myself a "marginalized" creator, even with my checklist of identities and experiences, until they put a white girl on my cover. i purposely didn't describe my main character's physical appearance and the publishers said that meant she was white. there is a system at work, and it works and works.

in my work as a storyteller, i'm constantly examining the structure and framing of what society has been telling us, in what we're telling our kids. like even in this piece of informal writing, by centering my experience and background, i'm worried it makes it sound like i'm advocating for individual curiosity and personal wayfinding as a solution to failures in the educational system. that the responsibility to navigate all there is to know is on the student. the kids.

formal mandatory education began to teach children how to succeed in manufacturing jobs. to get to work on time and obey the boss. for the past few generations, we've been learning how to be consumers. of resources and content. told our power lies in our individual purchasing choices. in our roles as educators, we need to be able to give students the full scope of the problem if we want to have any hope of their bright minds working out the solution.

also, in taking action to address the failures of the educational system, reconsider the rhetoric of lifting minority kids up, so that they can achieve the academic excellence of their well-off peers. no. try educating those better-off peers to the structural injustices and systemic forces that are involved in holding their classmates down. if they can learn to get comfortable with their own discomfort in the classroom, some things might change. learning and growing can hurt. and the struggling kids have already done their homework without getting credit.



rae mariz is a storyteller.
she/saboteur

she writes fantastical fiction about science and nature and what could be. her narrative non-fiction is about living playfully in the world right now. the rae genre often features the trope of misfits coming together to make something greater. the stories all imagine situations that embrace really radical change.

I came across the term “independent scholar” in the collection of writings New Politics of the Handmade edited by Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch. It means unaffiliated with institutions. I’ve often considered it a privilege that I didn’t attend a place of “higher education”. First, it meant I wasn’t saddled with a monstrous tuition debt (this was one of the main reasons I dropped out of art school, if I’d completed the four-year-degree in graphic design the only option with a potential salary to pay off loans was work at an ad agency. My goals in life were not to make Nike look cool. I had a vague impractical interest in learning about “visual communication” what could be conveyed without words. I liked signage and shit.) and SECOND, I haven’t had to expend a lot of energy to “unschool” the subtle things you’re taught in academic institutions—false social hierarchies, the unimpeachable wisdom of white men, and that some understandings are unattainable “for the masses”. Lots of bullshit baked in. I found that’s been a strength in my cultural analysis. I haven’t had to “decolonize” some things ‘cos I never let them get me to begin with. I don’t see “education” as a neutral good, so much depends on what is taught and how. Re-education camps are ominous as hell. What is the value of a child getting a “good education”?

A recent situation that fucked with me: I met a cool family from San Francisco, talked about The Hunger Games with the 11yo, impressed that the 13yo looked strange adults (me) in the eye and engaged in real conversation. The mom redistributed food waste and was devoted to reuse and repair instead of disposable consumption. The dad recently had a meeting with City of San Francisco to present how his company could supply the existing public transportation system with biofuel, and was kind of depressed they wouldn’t make the switch even though it would cost the city less than continuing with fossil fuels. A cool family. But then the mom told me that 13yo was going to start going to private school next year, and it would cost them 23 000 USD A YEAR to send him there. I couldn’t get that decision to line up with their other values. A tuition of that size is an investment in status; you don’t pay into a system of inequality and then want to radically restructure. I’m unsettled that seemingly “conscious” people would still pay so much to maintain unfair institutions, and I’m suspicious about what kind of “good education” they’ll be paying for...



I’ve been a fan of unschooling and children’s liberation since I graduated high school, when it was already too late for me. The core of the short story I’m adapting into a longer project now is “how and what does a culture teach its children?” especially when the culture has been shaped by the organizing principles of the natural world instead of order imposed by institutions. I’ve been figuring things out “on my own”—that the dangerous DIY idea (issue #1), “rugged individualism” in torn jeans—but that has always meant that I was reading and learning things from other people. So even though I don’t have academic faculty with office hours to discuss my writing with, there are libraries and links that are filled with “course materials” that I can refer to for this independent study project I’m working on right now, currently titled The Field Guide for Next Time (a novel this time). I do have mentors with a body of work my stories are in conversation with. This is what I continue to learn from them:

FINDING GENRE AND CREATING AN ARRAY OF STORIES

adrienne maree brown, along with **Walidah Imarisha**, coined the genre “visionary fiction” to describe science fiction as a tool for social justice movements. That imagining better worlds to work towards—sharing a vision of what might be possible—is an important part of political organizing. These are ideas I get all the way excited about. And I’m not sure I can express what it feels like to maybe find a genre that my work “fits” into (maybe got close in issue #2?) but it’s also been a process. Early in my writing career, I think I thought of genre as someone else’s concern... marketing and bookstore shelving, etc. My debut The Unidentified fit comfortably enough in what YA sci-fi was at the time, but End Generation, the follow up book I’d been writing and shopping around, kept getting responses like “YA dystopia is a tough sell right now” or “this doesn’t fit the conventions of YA dystopia, so... sorry”. And I was frustrated because I’d never considered that story to be dystopian... it was contemporary YA with the specter of climate disasters disrupting young people’s futures? But I get it now, anything with a whiff of climate change was a “tough sell” in 2012. But it was hard to navigate what I as a writer needed to do if the work was being rejected for BOTH not fitting a genre it was never intended to be AND because that not-even-intended genre “wasn’t selling”.

It made me disregard genre as something stupid and made up... a collective delusion like money and property rights. I wrote my stories, described them as “speculative fiction” and tried again. But what I thought of as an inclusive umbrella term for both science fiction and fantasy, where my work fell in some kind of grey area in the middle, I slowly came to the understanding that there

actually wasn't much room in that murky middle. Genre draws very distinct lines. And though all my stories had fantastic elements... they were the result of my semi-animist worldview more than fictional magic systems as in traditional fantasy. And though I approached worldbuilding and storytelling like a science fictional thought experiment, my distinct lack of cool tech or belief in human technological "progress" would disappoint genre readers. Even industry professionals who were looking for cross-genre work apparently wanted stories that blended two rigidly defined genres, not an amorphous own thing.

At this time, I had started begrudgingly admitting the importance of genre from the reader's point of view. **Genre sets up expectations, which informs how a reader experiences the story.** Articulating the correct genre does a lot of work in instructing them "how to read" the story they're holding; it gets their heads in the game before page one. If the story fulfills their expectations or subverts them is up to the storyteller, but communicating a genre frontloads what to expect. So that's when, instead of rejecting genre outright, I tried to get more particular about genre, more niche to find the readers who were enthusiastic about and receptive to the stories I wanted to share with them.

Maybe that's a long digression to explain why learning about "visionary fiction" as a genre, as adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha describe it, was such a revelation to me. (Though if you google "visionary fiction," something about New Age mysticism pops up so it's maybe not as much of an immediately recognized and established genre yet. Where readers know exactly what kind of story they're getting into.) But for readers looking for visionary fiction as a subtype of speculative fiction, I feel like we're ready to talk! Readers of that genre will be looking for this purposeful approach to storytelling—and assessing the story being told in a particular framework that the genre invites. Certain people will insist that writing with a political objective will always be didactic—but all writing is political... that choice to pretend it's not, or that there can even be a "neutral, pure" work of literature is ridiculous.

