

REVIEW OF *SCIENCE FICTION IN ARGENTINA: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE TEXT IN A MATERIAL MULTIVERSE*, JOANNA PAGE (2016). ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN: UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS, 235 PP., ISBN: 978-0-472-07310-8, H/BK, \$80.00, ISBN: 978-0-472-05310-0, P/BK, \$39.95

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In *Science Fiction in Argentina: Technologies of the Text in a Material Multiverse*, Joanna Page inserts herself into the field of Science Fiction Studies (SFS) in Latin America with authority, and in so doing ups the visibility and stature of this relatively new academic domain. Her previous books, *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (2009) and *Creativity and Science in Contemporary Argentine Literature* (2014), provided a solid foundation upon which to enter into SFS, and her 2017 collaboration with Edward King titled *Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America* hints at a sustained commitment to working in and around the genre. Page's monograph advances SFS by challenging some of the core scholarly readings of many of the country's canonical texts and films while also bringing into view newer and lesser-known generic modes, such as graphic narratives and sci-fi theatrical productions. Along the way she engages with, challenges, and borrows from a vast array of thinkers, philosophers, and cultural critics in order to provide us with a dense, complex, and gripping cultural study of the country's science fiction.

This book's overarching thesis posits that science fiction production from Argentina is deeply rooted in materialist conceptions of the universe, a position that erodes the long-standing belief that the country tends to write soft SF (based on "soft"/social sciences) rather than the hard SF so prevalent in the universal SF traditions of the US and Western Europe. Page argues that the corpus she analyzes employs reflexive and metafictional strategies at the service of this

materialist view; but unlike the metafictional stance so frequently signified in postmodern approaches that draw attention to the work's artifice and, ultimately, the socially constructed nature of reality through language, she sees an alternative metafictional technique at play here, one where the materiality of the text –not its self-referentiality– holds primacy. For her, the text (broadly defined) is constantly enmeshed as well as shaped by the world of substance within which it is embedded; this stresses the embodied nature of reading, writing, illustrating, performing, and spectating. In this way, Page draws on the “new materialist” turn in theory, which is a broad, epistemological grouping of philosophers and scientists, such as Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, Donna Haraway, Catherine Malabou, Bernard Stiegler et al, whose research can be understood to transcend the limitations leftover by postmodern critiques: inescapable dualisms of language/reality, Jameson's symptomatic readings of culture, and a continued reliance upon linear timelines of historical progress. The pitfalls present in this linguistic turn need to be overcome, she states, so that we can “focus on the text in a way that does not reduce its materiality to language” (14). Page's utilization of these theories is not entirely new in Latin American cultural criticism, as Abril Trigo, Mabel Moraña, and most recently David Dalton, have fruitfully engaged with some of these thinkers within the past decade, but she is likely the first to enlist new materialism so extensively as a conceptual framework through which to understand science fiction from Argentina.

Although the first chapter deals with two key national science fiction authors, Eduardo Holmberg and Héctor Oesterheld, and how they both reflexively engaged in their respective socio-political milieus while also contributing to the intellectuals-and-the-masses debate that has long been the ferment of critical discourse in Argentina, it is not until the second chapter's treatment of Ricardo Barreiro's graphic novels that her study breaks new ground. She argues that the intertextuality put forth in his visual stories foregrounds the materiality of the text, the cities represented therein, and the material aspects of the comic book medium itself. She borrows from Walter Benjamin's earlier conception of city-as-archive to understand Barreiro's graphic fiction as a kind of “comics-as-digest,” meaning that it is not just a repository, but also actively transforms what it appropriates. This innovative move puts her within the debate going on within contemporary comics theory –both in and outside the country.

Chapter three delves into the role of the material support that the book plays in transmitting and reproducing culture, ultimately undergirding collective knowledge and even structuring our sense of linear time. She reads three apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic novels from the turn of the past century (Eduardo Blaustein's *Cruz diablo*, 1997; Rafael Pinedo's *Plop*, 2004; Pedro Mairal's *El año del desierto*, 2005) as illustrative works of Bernard Stiegler's theory of time, technics, memory and the transmission of culture. Since human culture and technology co-evolve and are codependent, the loss of the latter results in the disruption and/or dissolution of the former, emerging in one form or another in these three novels. Technics here (i.e. the book) is wholly absent within these imagined societies, and cultural memory has been wiped, as has time's arc of linear progress diverged to become fractured or regressive. Both these effects, Page argues, result from a loss of technics.

Another particularly productive chapter contains Page's inclusion of sci-fi theatrical works that move beyond the (postmodern) linguistic turn in order to foreground this new materialist, posthuman view of subjectivity. The performance of Rafael Spregelburd's stage play *La paranoia* includes mathematics, fractals and chaos theory in order to suggest patterns of potential meaning beyond human categories of perception and thought. This was accomplished via placing a screen at the back of the stage upon which different fictional narratives appear throughout the production, and within them appear images and words that are juxtaposed in one world and become recursive or repeated in the play taking place on the stage, suggesting a world of possible significations that are hinted at but never anchored in meaning. Throughout the play, these self-organizing principles of the universe appear alongside the dialogue spoken by the characters, and ultimately point toward signification that is extra-lingual and embedded within the material world.

Two other chapters foreground Page's focus on visual culture and film production. For example, chapter four considers three authors and various literary texts —three Horacio Quiroga's short stories (written in the 1920s), Adolfo Bioy Casares's *La invención de Morel* (1940), and César Aira's *El juego de los mundos* (2000)— that engage the changing perceptual sphere produced by visual technologies and the regimes they enable. Against a thrust of prevailing scholarly readings of these works, she convincingly demonstrates that these fictions

suggest that new media have provided not a loss but a continuity with the themes and narrative modes of the 19th century, and that these texts articulate writing as a technology that is at least on parallel terms to the visual ones that displace it. Or in the final –and longest– chapter, Page reads four films (*Estrellas*, dir. Federico León and Marcos Martínez, 2007; *Cóndor Crux*, dir. Juan Pablo Buscarini and Swan Glecer, 2000; *La sonámbula*, Fernando Spiner, 1998; *La antena*, Esteban Sapir, 2007) as challenging the West’s universal, linear and singular notion of time that is proper to progress, capitalism and modernity. While she engages with other thinkers throughout, here she maintains an extensive critique on Fredric Jameson’s often-cited contention of postmodernism’s crisis of historicity as a result of advanced capitalism’s absolute and totalizing reach. In all, these four films perform a postcolonial critique of the temporalities created and sustained by modernity.

With this indispensable book, Joanna Page has opened up many new possible angles through which to consider science fiction cultural production from Argentina (and by extension, Latin America), making it one of the most important scholarly works on the genre since J. Andrew Brown’s *Cyborgs in Latin America* (2010). The sheer number of critical concepts at her employ is eclipsed only by the productive application to these narratives that span an ample temporal scope and breadth of form. Her readings will engage many scholars for years to come and will likely stoke significant interest in science fiction narratives from the periphery.