

Space is the (non)place: Martians, Marxists, and the outer space of the radical imagination

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I'm looking for my first trip up into space. Whatever training needs doing count me in. Wages can be negotiated. Any job considered. Oh and one more thing I don't have the uniform and am a little scared of heights, hope this isn't a problem. (Anonymous, 'freelance Astronaut' advertisement on Gumtree.com, London, 24 April 2008)

Joe Hill, the famous labour activist and songwriter, in a letter he wrote the day before his execution, said that the following day he expected to take a trip to Mars during which, upon his arrival, he would begin to organize Martian canal workers into the Industrial Workers of World. Why did he do this? After all, it might seem a bit odd that Hill, famous in his songwriting and reworking for consistently mocking the promises and deceits of religious reformers offering 'pie in the sky' (and that's a lie) to oppressed and exploited migrant workers more concerned about getting some bread in the belly (and maybe some roses, ie dignity, too). Hill continues to say that with the canal worker he'll sing Wobbly songs 'so loud the learned star gazers on Earth will for once and all get positive proof that the planet Mars is really inhabited' (Smith, 1984: 164). So why the reference to some form of other worldly-ness, one in which, rather than promising salvation or escape from the trials and tribulations of this world, Hill rather imagines himself as extending and continuing the very same social antagonism that brought him to the day before his execution in the first place? Aside from the personal characteristics of Hill's immense wit and humor (Rosemont, 2002), this chapter will argue that there is something more than that, something about the particular role outer space and extraterrestrial voyage play within the radical imagination. It will explore the idea of voyages out of the world as an imaginal machine for thinking and organizing to get out of this world that we want to leave behind. In other words, how themes and imagery of space take part in the construction and animation of socially and historically embedded forms of collective imagination and cre-

ativity; how they operate as nodal points in ever-fluctuating networks of collective intelligence animated through the shaping of social reality. For if utopia has 'no place' in this world, no spatiality on our maps, the dream to leave this earth can hold quite a seductive sway for those who desire to found a new earth upon escape from this one.

Within the imaginal space created through the imagery of space travel one can find an outer space of social movement, a smooth space and exteriority made inhabitable through a labour of collective imagination. The image and idea of space, through its circulation and elaboration within stories, myths, and artistic forms, composes a terrain of possibility that operates as an outside to the world as is. For even it is not possible literally to step outside the world or existing reality, the capacity to imagine other possible worlds creates a terrain where it becomes possible to work towards the creation of another world. Perhaps the best example of this is 'Visit Port Watson', an unsigned fake travel pamphlet written by Hakim Bey/Peter Lamborn Wilson and included in the Semiotext(e) SF Collection (Rucker *et al.*, 1991). When Wilson received mail and questions about actually visiting the utopian destination of Port Watson described in the pamphlet, he responded by saying that that Port Watson is that place where one is in the moment where one actually is when you believe that Port Watson could exist: a mobile territory of possibility rather than a fixed location. Port Watson is the location of realizing possible utopias that begins from the space of possibility opened in the imagination. At its best outer space operates in the same way, opening a space of possibility within the present through which other realities become possible.

It is this labour of collective imagination that draws together into collective imaginaries such diverse phenomena as the Misfits' suburban New Jersey punk anthems ('Teenagers from Mars', 'I Turned into a Martian', etc) with Sun Ra's cosmic madness and mythopoetic self-institution, that ties together the Association of Autonomous Astronauts' call for a worldwide network of community based spaceship construction with Red Pilot/Noordung Cosmokinetic Theater's usage of retrofuturist Soviet space design as fodder for their collective imaginings (Dubravka and Suvakovic, 2003; Monroe, 2005). In these spaces of collective creativity, outer space operates as an effective meme because it creates a space for engagement with weighty issues (exodus, escape, racial politics, otherness, militarization, global catastrophe, etc) while allowing an enticing playfulness to be employed. Indeed, one could argue that through much of leftist politics runs the notion of an apocalyptic moment, of some magical event (usually revolution), followed by the creation of a new and better world. The event, or the visitation, can both act as a pole of imaginal recomposition, or a projected hope that provides an excuse for acting in the world as it is, even if to find ways to escape from it. It is the process of negotiating these ambivalences in social movements, making contact with the other to come, where it becomes possible to build, in Bifo's words, 'spaceships capable of navigating upon the ocean of chaos: rafts for all the refugees that depart from the bellicose and arid lands of late-modern capitalism' (2008: 174).