It was also a process for me to admit that maybe I do believe in the "power of storytelling". I know that the process of writing has changed things for me, the writer. That there is some kind of power generated in creating a world, in learning about the people who populate a story, in getting a deeper understanding about why "we" do the things we do. I've always enjoyed the way stories were a way to organize my inspirations, a frame to line up and share everything I've been excited about recently. And draw connections. I knew being able to write has been a privilege—to have the time to devote to dreaming things up, the mental capacity to organize ideas, and even physical health to be able to sit (those times when there were problems with my burnt-out brain or my wrist, or eyes, or neck pain which

made the act of physically writing painful... I know I have a lot to feel fortunate about). But at times I felt it was simply self-indulgent to devote time to writing, probably because I've often been a little skeptical that a reader could experience similar transformative effects that I got to feel from the writing process.

"The power of storytelling". It sounds too fanciful? Is it something culture producers tell themselves to make what they've devoted their energies to have more meaning? Which stories have changed anything? We could probably come up with a few titles, but I think I've been looking at that phrase wrong. "The power of storytelling". Maybe the power isn't in the telling? That passively consuming a perfect story isn't where change comes from, but as long as a reader is co-creating with their imagination... maybe that's something. And maybe that's what brown and Imarisha are referring to with visionary fiction; stories that engage the imagination in the reader are the stories that shape culture.

But no, even passively consuming stories does have an effect on culture. A big theme in my work is that the stories we've been exposed to have played a role in shaping relationships with the world and the way we participate in the world at present. Part of the story of our culture is that passively reading or watching a narrative is enough, no further participation required to be "engaged" with political issues. You've read about the plights of Indigenous communities or saw a documentary about a girl oppressed by her Islamic fundamentalist family? Good for you, I guess. Did you consider why the story of someone's trauma was given the budget to be shot with such high-production values? Constant exposure to a certain worldview does seep into how someone perceives the world around them—whether through fictions or in other media.

The most conspicuous example to me right now is how Nordic Noir as a "popular genre" influences cultural ideas about crime and punishment in Swedish politics. Police are portrayed as flawed people in a flawed system, but they're the only thing standing in the way of violent misogynists and foreign drug cartels. Don't trust anyone except the police to protect you, and fear everyone else, the stories say.

I've seen how individual stories add up to a cultural worldview. I was a translator for the Swedish film industry for over 15 years, and in that position, I could see firsthand how one kind of story kept coming to me from multiple production companies. The reason? They were predominantly employing writers and directors of a certain generation, gender and class status to tell the stories that were sure to get funded. **When we see many many stories from a very narrow point of view side-by-side and one-after-the-other it produces a cognitive illusion.** They seem to simulate a cultural mainstream. By having these thin worldviews lined up beside each other to create a "broad" perspective on Swedish life, it enforced

the values of exactly no one I knew personally in Sweden. Overexposure to one kind of worldview has an effect on viewers/readers. Power validates itself.

So maybe it's again misleading to insist that a single story has the power to change anything, that's too much for a story to live up to... but look at what an array of stories can do? What would happen if we could be awash in different kinds of stories? Readers have to actively seek out niche genres told from perspectives marginalized by media and publishing industries (I'm tired of everyone hiding in the passive voice there. Marginalization isn't an inherent quality of any identity—those folks are being PUSHED to the side. Look at who's pushing and maybe make them stop.)

It's not only brown who insists on the necessity of a "new story". In every lecture series on any imaginable subject—neurology, human development, housing, climate justice, democratic turnout—the speaker always ends with a variation on "what we need are new stories to motivate, new visions, etc." Some of these speakers, often academics or experts in their field, use a very limited definition of story. The single-protagonist reader-insert overcoming a series of conflicts for a satisfying resolution. Well, when it comes to storytelling, I'm an expert. And to start out with, we're going to need a much broader definition of story.

THE AUTHOR AND THE STORYTELLER

I recently read/listened to **Karen Lord's** Redemption in Indigo and upon completion, listened to it again. Some comments from my writers group peers pointed out how they liked the positioning of the narrator and their role in the story. That intrigued me. I didn't immediately recognize it as something unusual—also mentioned in reviews—to me it was how you tell a story? I delighted in the telling because it was familiar to me, not odd. But that exchange gave me a different perspective on my own storytelling. I didn't realize the ways I've been using perspective could be something a reader was getting hung up on and confused by. I'd get beta comments sometimes when the narrator makes comment "who is telling this?"...uh, me? The storyteller?

The complaint is that it "pulls the reader out of the story" to wonder this. But... I think it's healthy for the reader to recognize from time to time that they're in a story. To ask themselves just that question while in the middle of everything: who is telling the story? Whose perspective are we inhabiting and why?



In Forest Primeval, some sections are "authored" by characters the reader meets in the "main story" of a child named Dasha looking to save her sister. The folktale retellings of scenes from the main story turn out to be written by the scientist-naturalist-animal hoarder-storyteller Dasha meets in the woods. The "omniscient" narrator who tells about the histories of the primeval forest and its intersections with humankind turns out to be a giant raven who cares for Dasha—the bird is also introduced in one of the scientist-naturalist-animal hoarder-storyteller's tales... itself a stylized retelling of Odin and his ravens that I (the person authoring the entire work) reimagined into a character, the omniscient narrator, who isn't me... Okay, I can see how readers don't always like this. But this is the job. This is the way a writer can wield a story. I always want people to wonder who is telling the story. That's like Critical-thinking 101. Cite your sources.

Craft is about how words on the page do this: what expectations the writer engages with indicate both who the implied reader is and who the implied author is. It sets up what the reader should believe and care about, what they need to have explained and/or named, where they should focus their attention, and what meaning to draw from the text.

Matthew Salesses' book [Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping](#) really confirmed for me the core argument I'd been having with agents and editors and some beta readers. I kept having to express to them, maybe not as gently as I could have, that the things they found "confusing" or "unbelievable" in a story was not a problem my intended reader would have a hard time understanding. I'm not sure they were self-aware enough to realize other people with different backgrounds would bring their own experiences in to complement the story...or maybe they did understand and were offended that I wasn't making changes to make the story "speak to them" and their particular experiences and that's why I've been having a rough go of publishing?... I didn't think it was so controversial to remind them that they were not my intended audience, but on the other hand, they were accustomed to having their particular tastes catered to, based on the positions they've taken in the industry. It was "expected" that they'd only be required to work on the stories that plucked their particular heart-strings and knew how to navigate; it was expected for writers to accommodate those tastes as a requirement for getting their stories accepted.

The "subjective" nature of the business and the seemingly innocent "not right for me" dismissal of certain stories might be fine if those yes-or-no positions in the industry were held by people with a wider variety of experiences and worldviews. (Lee & Low collects statistics on the diversity of people who work in book publishing, but don't show class or education. <https://blog.leeandlow.com/2024/02/28/2023diversitybaselinesurvey/>) A particularly painful absurdity for me is periodically sifting through a pool of potential agents who all proclaim themselves to have "eclectic interests" and then list cookbooks, pop memoirs, and all the most commercial genres and similar favorite tropes.

