

does, the book is a pleasure. He roots it in feminist, race, and sf scholarship, just as he grounds Butler in black American women's writing traditions and sf tropes. Moreover, he stays focused on his literary argument and doesn't get lost in the weeds of debates about agency, humanism, and the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment.

Ultimately, *Of Bodies, Communities, and Voices* is indispensable for any Butler scholar, primarily because of the ways he connects so many of her work's central concerns without reducing its complexity or variety. It will function more as a source of research than pedagogy, except maybe in upper-level classes centered on Butler. I recommend it not only to scholars of Butler but sf in general, especially in terms of afrofuturism, posthumanism, or any of Bast's focal points (agency, bodies, community, voice).

Biopunk SF in Liquid Modernity. Lars Schmeink. *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. 288 pp. ISBN 978-1-78-138376-6. £75 hc.

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Biopunk is among the more recent sf subgenres to emerge from the virtual citadel of 1980s cyberpunk. There have been others—most prominently steampunk, but also splatterpunk, nanopunk, dieselpunk, bugpunk, even elfpunk and monkpunk—but biopunk narratives are perhaps the first truly authentic descendant of the cyberpunks, featuring gritty dystopian settings, beat characters, corporate terrorism, techno-pathology, and body invasion. Instead of hacking computers, however, biopunks hack DNA and operate in worlds where the processes and products of genetic engineering are brought to bear by various forms of mad scientism.

In 2016, Sean McQueen meticulously traced the movement from cyberpunk to biopunk in *Deleuze and Baudrillard*, reading a wide array of texts through the vehicle of the titular postmodernists. Published the same year, the subject of this review, Lars Schmeink's *Biopunk Dystopias*, does much of the same, although Schmeink is less concerned with the movement to biopunk than with the current state of the subgenre as it surfaces in different media, including fiction and film as well as television, video games, and comics. Both books are seminal contributions to the expanding pool of scholarship on biopunk criticism and sf studies in general.

Schmeink lays the groundwork for his project in an introductory first chapter that is followed by six chapters and a conclusion. Each focuses on a

specific text or set of texts with the exception of Chapter 2, which builds upon the introduction, especially the notion that the sf imaginary and the utopian tradition are ideal modes for analyzing technological subjectivity and society as represented by “genetically engineered posthuman sf” (10). Centering on “the metaphor not of the cyborg but of the splice” (7), Schmeink aspires “to determine the changing perception of biological science in examples of visual, literary, and ludic culture from the turn of the twentieth century to the twenty-first century in connection to the concepts that inherited their critical potential from modern physical science, humanism, and modernity” (5).

Chapter 2, “Dystopia, Science Fiction, Posthumanism, and Liquid Modernity,” contains the most important material with a detailed register of the theorists, texts, and ideas that propel Schmeink’s inquiry. He begins by making what has become a commonplace disclaimer in contemporary sf criticism: “The world has become *science fictional*” (18). The same disclaimer marks a great deal of books about sf published in the last decade, as if the science fictionalization of the world is a new formation that Marshall McLuhan, J. G. Ballard, and many others were not professing over 50 years ago, or worse, as if writing about sf critically needs an apology. I understand the need for context, but sf scholars—the core readership for *Biopunk Dystopias*—know this well enough. Schmeink doesn’t spend too much time on the topic, however, and turns his attention to the evolution of biological sf, invoking familiar theorists, authors, and critics associated with POSTCyberMODERNpunkISM (e.g., Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Donna Haraway, Bruce Sterling, Darko Suvin, Rob Latham, Roger Luckhurst, William Gibson, Brian McHale, Octavia Butler, Annalee Newitz). He deduces that “the rise of biology as one of the driving forces of scientific progress since the late 1970s, the mainstream attention given to genetic engineering in the wake of the Human Genome Project (1989–2003), the changing sociological view of a liquid modernity, and the shifting discourses on the posthuman form a historical nexus that produces the cultural formation of biopunk—in terms of both a socio-political and scientific DIY [Do-It-Yourself] biology movement and its artistic negotiation in the popular culture imagination” (28). This is Schmeink’s central thesis.

Deliberating sf in the framework of humanism, anti-humanism, posthumanism, and critical theory, Schmeink foregrounds the concept of “liquid modernity” developed by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his 2000 book of the same name. Bauman discounts “the terms ‘postmodernity’ (the social dimension) and ‘postmodernism’ (the aesthetic dimension),” contending that they imply an endpoint or afterlife to modernity and modernism, which are

still very much alive. In Bauman's view, "contemporary society needs to be theorized from within the concept of a changed form of modernity, adapting existent processes to its ever-changing nature and addressing the protean and transitory state of contemporary society" (46). Hence liquid modernity, a "refer[ence] to a world that is fluid in that it can 'neither fix space nor bind time'" (47). Bauman's thesis has credence in spite of the fundamentally postmodern methods he uses to kill postmodernism, and his case for liquid modernity seems to follow the principles of the rhizome that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari map out in their books on capitalism and schizophrenia. Curiously, Schmeink, who leans perhaps too heavily on Bauman throughout his study, pays virtually no attention to Deleuze and Guattari, mentioning them only once. This is a raw wound of omission. I'm not suggesting that, like McQueen, Schmeink needs to educe rhizomatic thinking or usage. But any well-rounded theoretical discussion of biopunk (let alone cyberpunk) should account for Deleuze and Guattari—particularly in the case of liquid modernity, which, in some respects, is less a "new modernity" than an old, repackaged one (48). That said, there is much to like in Bauman's reterritorialization of modernity and Schmeink's largely effective application of it.

In the remaining chapters, Schmeink unpacks his argument in analyses of texts that include Margaret Atwood's "MaddAddam" trilogy, Paolo Bacigalupi's "Windup" stories, the film *Splice* (2009), the video game *BioShock* (2007), the TV series *Heroes* (2006–2010), and the films in the *Resident Evil* and *28 Days* franchises. All of these representational biopunk dystopias present "zoe-centric" points of view that aspire to "shift the paradigmatic metaphor in thinking about life from DNA to cell, from data and informational technology to community and sociology" while "signaling both a warning about the future and a call to recognize possible actions" (241). His reading of the highly artistic, literary, and elaborate *BioShock* is exceptionally revealing and even prompted me to play and examine the game, which "explores the contemporary trend towards individualization by extrapolating and mapping it onto science-fictional developments of posthuman genetic engineering" with "meta-commentary on the procedural nature of video games in general" (162, 169). Equally revealing is his evaluation of *Splice*, a pivotal biopunk narrative to which McQueen also devotes a chapter in *Deleuze and Baudrillard*. McQueen focuses on how *Splice* reworks Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) into a critique of biocapitalism. Schmeink, too, calls it an update of *Frankenstein*, one that "negotiates not only the science-fictional dimension of possibility in terms of a posthuman being, but also the dimension of consequence in terms of the commitments involved towards the

newly created life and towards society as a whole” (120), making the film “an ideal example of a posthuman negotiation of scientific consequences within the liquid modern world” (121).

For Schmeink, biopunk sf holds the promise of utopia by unlocking the doors of posthuman subjectivity and perception not only for humanity but for all varieties of living organisms. This is only the beginning, of course, both for the subgenre and the criticism that will define and refine it. With *Deleuze and Baudrillard, Biopunk Dystopias* erects a solid infrastructure for future scholarship as well as fresh interpretations of recent texts for critics in the field.