To infinity and beyond!

Mannoch drivels on with mindfucking stupidity about ‘visiting agitators from Handsworth’, what a load of fucking bullshit! No, as EVERYONE knows, the riots were started by Communist Alien Stormtroopers from the red planet Bolleaux who landed on the roof of the fucking Ritzy. – Peter from the Class War Federation explaining the true cause of the 1981 Brixton Riots (Quoted in Bone, 2006: 270)

Perhaps an interesting question, or one of them, is not so much a question of whether there is a presence of outer space imagery and extraterrestrial travel residing within the workings of the social imaginary, but of their function. Their presence is felt both when the poet and songwriter Gil Scott-Heron complains that he can’t pay his doctor’s bills or rent and wonders what could be done with all the resources that would be available if they weren’t being spent on getting ‘Whitey on the Moon’ (1971), and when Stevie Wonder contrasts the utopian conditions of ‘Saturn’ (1976), which are peaceful and free from capitalist exchange, with conditions and problems of the urban ghettos. The persistence of space imagery in the social imaginary seems relatively straightforward and easy to demonstrate (and could easily turn this chapter into an extended list of examples, which would be a condition better avoided), perhaps because to some degree the unknown and the mysterious are almost by definition of particular fascination to those crafting mythopoetic narratives and imagery. There’s simply not enough mystery in the familiar, banal and well known. One can try to evoke a mythos from a faceless man in a grey flannel suit, or any other kind of every-day-everyman type figure, but tend to lead in a completely different imaginal direction. The curious question is why there was an increase in forms of space imagery and narratives during the period of time roughly from the end of the second world war to the early 1970s; since then they have gone through peaks and spurts in their usage within various political milieus.

One way to approach this question, which might seem odd at first, although hopefully will ultimately become clear, can be found within a recent collection on the history of artistic collectivism and practices of social imagination since 1945 edited by Blake Stimson and Greg Sholette (2007). In their introduction they argue that there was a transformation in artistic collectivism in the post-war era, which they identify as a change in the composition of avant-garde artistic practice. The main reason for this is a movement away from communism as an ideological backdrop (although admittedly the relation between the avant-garde artistic practice and communism had been fraught with tension for some time), with existing connections and relations of affinity almost as strong if not stronger with various currents of anarchist thought and politics (Lewis, 1990; Weir, 1997; Antliff, 2001/2007). Putting aside the particular details, this argument is made of part of a broader observation of the forced removal of forms of collectivism from political, economic, and social life of various forms. This can be seen in the blatant attacks on all forms of collectivism through political witch hunts, the purging of more radical organizers from unions, and the general rise of McCarthyism in the US. Paradoxically the destruction of forms

of working class collectivism and forms from political life is directly connected to the rise of ingenious forms of capitalist collectivism, such as mortgages, stock options, retirement plans, and so forth, which are then employed in dual capacities as means of discipline and social support for populations enmeshed in them.

What is of interest here is the relation between the disappearance and destruction of certain forms of collectivism, and their reappearance in others. As Stimson and Sholette observe, the disappearance of collectivism from the political realm lead to these forms returning in a 'mutated and often contradictory form within the cultural realm' (2007: 8). It means that the rise of science fiction films in the 1950s with their imagery of bizarre alien races functioning by some sort of incomprehensible totalitarian collectivism, in many ways reflect the recoded and redirected imagery of communism (Smith *et al.*, 2001). The spectre of communism reappears as a UFO. This is perhaps not a new argument in itself, for the imagery used in genre science fiction has been interpreted as coded for communism before, with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) as the most commonly used example (Brosnan, 1978; McCarthy and Gorman, 1999; Von Gundren and Stock, 1982). But what is interesting about the Blake and Stimson spin is their argument for a displacement of energies from the economic and political sphere, embodied in working-class resistance, into mutated forms in the cultural sphere. This can be read as a form of recuperation or co-option in some senses; but it is not so straightforward. As I have previously argued (2007), the Plan 9 from the capitalist workplace is not a clear-cut case of the integration of energies of social resistance into the workings of capitalism, not one that is irreversible. The mutated and contradictory forms of collectivism that appear might start with imagery of an alleged collectivist communist-totalitarianism, but their ambivalence is also a space of possibility, one that can be turned to other uses. The despised other is often also the secretly desired other, a dynamic that can be viewed as imaginal forms, held out as examples of an Other to be rejected, start to be drawn back into other forms of politics, other forms of usage, and the pleasure of these usages. This is a dynamic that emerges more clearly in the 1960s and 1970s, as the utopian traces of a repressed communism, congealed within the imaginal form of outer space imagery, are slowly reclaimed and brought to other uses.