Salesses's book gave many examples of how "writing craft" as it's taught in MFA courses (which has bled into internet advice) isn't neutral "good writing"—and it hasn't ever been. There are particular politics at work in character development, story structure, etc. (preface page xv-xvi). It confirmed for me some of those suspicions where I couldn't figure out where the miscommunication was happening (with former agents and potential editors). But it was also hella daunting to understand what a writer with a cultural background traditionally marginalized by the publishing industry had to take into account in telling their stories.

What I'm getting hung up on now in my [Field Guide](#) project, is that I am literally (ok, metafictionally) making the reader a character in the story, so I REALLY have to identify who I'm writing this for. In this rough beginning draft, the Storyteller takes breaks to address "questions" the implied reader has after experiencing a scene... like the cultural intricacies that are lost since The Reader is from 2021 and The Storyteller is telling their story from their present 2120 where the widely accepted cultural values that inform how the characters interact with each other (and animals and the land) are very different from the Reader's present accepted cultural values. Craftwise, The Storyteller makes note that telling this story shouldn't be any more difficult than telling a historical period drama or describing community life on a generational starship set in space. But I know science fiction and historicals have long adhered to colonial impulses in their crafting, so that's why I haven't really found a way to "tell the story straight"... by just immersing the telling in a specific character and building details of the setting (time and place) around them as they navigate the plot. I've involved this fictional Storyteller to clarify why the storytelling techniques the reader is accustomed to are outdated in the Storyteller's time—mostly because the usual ways fail to stimulate the imagination in ways people needed to dream themselves out of societal collapse. Kind of that Audrey Lorde quote about not being able to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. I'm trying some different narrative tricks, but not sure if they're working. (And not sure who to trust to ask if they are.)

When the Storyteller addresses the Reader it's not just infodumping, more subtle story things/characters are introduced along with extra context, but I'm also aware that the framing positions The Reader to be a person who is used to having everything understandable/explained to them. So that means I (and The Storyteller) are addressing a reader who, in 2021, presently enjoys a position with a certain amount of cultural supremacy. Those sections are kind of playing on the "explanatory comma" situation in journalism. Where a line of information is added to explain a concept for an implied ideologically white audience... often indicating to a reader who DIDN'T need the additional information that Tupac is an L.A. rapper, that the writer isn't talking to them. It shows they are not the one the author has in mind. That's the main concern I have with the specific relationship between who The Storyteller asserts the reader is. I don't want someone to feel left out or alienated. (Maybe I can make note early on that the Storyteller acknowledges that they are telling this story to a crowd. Not everyone has the same questions, that the Storyteller sees them there as well.)



WHO IS TELLING THE STORY?

There's a fun overlap between science fiction writers and academic scholars. A lot of the writing from these authors feel relevant to stories I produce even though I'm an art school dropout and barely sure at times that I'm writing SF.

IT'S ALL ACADEMIC

Annalee Newitz – I actually met Annalee at Sciencefictionbokhandlen in Stockholm when they were signing books with Charlie Jane Anders, late spring 2019.

Russ tipped me off yesterday that Charlie Jean Anders and Annalee Newitz were in Stockholm, so I went to their talk/book signing at a science fiction bookstore here and ACTUALLY TALKED TO THEM like a peer. Writer to writer about science and the world and telling stories.

At first I just got my books signed and made awkward conversation. Then left. Then told myself to woman up and go back up there. Listened to sci fi geeks ask them about Godzilla and role playing games and Swedish weather so I was like, fuck it, I'm going to ask Annalee about real things they mentioned in their talk. Asked them if they're still writing non-fiction because I really liked their Scatter, Adapt and Remember about how humanity will survive mass extinction. They're working on one about abandoned ancient cities and archeology. Then I asked them ooh what's the name of the woman who modified satellite imaging to analyze growth patterns of vegetation to locate where lost cities are likely to be buried? And Annalee knew who I was talking about! Sarah something, said she was in their book! So Annalee asked me if I was a scientist. And that's when I got to say "nope!! Science fiction writer." Mentioned UnID. Then went on to discuss my true love, catastrophic climate breakdown and how to get people to care. And story structure. And resistance. Hopefully I made a good impression. I'm going to be a creeper and email them later to follow up. Annalee's new fiction book sounds TOTALLY like my thing. Much more than the gay robot fuxking book. The new one is time travel women and teenage feminist revenge killer. That's like a mix of 13 and a Life on Mars subplot.

Anyway. I talked with writers in person who I super admire and might even made it sound like I know what I'm talking about. Achievement Unlocked.

Obviously, that meeting didn't lead to a lifelong friendship, but I love it as a reminder that I do periodically take a large exaggerated step out of my comfort zone and it leads to fun feelings. I am a fan of all of Annalee's work, but I do find myself more inspired by their narrative non-fiction pop science. I mentioned Scatter and Adapt, which looks at previous pandemics, social upheavals, historical happenings and the takeaways from those times, and how we can use what we know about what happened in the past to prepare for "inevitable" future events. This is a perspective established

early in The Field Guide for Next Time, that the Storyteller can't predict the future, but knows how to extrapolate from her long view of the past... especially the erased "pre-histories"... to validate her current seemingly "unimaginable" present, the future for the reader. This is one of those things between coincidence and peer review, I guess, but I read Newitz's Four Lost Cities long after I envisioned the future society (in the short story of "The Field Guide for Next Time") and so much of that future society has ties with what archeologists have pieced together about the social lives of Cahokia, most specifically, that the largest city at the time (between 1050-1100 AD, its population dwarfed Paris's) wasn't built to facilitate markets... it was something else, social, religious, sport, feasting, sharing craft. I was thrilled that the most "difficult to accept" aspect of my future fictional society had a basis in Indigenous civilizations. (Also built to be temporary.) I even canonically placed this future place over the rubble of East St Louis, itself positioned over the ruins of Cahokia. Indigenous futurisms are triumphant returns.

Predictive Fictions: Stories About The

Future	Our present is surrounded by futures. Weather reports; science fiction novels, films, or cartoons; economic forecasts; year-end predictions; five- (or fifty-) year plans; election polls; product launches; mock-ups for large development projects; disaster simulations; all of these offer versions of the future, and their purpose is to influence us, affecting both mundane and momentous decisions that then create the future we will inhabit. Some approaches are framed as neutral or scientific while in fact privileging certain viewpoints and involving considerable guesswork, while others are discounted as emotional or imaginative.
Dr. Malka Older	
Course Description:	

This course will explore the range of tools from a critical perspective, questioning how we, societally, value or devalue various constructions of the future. We complain about the inaccuracy of weather forecasts and election polls, yet give them an entirely different status than we do to science fiction, no matter how rigorous the science. Plans rarely acknowledge counterfactuals or unexpected events; economic forecasts are used as the basis for consequential policy decisions without consideration of their track record. Without discounting the utility of numbers, measurements, and calculations, this course will have a particular emphasis on the currently under-used area of fictional narrative and what speculative fiction can bring to our understanding of the future. Characterization, imaginative thinking, and narrative motivations offer powerful tools largely ignored in mainstream construction of futures.

Through readings of science fiction along with critical examinations of other forms of prediction – all of them, to some degree, fictions – students will be challenged to think critically about what futures are being presented, what techniques are given more confidence, and why.

The fact that **Malka Older** posted her entire course syllabus publicly for anyone to read along says a lot about Malka Older. And they're all good things. So generous. <https://malkaolder.wordpress.com/2020/12/17/syllabus-predictive-fictions/>

Donna J Haraway – After reading “The Field Guide for Next Time” short story (khōrēō vol 3.2), a visual artist friend from Hamburg asked if I was familiar with Donna J Haraway’s work. I was not. Like at all. I was so surprised to read the “back cover” copy of Staying with the Trouble:

“In the midst of spiraling ecological devastation, multispecies feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway offers provocative new ways to reconfigure our relations to the earth and all its inhabitants. She eschews referring to our current epoch as the Anthropocene, preferring to conceptualize it as what she calls the Chthulucene, as it more aptly and fully describes our epoch as one in which the human and nonhuman are inextricably linked in tentacular practices. The Chthulucene, Haraway explains, requires sym-poiesis, or making-with, rather than auto-poiesis, or self-making. Learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth will prove more conducive to the kind of thinking that would provide the means to building more livable futures. Theoretically and methodologically driven by the signifier SF—string figures, science fact, science fiction, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, so far—Staying with the Trouble further cements Haraway’s reputation as one of the most daring and original thinkers of our time.”

Since I read it, I’ve seen her cited everywhere... what’s the name of that phenomenon? When a thing you just found out about suddenly seems to crop up everywhere? The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon. (I translated a film script about the militant leftist group in Sweden in the 70s but I can’t say I noticed it everywhere afterward.)

Anyway. Donna Haraway kept popping up in a bunch of my readings on other seeming unrelated topics (they’re all related, that’s the thing) like environmental stewardship and slow fashion movements (issue #6) and more. I liked Staying with the Trouble okay, but I think I’ve been oversaturated by “daring and original thinkers” of a certain generation obviously influenced by Indigenous ideas of kinship, etc. Also the terminology of the “Chthulucene” was just silly. It’s a weird choice to give deference to a notoriously racist (even for his time!) SF writer for a central idea of your study. Doesn’t feel thought through. Not serious. Still, this is also what I kind of hope for...what I was saying about an array of stories needed to shift culture. I WANT for these tangled, interconnected ideas to resonate and become ubiquitous and encountered everywhere you look (or are not looking). Though it would be nice for people to cite their sources.

James C Scott – Like Donna Haraway, this is an academic writer that I came to after I already had a solid vision of the forces that shaped this story future. I found it weirdly validating to have my conception of a diverse society shaped by messy overlapping clusters of care as exactly the kind of thing kings hate in Seeing Like a State. Scott describes “legibility”—the simplifying for easier management (control) and understanding “from above”—as the goal of state projects. I especially appreciated the note

that, in city design as in forestry practices, “efficiency” is the claim to this system, but in reality it is an aesthetic idea that led to grid cities and timber farms. They “look” more organized to an outsider’s eyes, but don’t make as much sense to the communities living their messy lives.

What I was trying to do with the short story, both in content and in structure, was to show naturally occurring organizational principles found in nature. The reiteration of fractal patterns. Prizing the endless variation of a snowflake instead of its “uniqueness”. The unpredictability of a waft of smoke. It was an effort to appreciate the inherent beauty in the “messy” and feel comfort in the “chaotic”. Some people admire a wild-flowering meadow, others glare aghast at an unruly patch of weeds. Is the project of the story to assist readers in no longer “seeing like a state”? To disconnect from the value judgements of a ruling elite and appreciate natural systems of community care? MAYBE!

Ultimately, I don’t think it’s weird to have independently come to similar conclusions as these scholars, we’ve been recognizing the same patterns in the observable. I do find it disheartening that by not occupying positions in recognized institutions (either academic or publishing) that this invisible work of “engaged thinking” feels lonely and unacknowledged and doesn’t have a place.

WHO GETS TO BE THE BIG THINKERS

Kim Stanley Robinson and, to a similar extent **Richard Powers**, are cited as the big thinkers in climate fiction/eco-fiction. Influential writers. I have them in a similar category in my mind because I feel I’ve taken the same lessons from their work and their positions in science fiction/literary landscapes. They’re of the same generation (born in 1950s), are respected American novelists with Californian roots, both seem like very sweet and generous people—KSR talking up and making space for the younger generations of science fiction writers behind him, Richard Powers deflecting the media fawning that he’s “doing something new” in storytelling by acknowledging that he’s actually doing something that’s very old by including the consciousness of other-than-human forces (in conversation with Bill McKibben, 2019). **And both of their writings frustrate me in similar ways.** I want to love their big ambitious thinky books and recommend them to others, and I can never do it wholeheartedly. I admire their premises and approach to their subject matter—they’re telling stories about the kinds of things I’m interested in and would like to see fiction take on more often! But the execution... there’s something that doesn’t always work for me. Usually it’s character-related, I think. How a character is described. Often it’s a detail that reminds me the book is written from an unexamined dude POV. KSR early (and not-so-early)

works ogle female characters, Powers weirdly fetishizes disability, and both of them reveal their timidity about radical property damage and sabotage. Maybe it's similar to the problem I mentioned in the Salesses's section, I'm not quite their intended reader and I feel it. (Even though I very very much am! Hard to find a reader who is as dedicated to wonky science fiction and sprawling multi-character cast novels than me.) Still, it's difficult to connect to the story when the story wasn't crafted to connect with me.

I am always excited to read a Kim Stanley Robinson book, and sometimes I finish reading them. I really appreciated and maybe enjoyed KSR's New York 2140 the most, except I didn't agree that capitalism is robust enough to survive through the kinds of environmental destructions described. There was a switch to communal lifestyles within submerged apartment buildings, but I didn't buy that the bubble real estate economy would hold for 100+ years. I don't like that the story may contribute to the idea of capitalism's inevitability. KSR has had characters quote in his stories, "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." And like, cool quote, but it's not?

I don't want my critique, or any critique of a body work, to sound like I think "it's no good". I admire these people! They're doing great work! But **this is the way I process stories and rub up against the stuff that bothers me as a reader in order to sharpen my blades as a writer.** To focus and fill in the spaces. And I want my stories to be accessible in a different way, that the reader who finds one of my fantastical fiction works appealing enough aren't the same ones who are likely to read Seeing Like a State for fun... but would get that sense of understanding.



But still it's instructive to see which ideas and by whom get the wide recognition in the current conversation. Who has access and whose work garners acceptance. This is something I've been thinking about... if it's an area of study already... and what might be called if it is. It's not so much literary theory, analyzing the text of a work and its underlying meaning... I want to analyze the "reception" of a work. Why some ideas breakthrough or are ignored in their time. A wider interaction of fictional works and the cultures that spawned and embraced (or rejected) them.