This is not to say that outer space memes and images of technological development have always played a totally progressive role. Indeed, aside from space exploration and technology, there is a longer history of the relation between scientific innovation and discovery and their connection with right wing and conservative politics (Federici and Caffentzis, 1982). Richard Barbrook (2007) has shown quite convincingly that the imaginary futures formed around space and technology animated collective imaginaries across the entire political spectrum, with both the diffuse spectacle of Western capitalism clamoring towards supremacy through technology, and the concentrated spectacle of bureaucratic collectivism capitalism in the East trying to do much the same, albeit framing it in different terms. While early efforts toward cybernetic communism were

initially developed within the Soviet Union (until they were crushed by the party who feared, rightly, that they could not control it), Barbrook notes ironically that the first working model of communism as social co-operation through technology was developed by the US military in the form of DARPA Net, which would later become the internet. Despite apparent vast differences across a communist-capitalist divide, there existed a more profound underlying agreement on technological development as a road to the liberation of human potential, one that was shared by autonomist currents who argued that movement toward increased automation of the labour process would reduce necessary labour to almost zero, thus freeing up great amounts of time for activities other than repetitive labour.

Outer space, far from being a pure space that is always available for recomposing imaginal machines, also connects areas of political thought that veer off in strange and bizarre directions, showing that, as Deleuze and Guattari would concur in their more sober moments, absolute deterritorialization can easily end in death, insanity, or absurdity. The mere mention of alien invasion, coupled with anxiety about the worsening conditions of world affairs, famously led to outbursts of panic during the 1938 Mercury Theatre Halloween broadcast of a radio version of *War of the Worlds* that Orson Welles directed. And why is it that alien visitations seem to always happen in small, rural town where the residents seem more likely to greet the visitors with shotguns rather than curiosity? Among the classic examples of space related judgment-impairment one can find the Heaven's Gate cult led by Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles. In 1997, 39 members of the cult committed suicide to coincide with the Hale-Bopp comet passing the Earth, an act they believe would allow themselves to be transported to a spaceship following the comet, thus averting the impending wiping clean and recycling of the planet (Lanja, 2004; Theroux, 2005).

Further back in the history of the diffuse wonders of the wingnut international, one can find the baffling case of Juan Posadas and the Fourth International. Posadas was an Argentinean Trotskyist and, at one point, a relatively well known football player. During the 1940s and 1950s he came to the leadership of Fourth International affiliates in Latin America, known later for their role in the Cuban revolution. Beginning in the late 1960 Posadas also become quite renowned, or rather infamous, for his views on UFOs. Posadas' logic flows in quite a simple way: as Marx tells us, more technologically advanced societies are more socially advanced. Because of this, the existence of space aliens demonstrates the existence of intergalactic socialism, as the level of technology and social cooperation necessary to advance interstellar travel could only be produced by a communist society. The goal of the party, therefore, should be to establish contact with the communist space aliens, who would take part in furthering revolution on this planet. While Trotsky argued against the possibility of communism in one country, Posadas took the technological fetish to its logical conclusion, that there could not be communism on one planet (Salisbury, 2003). While this was greeted with derision by much of the left, as China Miéville explored in a recent article (2007), the derision was for entirely the

wrong reasons. Putting aside the existence or non-existence of aliens, the problem was rather the conclusions that Posadas drew from their existence. If the long-standing problem of authoritarian communist and socialist political organizing is the contradiction of their implementation from above, Posadas transfers this problem to another level, literally. Posadas' politics necessitate socialism from above, *way* above, an outer space that can only be hoped to intervene in the earthly realm and obeyed. The imaginal machine animated by outer space in Posadas' politics therefore contributes almost nothing to the further development of collective composition in social movement, and through its vanguardist nature, if anything, tends to act against the development of autonomy and self-organization. It is, however, rather amusing.