WORKS IN CONVERSATION

N.K. Jemisin (and **Ursula K Le Guin**) – My current project describes the ways a future society relates to each other and the steps taken to get there. I recognize a lot of similarities in what I'm trying to do with what N.K. Jemisin did with "The Ones Who Stayed and Fought"—including a narrator that addresses the reader's skepticism that such a place could exist. The differences are: she placed her world "away" from the reader's world... with only a media connection between the two... and her city still described a very clear division of labor roles. Even if there was more harmony between the farmers and merchants or whatever, it was still a society organized by certain people performing certain jobs to maintain the whole thing. ("Utopias", if they're ever attained, seem only to be able to exist within city limits, or sort-of national borders. Always on the edge of something worse. "The whole world" being better seems outside the scope of what we're supposed to be capable of envisioning.) "The Ones Who Stayed and Fought" is a direct response to Ursula K Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas." It's weird to admit, but I have not read a lot of Le Guin's fiction! The Word for the World is Forest is maybe the only full novel(la) of hers I've read (not true, I've now also read The Dispossessed and Paradises Lost and some short stories, but the bulk of her writings have been essay collections and other non-fictions.) I've been aware of the existence of Omelas since I was maybe 19 when my English major roommate discussed her coursework with me in our cookie-cutter apartment in Vancouver, WA that often smelled like stir-fry from a bag.

I've since read the story. "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas". The set-up is: a lovely functioning "utopian" society but the catch is one child is horribly treated and abused and everyone is aware of this child's suffering, but all the luxuries are dependent on this one kid's mistreatment. Everyone is mostly cool with it, except for the ones who can't make peace with being complicit in that kid's suffering and leave Omelas in protest. It's still a powerful parable, still kind of devastating for some to wrestle with their good times being at the expense of millions of children's suffering. (Though not everyone who reads it does the wrestling.)

N.K. Jemisin's story—"The Ones Who Stayed and Fought"—proposes that walking away isn't as noble as it's portrayed in Le Guin's piece, that you have to stay and fight for the society you want to have. **And I even get a thrill from the cultural conversation between stories, the way worlds are built on and reframed through time.** That Jemisin's 2020 story is in conversation with Le Guin's 1976 story. It's exciting that some fiction can have a conversation like this. (There's also a new

voice in the discussion Isabel J. Kim's "Why Don't We Just Kill the Kid in the Omelas Hole" Clarkesworld, 2024.) I don't see stories as self-contained universes, that it's not just about what happens to the characters populating a particular world—that there could be an intentional relationship with the reader and "the culture" at large. The Field Guide for Next Time is intentionally making connections between current "expectations" of story and what it would look like if a culture expected more.

I also just recognized a connection between The Field Guide for Next Time and "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas". Le Guin set up her story that all the benefits of the seemingly utopian society are based on the neglect and mistreatment of a single child, and my premise for Field Guide is that the benefits of the seemingly utopian society are based on the fair treatment of each and every child (and what happens if the society seems to fail one). That's fun.

I feel like I'm more influenced by Le Guin's essays about writing more than her fiction itself. I get a jolt of "my people" when someone shares her "The right of kings" quote. This is the full quote:

"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings."

and the last line, often truncated in the quote:

"Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words."

What a perfect rallying cry. This is why I'm obsessed with story structure and social structure and structural everything. Maybe too much energy has been poured into analyzing structures as immutable and inevitable THINGS THAT EXIST, as if the forces are something we have no choice in/we're continually at the mercy of. I want each of my stories to be a reminder of how pathetic quests for power are, how impoverished the worldview of the wealthy is. How there is nothing inevitable about colonialism, and how capitalist systems aren't doomed to fail... they've been in the process of failing for my entire adult life. This presently agreed upon economic system is vulnerable. It takes one cargo ship blocking a canal, one bank of servers going offline, or maybe just one person helping out their friends and community without expecting material rewards to expose the lie to the "robustness" of the system. It's teetering constantly on the edge of collapse, and all the "shows of force" are the frantic attempts to prop it up. **Capitalism requires the participation of individuals. It does not exist independent of people.**

BREAKING IT DOWN

A helpful framework to make sense of this mess – written "in lockdown" 2020

The global economy is a colossal Jenga tower built by people.

It's understandable that people were proud of it; the way it seemed to defy gravity. How some howled and laughed in awe of the sheer implausibility of what they accomplished.

"Look at it!" the billionaires marveled, "what an awesome monument to our ingenuity!"

Businesspeople took selfies with it. Financial speculators egged each other to keep going. The instability of it was what made the tower exciting. The spectacle of it was the only thing that captured media attention. How much higher could it go?

Others saw the tower and couldn't get as excited about it.

"The table is shaky and there are no more bricks," environmental activists cautioned.

"There's no way that's going to be standing by the time we're expected to build," the younger generations watched anxiously, angrily.

"Where did you get those bricks to build in the first place?" Indigenous survivors and descendants of enslaved people wanted them to consider.

"What are the bricks?" the struggling wage workers were too tired to ask themselves.

Will we be surprised when it all comes toppling down?

It's a viral pandemic this time, but it could be anything. The tower wasn't built to last. And in the silence after the thundering collapse, we have to ask ourselves, "What was it built for?"

The ones most invested in the tower, are going to want to start rebuilding without any reflection, to redouble their efforts to keep what's left of the unwieldy structure upright. Even though it's too late and has been too late for longer than anyone wanted to admit. The image of what-once-was is the only vision they can see; the stance of "protecting" the tower against "attack" is the only position their rigid bodies can take. They'll build using the same methods they always had. Stripping away pieces from the bottom to continue construction up top. Using the same ridiculous techniques that caused the mess.

And the rest of us? We're at home. Momentarily relieved of the pressure of keeping the tower standing for maybe the first time in generations; so many of our jobs and laws and structures were dedicated to simply keeping the tower from falling, but we never got the chance to consider our daily activities in those terms. How the rigid structure of the tower allowed very little personal movement or choice. All the things people "needed" to do to live—the purchasing habits, the jobs or careers, the sacrificing of limited time to keep one's daily individual life possible—they were all prescribed roles to support the tower whether willingly or not.

We're starting to see it now. All the previous efforts and energy put into keeping the tower from toppling, all the faults and inequities of the systems. All of it exposed. Grocery clerks in Minnesota are getting recognized as 'essential personnel' like doctors and nurses. Not because we are now in a crisis. They've always been essential; we're just allocating their work a more appropriate amount of social status now that we can see exactly what supports the structure (but never compensating that essential work and quickly withdrawing that status when convenient). The talks of individual relief funds—that resemble the previously radical idea of a universal basic income—are now being seriously considered. The ones who balk at ideas like this—the senators and CEOs who want a person's ability to provide essential needs for themselves and loved ones to be tied to workforce employment—they're the ones who have the tower still standing in their minds. They're not living in a current new reality. They're not looking at the people scattered and dazed in the rubble of their precious economy. They still don't see us as people; we're still just bricks they want to force back into place.

Take this time, if you have the privilege to do so, and reexamine what the tower provided for you at its height, and consider the shapes of structures that can be built once resources and societal expectations have been released from the duty of propping it up. It can still be daunting; part of the reason we've been ignoring the wobbling tower for so long is because it's so scary.

These are still early days. You're allowed to sit with your sadness. Assess the mess. At some point, we're going to have to pick up the pieces, so if you have the luxury of boredom right now, consider which worlds might be possible to create.

Because this isn't a rich person's party game. It isn't a fanciful metaphor. And it never was.

-rae

That's what I hope comes through in my stories, the mutability of how we live. That if the suffering is by design, what could we make instead? The Field Guide presents organizational structures that already exist in nature. A way to show someone how to appreciate the beauty of a weedy lot. That anarchy and chaos aren't lawless, they just follow a more complicated inherent mathematics or very simple guiding principles (direct action = if there's a problem it's within your power and responsibility to do something about it, and mutual aid = help whoever you can whenever you can so they'll be able to care for you when you need). Starlings flock following the lead of their seven nearest neighbors. What would a society look like if each person subconsciously chose seven people in their community to be inspired by and emulate? I don't know! That's why I'm writing this piece.

Le Guin's essay on the Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction is also instructive: <https://the-anarchistlibrary.org/mirror/u/uk/ursula-k-le-guin-the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction.pdf>

It sometimes seems that the story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we'd better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one's finished. Maybe. The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

CURIOUS COMMONALITIES IN WHITE LADY UTOPIAS

I've been reading as many fictional utopias as I can during breaks in drafting The Field Guide for Next Time. Been seeking out well-known and lesser known stories featuring what are often described as "feminist utopias" just because I want to know what's out there, which ideas have been tried and tested through narrative, which descriptions of a future society resonate and which have died on the vine. There are a few stand outs that I keep returning to—"bugging me," I would say. There are a few peculiarly particular elements these stories have in common that trouble me, or maybe they wouldn't bother me if they were isolated incidents, but because they appear in multiple tellings, I want to know what's going on there.

In both The Woman on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy (1976) and The Actual Star by Monica Byrne (2021), the authors seem to have something to say about blood-ties kinship being the "problem" that humanity needs to overcome/get past if they're to have a functioning peace. And... that's weird, right? Or at least, feeling a sense of family and connection to other people hasn't been on my radar as one of

the main societal ills people have to get over to ensure some kind of better world? I guess they're both trying to avoid "in-born" national and cultural identities which they assume are what lead people to war and disagreements, but does that mean too much love for family and community is really the core problem that we all need to roll up our shirt sleeves and really do something about? Both stories present people connecting too strongly with their own biological offspring as a deal breaker for a just society, so they need to implement these big projects to ensure that everyone cares for every kid equally.

In both the stories the physical biology of men and women have to be changed for this to be possible... In Star, all people are induced to develop male and female reproductive organs in the womb (a procedure developed to address a genetic bottleneck 200 years in their past) and in Edge men are hormonally given the ability to nurse babies which the protagonist-from-another-time finds horrifying, but I thought it was rather charming? And also appreciated how Piercy presented motherhood and that bond as a kind of power that women had over men (and allowing men to experience the child bond through breastfeeding was an effort to level the playing field and correct that imbalance). I guess I just found it refreshing (in a story from 1976, no less) to see motherhood described in terms other than a spiritual death sentence or oppressive bummer in a work of feminist fiction. (Le Guin, in one of the essays in Words Are My Matter, talked about the political power of women in the family to teach children how to be people and society teaches them how to be boys or girls outside the house. Respecting this inside work and acknowledging this power is a big thing in Field Guide.)

"It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers.

In Edge, there is no biological birthing from any gender, babies are genetically matchmade, machine incubated and—though probably not what Piercy intended—I imagined them getting squeezed out of a machine like soft serve froyo. Babies are then assigned to applicant families to be raised and loved by three parents of varying genders, though they live in children's houses among other kids to

encourage bonding with their peers over bonding with adult caregivers. In Star, babies are birthed with the person's lady parts but given over to be raised by other parents—zadres—often times with birth mother's names unknown. It's part of the principles the society is governed by to discourage contact with biological offspring, because of that aforementioned problem of parents just loving their own kids too damn much to help themselves. Not being allowed contact with her child causes a lot of emotional strain and heartache for one of the protagonists (not to mention her child)—but the mother wants to adhere to the principles and not give into temptation, to set a good example for her child by ignoring her existence—and I'm sorry, my own biases are showing here, but I have a hard time believing that the ills in our present societies are from having TOO MUCH LOVE for our "own" children to be capable of caring and advocating for all children.

MULTIVALENT ATTACHMENT THEORY. Originating in the twenty-second century, multivalent attachment theory posited that children could successfully be raised by hundreds of successive adults without the need to attach to any in particular, if their bodily safety, physical needs, and emotional needs were universally guaranteed. The theory was highly contentious and took three centuries to prove, which was how long it took to ensure the necessary conditions on a large enough scale.

EXCEPT! Even in 3012, a kid still wanted attention from their birth mom and birth mom was still in anguish about not being in her kid's life, soooo... did time really prove that big theory? I don't think the narrative really set us up to call into question this element of world-building, felt like the story was saying this future isn't possible without these biological and social interventions. Odd.

This idea of "too much connection is the problem, actually" was my problem with The Actual Star. I wanted to be misreading that and kept waiting for the story to complicate my interpretation of what was motivating that future, but... it never really did. The Actual Star is a braided narrative, starting with the teen twins (and their little sister) of a royal Mayan family in 1012, then following a 19yo (of Mayan ancestry) in Minnesota 2012 before she travels to her unknown father's homeland of Belize in time for the end-of-the-world Mayan calendar tourist hype, which leads us to a drastically restructured world society in 3012 (population of only 8 million) where the legends surrounding the 2012 protagonist had been codified into a religion and social order of "travelers". I admired the story, and even enjoyed it! So these assessments of what humanity's future hinged on... kinda confused me.

The thing was, I really connected to one of the character's bitter assessment of "the tourist gaze". Xander was a tour guide shuttling tourists to sacred sites and serving up his Mayan heritage to these people he sometimes, though rarely, respected. What happened was, the events of his 2012 story—and his academic writings afterwards—inspired all those 3012 principles that people in the future were living by. They had to stay nomadic. Perpetual pilgrimage. They weren't permitted to keep travel companions for longer than 9 nights. There were mutual aid wayhouses and the people you found yourself with were your family for that moment before moving on.

Despite his desire to work and study abroad (and bitterness that visas and his position prevented him from blithely traveling the world like the tourists he catered to), I can't help but wonder if Xander would be horrified to discover that his work inspired the remaining 8 million people on Earth to roam as perpetual tourists? I'm Hawaiian and I don't have any romantic ideas about tourism. I don't understand the allure of dropping into a different culture as an outsider, expecting to enjoy a paradise or contrast to the everyday, or feel comfortable with being shuttled around to experience something new and novel. Deeply unappealing. I have traveled, even at 19 as a tourist with the excitement of the 2012 protagonist, but it's rare now that I go somewhere without a connection to a place—a friend or family member—or a role or reason for my presence in that place. I can't see past the exploitative elements that Xander on one page so eloquently laid out while the rest of the story upheld something else.