Although Posadas died in 1981, Posadaist sections of the Fourth International have been able to continue to produce apparently new material from him for some time since then, due to what seems to be a very large reservoir of taped materials he left behind. Among the more interesting rumoured aspects about the Posadaists of the Fourth International, although very difficult to verify (except by some members of the Marxist Ufologist Group), Posadaists have been known to appear at CND rallies passing out flyers demanding that China launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike against the US as a first step toward creating socialism. While one of the main subtexts of this chapter, following the excellent work of Jack Bratich on conspiracy panics, is the idea that even the most bizarre-sounding ideas often contain some sort of merit or can be learned from as a form of subjugated knowledge (2008), this, along with Posadas' fondness for dolphins based on the belief that they were a highly sentient alien race, cannot but lead to some chuckling, at least, if not a belly laugh or two.

Due to this, as well as other reasons, outer space travel and imagery has not always figured positively in the workings of the radical imagination, which is not so surprising given the ways that the dystopian future narrative often plays just as prominent a role (although often it is technological development enmeshed in an authoritarian social arrangement that is the problem rather than the technology itself). A notable exception to this is found within anarcho-primitivism, which does not find much considered redeemable within space travel and imagery. This is not surprising given that many primitivist thinkers find nothing redeemable in any technological development, including agriculture itself, which is sometimes argued to contain implicitly all forms of subsequent technological development, and therefore the forms of domination based upon them. This gives an almost mystical, autonomous power of self-development and organization to the forms of technology themselves, one that does more to reify and mystify technological development than actually to explain its workings in any way constructive to a radical politics. Asking a primitivist about technological development is like asking a neoliberal economist about the economy: they both weave tales of mystification. In this case the imaginal exteriority of space travel has been internalized as a dystopian feature and attributed to forms of technology themselves, rather than the imaginal processes flowing through and animating the particular assemblages in question.

Mythopoeitics and imaginal space

Do you find earth boring? Just the same old same thing? Come and sign up with Outer Spaceways Incorporated. (Sun Ra, 'Outer Spaceways Incorporated', 1968).

Oh we were brought up on the space race, now they expect you to clean toilets. When you have seen how big the world is how can you make do with this? (Pulp, 'Glory Days', 1998).

All the efforts expended on technological development and innovation, alas, largely failed to deliver on many of the promises on offer, including unlimited energy, artificial intelligence, robots that cleaned the home and eliminated the need for most manual labour, and so forth. To put it crudely, one could say that while most of the forms of technological achievement anticipated by people living in the early 20th century (cars, radio, rockets, television) were largely achieved by midway through the century, for the second half of the century this was not the case. In the second half of the century much more was promised than actually delivered. People thought that soon they would be engaging in outer space travel, driving flying cars, and other such wonderful things that never appeared. If anything, it seems that the main technologies developed during the second half of the century were mainly premised on their ability to simulate things rather than actually do them. Perhaps Baudrillard was waiting with great anticipation for anti-gravity boots and upon their non-arrival decided his only recourse was to conclude that only simulation was possible now? This does not mean that the imaginary future held out by the seductive sway of the promised future did not continue to have powerful effects. If anything that served to diminish the fascination of outer space and the techno-fetish, it is perhaps, as Barbrook points out, when people actually began to acquire personally ownable forms of these wonder technologies (personal computers, allegedly programmable VCRs), only to discover that they were far less intelligent and sensible than the mythology surrounding them would like to suggest. The actual technological delivered were somewhat less impressive than a menacing HAL 9000, now reprogrammed for beneficent purposes, for every household.