PRINCIPLE OF DISPERSION. One of the foundational principles of *La-viaja*. "Accumulation of any human property ultimately leads to human suffering. Lasting peace can only result from the constant, deliberate dispersion of population, wealth, power, computing, and capital. In order to survive, we must flow with, and not against, the entropic nature of the universe." Xander Cañul, 2028.

Are these stories telling us that a peaceful global society can only be maintained if no one is permitted to create lasting community bonds? Oh, and for the social and religious ideals to be maintained, the entire global population has to be approximately 8 million which... is rather low. That's like the population of Chicago. I had to look it up, but the world population in 1012, when ancient Maya portion of the story took place, was low-estimate 254 million. (Just wanted to make note because I'm just always skeptical of the insidious ecofascist "too many people is why we can't have nice things" argument.) It is baffling to me that avoiding building lasting community with people and place was presented as a net-positive greater good. The future people acknowledged the gods of places, and it was refreshing to see a future people allowed some spirituality, but despite the disdain the future people held for

settlers (a new group of people who were not nomadic) there's too much about tourism that's colonial at its core for me to buy that it was an "ideal" lifestyle for all of humanity to strive for. And I don't think that element was ever challenged in the story. In 3012, one character called an element of their way of living into question (the existence of another "beyond" people eventually crossed over into) and that storyline centered the conflicts and reactionary movements to that heresy, but the impermanence of social bonds with anyone was still presented in the story as the best case scenario for humankind.

Which leads to ANOTHER record-scratch similarity between *The Actual Star* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, without biological family ties or born-into communities, the inhabitants of these two otherwise vastly different future societies both were encouraged as a matter of course to select the cultural practices and ethnography they wished to belong to and participate in. Again, that's just... so weird! In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the protagonist's main "guide" Luciente said she lives according to the customs of Wampanoag Native Americans, which at first I thought was cool, that already back in 1976 there was some understanding about respecting #LandBack sovereignty and following the understandings about the land they inhabited? But next breath she mentioned others claiming "Harlem Black" as their cultural codes, without the racial and experiential background that those cultures were shaped from. Those weren't necessary, I suppose. I thought the shopping-for-cultural identity was a little eesh, but Piercy had her main character object on my behalf and question how that was supposed to work.

"You! You look like me. My ancestors were Mayans, but they were hardly Wamponaug! That's no more alike than . . . Italians and Swedes!"

Unfortunately the distrust and disbelief of the titular woman (on the edge of time) had been established at this point in the story as reactionary or less enlightened responses to new ideas and her concerns were glossed over. I still had concerns, but let it slide. Piercy was writing in the late 70s. Maybe we needed decades of discussion about cultural appropriation to understand that randomly adopting entire cultures as one's personal identity maybe wasn't that radically revolutionary. It's kind of a trope at this point. A historical constant. So I just rolled with it. UNTIL THAT SAME IDEA WAS CENTRAL TO THE ACTUAL STAR?!

Upon turning 13 (in *The Actual Star*), people in 3012 choose a "personal expression best described as some combination of alignment, aesthetic, and area of interest."

MANÉRA. A viajera's chosen personal and/or género expression, best described as some combination of alignment, aesthetic, and area of interest. Manéras may be uncovered or created based on an archetype, physical attribute, astrological sign, religion, fashion aesthetic, fictional character, historical character, mythical character, ancient worker identity, ancient ethnic identity, ancient national identity, ancient sexual identity, ancient regional identity, or any of many other modalities. When a viajera chooses or changes a manéra, she is expected to take a battery of tutorials that educate her within her chosen manéra, or—if she is creating a new manéra—to develop her own. About half of all manéras are created, trend over a period of years or decades, and die off; the other half persist through the ages. Typically, a viajera chooses her first manéra upon menarche or around the age of twelve, and can change it at any time,

Many characters chose to identify as maya, or a sub-group of maya. They watch/ingest a bunch of tutorials and go to sleep and then, boom, they're maya. Until they want to change it, which happens on average three times in a person's lifetime. Is it just me or does that feel... anti-Indigenous? To just eeny-meeny-miny-moe a culture (making no distinctions between fictional and actual ethnic identities). Worse than a problematic Halloween costume! It's weird! And maybe I wouldn't find the idea so off-putting without the long history of people adopting, incorporating, claiming, and appropriating Indigenous identities, but... that is the history. The main characters all chose mopán maya, which fit thematically with the rest of the narrative. But why was that even a thing crafted into the future society? A ritual and a right. There are only 8 million people. They have a fully realized religious and social organization with this Saint Leah stuff, what does it even mean to be maya not by blood, not on that land? Is it aesthetics? I'm baffled. Didn't they go through a whole procedure of not allowing birth families to avoid forming cultural, racial, or familial identities cos that was a "bad thing", and then they get to whole-cloth assume the mantel of some other ethnic group and expect that not to be problematic. WHAT? WHY?

That Principle of Dispersion (the idea that people have to scatter otherwise they accumulate stuff and that would be Bad) also erases countless prehistories of Indigenous communities engaging in gift economies and communal caregiving and forming relationships to place without devolving into the inevitable suffering. It's again a bias of mistaking colonial settler culture and impulses as "human" impulses and behaviors. "People are just naturally terrible." Maybe the people you know, deary.

It's more a feature of white culture to break identity down to smaller and smaller units of belonging. Nation, friend group, nuclear family, the individual "I". There are greedy jerks in other cultures too, but it's not taken as an inherent quality of being human like white writers of science fictional futures often assume. Maybe it is a valid assessment that "the problem" with the world is that white people don't have a sense of social cohesion beyond their own offspring, but breaking that bond so that people have NO BONDS or sense of social cohesion beyond their role-playing guilds is just... not a very hopeful vision for a future to strive for.

My big beef with the Principle of Dispersion is that it perpetuates the myth that people are bad for the environment. It misunderstands the roles of Indigenous stewardship all across the globe and through time. People shaped the environment as much as the environment shaped them. This relationship to land isn't acknowledged anywhere in Star, people are supposed to pass through "low-impact" or if they chose to dirty themselves by being hunters on the land, then they had to turn off their tech to give nature a sporting chance against their inevitable superiority. In Woman on the Edge of Time, I think they had a deeper sense of people's ecological role... the cross-communal decision-making scene regarded land use issues. I appreciated that. Main thing though, very few utopias, feminist or otherwise, describe people's reciprocal relationship to land. It's all about how the humans get along with each other (or don't) and maybe some ideas about distribution of "resources" (which itself is a colonial conception of land and water).

For the record, I think both The Actual Star and Woman on the Edge of Time are VERY GOOD examples of societies organized around anarchist principles. And seeing societies socially structured differently from ours is what I find exciting in this kind of literature!! There are a lot of cool and inspiring things in those stories. I'm focusing on these issues because I was tripped up by these perhaps unexamined ideas in otherwise fully realized thought-of-nearly-everything future worlds. They're worth reading, worth buying. I'm just wrestling with some elements that I'm not sure many readers would even think to wrestle with, that's all.