But more than just the disappointment of not receiving those anti-gravity boots for Christmas, techno-utopian space dreams often came with less desired attributes. It was often a case of desiring a transformative war machine, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the potentiality of exteriority and its transformation, and instead getting an actual war. To find oneself caught playing a bit and switch game of dreaming of space travel and getting Star Wars as a missile defence system instead. After all, this trick only worked for Reagan precisely because of his ability to tap into and draw from the utopian trace of space imagery. In order to justify and narrate a nationalist-militarist project. Reagan very well might have been making policy decisions based on movies he remembered seeing (or acted in); but this was as much a source of ridicule as a certain kind of populist appeal derived out of his confusion. To some degree there is a large population out there that wishes it was living in a movie set, and these

desires congealed in Reagan's confusion and rhetorical bombast. An analysis of this dynamic can be found in the work of Dean and Massumi (1992), who explore the relation between the role of the Emperor's body in the first Chinese empire and the mass mediated role of Reagan's body in the workings of the US Empire. Dean and Massumi argue that President Bush (the first one) attempted to engage in a similar kind of populist media politics, but failed. Extrapolating from this it seems arguable that the second President Bush attempted much the same, even attempting to revive the Star Wars missile defence system. Likewise this has been of mixed success. Many children, including the author, at one point during the 1980s wished to grow up to be the president like Reagan. It is likely that there are far fewer children making the same wish in regards to President Bush. And yet again, one premised on having to confront the all-menacing threat of the communist other and the evil empire. All this is to say that the imaginal space attached to technological development and dreams of space is highly ambivalent, dragging along with it a post-apocalyptic bad-new future.

This makes the role of outer space as a theme for imaginal recomposition much more complicated than it might be otherwise and also more directly politically relevant, to the degree that the provision of imaginal energies, imagery, and resources are necessary to the continued existence of capital and the state. To put it simply, they function a lot better when people have some reason and justification for their actions. Often it is the dreams of escape from the drudgery of wage labour and the banality of the everyday that creates spaces for fermenting these 'new spirits of capitalism', to borrow Boltanski and Chiapello's argument (2005). Why then might outer space emerge more prominently as a theme for imaginal recomposition in the period of the 1960s and 1970s? Aside from the previously mentioned point of mutation of collectivist energies from working-class resistance, one could also say that there was a shift in the nature of imagined exodus. While previously it might have seemed possible that exodus could take an immediately physical form (go westward young man, or take to the high seas, or finding a promised land), this no longer seems possible as the borders of the global frontiers seem to disappear. The world seemed to have most of its territories mapped and at least somewhat known, even if not totally. Outer space provided other avenue of possible exit for those desiring an exodus from the world as we know it, or at least a route to be imagined for this purpose.

In a way, while the map is not the territory, an imaginal landscape is a precondition for actually finding a northwest passage in the physical world. A shift to imaginal recomposition around outer space themes is part of the shift from a conception of exodus in physical terms to one in terms of intensive coordinates. In other words a shift towards an exodus that does not to leave while attempting to subtract itself from forms of state domination and capitalist valorization. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the development of late 1960s so-called 'drop out culture', even more so the case of places like Italy where it is organized in terms of the collective and the development of other forms of sociality and collectivity, rather than a sort of individualized notion of with-

drawal (which became much more the case in places like the US). This is part of an overall transformation of political antagonism towards forms that inhabit a mythic territory and space of composition and are involved in forms of semi-otic warfare and conflict.

A shift toward a mythic terrain of conflict and image generation can be seen in Afrofuturism, which as a literary and cultural movement is based on exploring the black experience through the relation between technology, science fiction, and racialization (Kodwo, 2003; Nelson, 2000; Williams, 2001; Weiner, 2008; Yaszek, 2005). While Afrofuturism is a wide-ranging area of cultural production, what is of most interest for the purposes of this chapter is the way it provided a space for going 'black to the future', to borrow Mark Dery's phrasing (1995): in other words, to fuse together an engagement with historical themes and experiences and the ways that they play out within a contemporary racialized experience. In Paul Miller's Afrofuturist manifesto he framed it as a 'a place where the issues that have come to be defined as core aspects of African-American ethnicity and its unfolding . . . [are] replaced by a zone of electromagnetic interactions' (1999). In other words, as the space of publicness for the exploration of these dynamics that had faded or withered, or has become transformed into a paradoxical form of publicity without publicness through hyper-visibility, Afrofuturism exists as an imaginal for this exploration, coded within forms that are perhaps not instantly recognizable as dealing with the political content they actually work through.

Afrofuturism was first elaborated by Sun Ra in the 1950s (Szwed, 1998; Cutler, 1992; Elms *et al.*, 2007). The Sun Ra Arkestra continues to play to the present day, fusing together hard bop, experimental jazz and electronic music with outer space imagery and Egyptian themes. The Sun Ra Arkestra was one of the first ensembles to make extensive use of electronic musical equipment, synthesizers, and instruments in their performances. They directly combined a continued engagement with new forms of technology and experimentation at a time when most jazz performers who were trying to be taken seriously avoided them (but then again they also avoided appearing on stage in Egyptian garb, claiming that they were from another planet). Perhaps more importantly for the discussion here, Sun Ra elaborates a sort of mythological performance and cosmogony based around fusing together ancient Egyptian imagery and scientific themes. This is clearly expressed a scene from the 1974 film *Space is the Place* (in which Sun Ra engages in a cosmic duel over the fate of the black race, who Sun Ra hopes to transport to another planet in a form of space-age Marcus Garvey-esque exodus). In a discussion with some youth in a community, Sun Ra, when asked if he is real, responds

How do you know I'm real? I'm not real. I'm just like you. You don't exist in this society. If you did your people wouldn't be struggling for equal rights. If you were, you would have some status among the nations of the world. So we're both myths. I do not come to you as the reality, I come to you as the myth, because that's what black people are, myths. I came from a dream that the black man dreamed long ago. I am a present sent to you by your ancestors (1974).

As we can see from this quote, Sun Ra used this as a means to formulate and develop a politics based around this mythological self-institution. Over five decades the Arkestra released almost seventy albums and gave countless performances while living communally and elaborating forms of mythic narrative and imagery as part of the process of creating a philosophical system, or equation, as Sun Ra referred to it (Wolf and Geerken, 2006). The potentiality in the creation of such imagery does not depend on whether or not Sun Ra is really from Saturn, but rather on the social energies and desires that flow through the creation of these images. The Sun Ra Arkestra were also among the first ensembles to experiment in a serious way with collective improvisation, which can be understood in some an emergent model for a self-organized communist mode of production and social organization.

These themes have been picked up and elaborated since then by artists such as Parliament-Funkadelic and George Clinton in the 1970s, whose work contained frequent references to the mother ship and other-worldly exodus, fusing together space themes with cultural black nationalism. This can also be seen more recently in the work of the hip hop project Deltron 3030, with its descriptions of intergalactic rap battles and strategizing industrial collapse through computer viruses (2002). Similar themes can be found in the work of artists including Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, Colson Whitehead, and in films such as *The Brother from Another Planet*, and most famously in *The Matrix*. Across the many particularities within the work of these various artists one can find what Fred Moten describes as the ontology of black performance, a performance primarily animated through a 'blackness that exceeds itself; it bears the ground-ness of an uncontainable outside' (2003: 26). At first this might sound rather strange, but it makes precisely my core point: that it is not necessarily the feasibility of space travel or literal other-worldly exodus, but it may even be the case that the imaginal machine based around space imagery is made possible by its literal impossibility. In the sense that this possibility cannot be contained or limited, it becomes an assemblage for the grounding of a political reality that is not contained but opens up to other possible futures that are not foreclosed through their pre-given definition.

It is in this sense that outer space plays its most powerful role in the building of imaginal machines, despite and through the ambivalent roles that it has and continues to play in some regards. This is the very point made by Eduardo Rothe in an article he wrote in 1969 for the journal of the Situationists in which he argued that science, scientific exploration and discovery had come to play the role formerly played by religion in maintaining spectacular class domination. The heavens, formerly the province of priests, were now to be seized by uniformed astronauts, for those in power have never forgiven the celestial regions for being territories left open to the imagination. Space then becomes the possibility of escaping the contradictions of an earthly existence, which Roth frames in ways that makes him sound much closer to the priestly caste he claims to despise so much:

Humanity will enter into space to make the universe the playground of the last revolt: that which will go against the limitations imposed by nature. Once the walls have been smashed that now separate people from science, the conquest of space will no longer be an economic or military 'promotional' gimmick, but the blossoming of human freedoms and fulfillments, attained by a race of gods. We will not enter into space as employees of an astronautic administration or as 'volunteers' of a state project, but as masters without slaves reviewing their domains: the entire universe pillaged for the workers councils (1969).