Thought experiment exercises in writing (and reading) utopias are the most effective ways to expose our "what is wrong with the world" biases. It took me awhile to realize the stagnant "perfection" of utopia was what writers?readers?thinkers? were striving for in their utopian thought experiments. The how to get it there and keep it there, and I guess I'm just more interested in a vague direction to move towards and reassess then keep moving. With The Field Guide for Next Time, I just want to describe something radically different than what we have now, that accommodates all the unknowable messiness of people. (And doesn't perpetuate some weird narrative that we have to be biologically altered and/or socially forbidden from connecting to children into order to care for "all children")

FINDING FRAGMENTS OF OLGA TOKARCZUK

Here's another reason why I'm skeptical of formal academic instruction. One of my lovely writing peers shared with me the list of novels they will be reading and analyzing in her university class on climate fiction in Essen, Germany. And I'm afraid I made an unimpressed face. (Many bleak-future dystopias written by the usual suspects from expected demographics.) BUT! In the same conversation, she mentioned a comment Olga Tokarczuk, 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature, made about returning to parables as the storytelling format relevant for climate fiction. Which, when I was trying to nail down the genre category for my work to submit novels and novellas to agents and publishers, I kept coming back to... this thing I've written is actually an allegory or parable with fantastical elements. Too bad no one publishes those. So in tracking down the source of Tokarczuk's statement on climate parables, and I found this gift (from The Guardian):

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jun/26/stories-to-save-the-world-the-new-wave-of-climate-fiction>

In their different ways, both Moss and Ellmann are addressing the solipsism or self-centredness of consciousness, which got us into this problem in the first place, and is both formed and enacted through the stories we tell about ourselves. Their characters are prisoners of what the Polish novelist Olga Tokarczuk, in a visionary Nobel lecture, described as "the polyphonic first-person narrative", which filters everything through the self of the storyteller.

Tokarczuk, who laid out her environmental agenda in her eco-whodunnit *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, called for a return to the perspective of parable, and for the development of what she called a "tender narrator", a quantum version of the omniscient narrator, capable of seeing in many dimensions. Quite how this would work she didn't know, because it had yet to be invented. In the meantime, we should abandon traditional distinctions between high- and lowbrow fiction and trust to fragments. "In this way," she said, literature can "set off the reader's capacity to unite fragments into a single design, and to discover entire constellations in the small particles of events."

It was rewarding to see my resistance to the "polyphonic first-person narrative" validated! (Even that distinctions between high-brow and low-brow fiction. I've been joking that I'll have to pitch this story as If on a Winter's Night a Traveler but solarpunk. Post-modern hopepunk? NO ONE wants to read that.)

It's clear to me why I tell the stories in the perspectives they're told in... often the story can't be told differently. With The Field Guide for Next Time, I really set out

to try and tell the story straight. The short story that I'm adapting didn't have the traditional anchors that a contemporary reader needed to "get into the story". The protagonists didn't have names... they were just referred to by their relationships and roles. They weren't even the same people in each scene, since the story was about the interactions more than the individual characters. I'm still very intrigued by that story and how it unfolded to me in a fractal-like pattern, which is the structure of the story and the society it describes. (Short story published in *khōrēō* magazine vol 3.1) But apparently, not very many people know how to read a story that is not the structure they're familiar with, so in re-envisioning it as a novel, I've been struggling with how to teach a reader how to read my story as I'm telling it. To start putting the fragments together in real time.

Reading the entirety of Olga Tokarczuk's Nobel lecture felt like the long talk with the mentor I was looking for. I felt encouraged and validated in my attempt to position the storyteller... differently... than traditional storytelling conventions would do.

How we think about the world and—perhaps even more importantly—how we narrate it have a massive significance, therefore. A thing that happens and is not told ceases to exist and perishes. This is a fact well known to not only historians, but also (and perhaps above all) to every stripe of politician and tyrant. He who has and weaves the story is in charge.

Today our problem lies—it seems—in the fact that we do not yet have ready narratives not only for the future, but even for a concrete now, for the ultra-rapid transformations of today's world. We lack the language, we lack the points of view, the metaphors, the myths and new fables. Yet we do see frequent attempts to harness rusty, anachronistic narratives that cannot fit the future to imaginaries of the future, no doubt on the assumption that an old something is better than a new nothing, or trying in this way to deal with the limitations of our own horizons. In a word, we lack new ways of telling the story of the world.

We live in a reality of polyphonic first-person narratives, and we are met from all sides with polyphonic noise. What I mean by first-person is the kind of tale that narrowly orbits the self of a teller who more or less directly just writes about herself and through herself. We have determined that this type of individualized point of view, this voice from the self, is the most natural, human and honest, even if it does abstain from a broader perspective. Narrating in the first person, so conceived, is weaving an absolutely unique pattern, the only one of its kind; it is having a sense of autonomy as an individual, being aware of yourself and your fate. Yet it also means building an opposition between the self and the world, and that opposition can be alienating at times.

Could there be a story that would go beyond the uncommunicative prison of one's own self, revealing a greater range of reality and showing the mutual connections? That would be able to keep its distance from the well-trodden, obvious and unoriginal center point of commonly shared opinions, and manage to look at things ex-centrally, away from the center?

I am pleased that literature has miraculously preserved its right to all sorts of eccentricities, phantasmagoria, provocation, parody and lunacy. I dream of high viewing points and wide perspectives, where the context goes far beyond what we might have expected. I dream of a language that is capable of expressing the vaguest intuition, I dream of a metaphor that surpasses cultural differences, and finally of a genre that is capacious and transgressive, but that at the same time the readers will love.

I also dream of a new kind of narrator a “fourth-person” one, who is not merely a grammatical construct of course, but who manages to encompass the perspective of each of the characters, as well as having the capacity to step beyond the horizon of each of them, who sees more and has a wider view, and who is able to ignore time. Oh yes, I think this narrator’s existence is possible.

—all quotes from the transcript of her 2018 Nobel Lecture

<https://culture.pl/en/article/olga-tokarczuks-nobel-lecture-the-tender-narrator>

So it could be best to tell stories honestly in a way that activates a sense of the whole in the reader’s mind, that sets off the reader’s capacity to unite fragments into a single design, and to discover entire constellations in the small particles of events. To tell a story that makes it clear that everyone and everything is steeped in one common notion, which we painstakingly produce in our minds with every turn of the planet.

I keep wondering if these days it’s possible to find the foundations of a new story that’s universal, comprehensive, all-inclusive, rooted in nature, full of contexts and at the same time understandable.

No doubt a genius will soon appear, capable of constructing an entirely different, as yet unimaginable narrative in which everything essential will be accommodated. This method of storytelling is sure to change us; we will drop our old, constricting perspectives and we will open up to new ones that have in fact always existed somewhere here, but we have been blind to them.

I found my mentor for this project. Time to write.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Olga Tokarczuk', with some scribbles above it.