The messianism bubbles palpably within his rhetoric, seductively so. For many within autonomous movements of the 1960s and 1970s (as well as for many before and after that), what was previously conceived of as the inevitable march of dialectical progress towards a communist future, propelled along by the laws and motion of historical progress, seemed at best something of antique or a myth. But it was that imaginal machine that provided a great deal in terms of nourishing the resistant imaginary. It was this narrative that provided an outside from which critical thought and interventions were possible. In the same way that the narrative of progress towards a communist future was based around a forward projection of an outside to capitalism enabling a space of possibility in the present, here one can see outer space functioning in much the same way: a moment where a unity is reclaimed within the wealth of social knowledge and production (in this case in terms of the alienation of science and technology through state usage) which then enables a communist future in the present, one that overcomes the master-slave dialectic and an outburst of creativity in the organized form of workers councils. A mythopoetic creation indeed, but that is exactly the point, for the capacity to structure an imaginal machine is not necessarily based on the feasibility of enacting the ideas contained within it, but rather in acting as a compositional point for collective social desires. And if today we live, as Stephen Duncombe argues (2007), in an age of fantasy, our developing ability to understand, intervene, and work within the flows of imaginal desires and flows is precisely the ability to think through a collective radical politics despite and because of the ambivalence that the desires of the multitude contains.

A more recent example of space as a pole of imaginal recomposition comes in the form of the Association of Autonomous Astronauts (AAA), which formed in 1995 as a response to the continued militarization of space through programmes such as Star Wars. The AAA operated as an umbrella organization, or as a collective name for the autonomous activities of many different groups operating across numerous cities. While the AAA initially emerged very much out of the mail art and psychogeography scene, their efforts were intended to take the practice of the collective name and extend it from being an artistic practice to a wider form of organizing and political action (Home, 1997). For the AAA the collective name opened the possibility of creating a collective phantom (Holmes, 2007), one that 'operates within the wider context of popular culture, and is used as a tool for class war' (Anonymous 2004). Thus they, in a diffuse sense, proceeded to formulate a five year plan to boldly establish a

planetary network to end the monopoly of corporations, governments and the military over travel in space. Although in a certain sense one might say that the AAA 'failed' in that they did not actually establish any sort of autonomous network of space exploration, that would be to mistake their stated goals for actual goals rather than as points of imaginal recomposition, a sense in which they were much more successful. Or, as Neil Starman frames it, the AAA was an attempt to turn nostalgia for the future into an avenue for political action, to 'make good some of the unkept promises of our childhoods' (2005). People dreamed that they would be able to explore space but, as the Pulp song intones, they only found themselves in dead-end, precarious jobs cleaning toilets or something equally uninteresting.

Among the AAA's most noted actions was a protest outside the London headquarters of Lockheed Martin against the militarization of space held in 1999 as part of the J18 'Carnival Against Capitalism'. It featured the strange sight of police blocking men in space suits from entering the building. This also marked the beginning of the 'Space 1999 – Ten Days that Shook the Universe' festival. Given the then waxing expansion of the anti-globalization movement one might think that this would be an opportune moment for the expansion and proliferation of the AAA. Rather, it became the moment when the AAA decided that it was time, according to their own previously charted five-year plan, to move towards self-dissolution. This might seem a bit odd, but as explained by Neil Disconaut:

So why stop now? Well even the wildest of adventures can become routine, startling ideas clichés and the most radical gestures a source of light entertainment. Space imagery has become increasingly banal and retro, featuring in numerous adverts and pop videos. We don't want to be the space industry's court jesters when capitalism itself is being openly contested, as seen in Seattle and the City of London in the last year (2000: 13)

The point made here by Disconaut is quite clear. While the AAA was intended to, and did, act as a pole of imaginal recomposition, it was not intended to be an end in itself. One can find something of a parallel to the AAA in the Men in Red radical Ufology group, which grew out of the student movement in Italy in the early 1990s. For Men in Red, radical Ufology starts from a politics founded in disputing the proposition that the universe is made in man's image, and proceeds to think of ways to engage in autonomous contact with extraterrestrial life forms. In a parallel to the AAA as collective phantom, Men in Red state that they themselves wish to remain at a level that is the same as what they study, namely unidentified. To act as an end in itself would all too easily slip into a form of aesthetic escapism that might be said to characterize many forms of science fiction not particularly concerned with its politics. But the AAA did not want to fall into such a trap, did not want to end up generating more imaginal fodder for the capitalist image machine, and thus chose to dissolve in 2000. ET sold out to a capitalist communication company, but the AAA had not intention of doing so. In other words, the members of AAA sensed the poten-

tiality of space imagery as a point of recomposition at one point, and also realized that it was not permanent and that would it would strategically better to move to something else.

Outer space and the communist other to come

We really don't think it's worth going through all the effort of getting into space just to live by the same rules as on earth. What attracts us to space exploration is the possibility of doing things differently. We are not interested in finding out what's its like to work in space, to find new ways of killing. We want to find out what dancing or sex feels like in zero gravity. (Association of Autonomous Astronauts flyer for J18 Anticapitalist Carnival, 1999)

Lastly, let us turn to the lovely example of the recently created Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art, which existed at the Barbican in London from 6 March to 18 May, 2008. The museum was coordinated by Martian anthropologists visiting Earth for reconnaissance purposes, sent on a mission to reconsider whether the previous classification of Earthlings as an unsophisticated and backwards population amongst the cosmos is as accurate as previously thought. This particular section of the Martian Museum took on multiple functions, including both playfully engaging with the commonly felt near incomprehensibility of contemporary art as well as the othering and alienating effects contained within unreconstructed uses of traditional anthropological methods (ethnography, fieldwork, living amongst the primitives). To put it bluntly, it was clear from the arrangement that the Martian ethnographers were quite baffled, although they tried with great valour to understand the function and purpose of contemporary art. Agent 083TOM33McC5THY, one of the more astute among their team, made the following comment in a red paper that accompanied the creation of the museum:

The fact that art occupies a symbolic stratum – and, moreover, does so with a rationale whose key or legend seems to elude both Martian *and* Terrestrial observers – has led to a suspicion that it forms an encryption that among Terrestrial codes has hitherto eluded deciphering. That it serves both as repository and index of the population's desires, fantasies, and so on suggests it as potential field for mind control activities – yet one that must be mastered, or alternatively, neutralized by Martians lest it be directed against us. (2008: ∞)

This is quite an astute observation. Here we find an observation of the large degree of incomprehensibility of the artistic world mingled with some vague premonitions that there could be something dangerous happening. Art could lead to mind control, which could be potentially used against the Martian forces. Quickly, let us do away with the incomprehensible other for there could be something dangerous here. This is not far from the attitude of many secret service organizations or colonial regimes, although it is one that would tend to dispute the previously argued for, inherently progressive, politics required for cooperative space exploration.

But, again, there is an ambivalence that is also a possibility. When you think about it, the emergence of a radical future, communist, anarchist, or otherwise, is almost always necessarily defined by its very otherness from the world as is (see Parker, this volume). It is the other future that emerges through struggle and to some degree necessarily seems alien from the world as is, because otherwise it would not be (an)other world at all, but merely a rearrangement of the present. While Juan Posadas and the Fourth International may have argued that space aliens would inherently be communist, maintaining an open relation to encountering the other means having to confront the realization that despite all our wishes, space aliens might in fact not be communists at all! The becoming-other of the communist future can be found in the becoming-other and abjection of the present as well as the past, an abjection which brings together the twin dynamics of rejection and desire in an otherness already in the process of becoming. This is perhaps why the Zapatistas, when they call for an *encuentro*, often frame it as being an intergalactic *encuentro*. Not that they actually believe a delegation from another universe will arrive, but in the sense of maintaining an open relation to the actually existing other, the other of the future. It is in these spaces where, among many others, one finds cracks in the imagery of a present that is often not nearly as hegemonic as thought, imaginal breaks and tesseract through which other voyages and transformations become possible. A communist future is not an uncritical celebration of this otherness but rather an ethics of engagement with an Other that is truly other, and a politics founded through that. The question is not really whether there are little green men or communist partisans on the red planet bolleaux, but what can be gained through the imaginal gymnastics of imagining our relation to them. As the Association of Autonomous Astronauts always say, 'Above the paving stones, the stars.' What to be found beyond the stars is an open question, an unidentified future, and that is precisely the reason why it is the only one worth living. Out there, somewhere, Joe Hill is still singing.

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