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Fattori, Adolfo. *Memorie dal futuro*. Ipermedium. Napoli, 2001.

This a solidly constructed study, ambitious and well organized without being excessively rigid. Its orientation is clearly and openly sociological, inspired by the works of S. Kern and Georges Bataille. The goal the author set for himself is quite simple: to show how science fiction deals with themes that are essential for modernity, such as "identity, memory, time and space, as well as our questionings of the nature of reality and its perceptibility." (19) Like Kern, Fattori identifies time and space as the concepts that will prove the most useful to help us understand the transformations in world-view and human behaviour that marked the twentieth century. The author's research is based upon a personal, and highly critical, statement: a feeling of time and space is fundamental for us to understand our own identity. However, late modernity, through the acceleration of the phenomena of "presentificazione" (loosely translated, the abolition of the feeling of time in favour of an eternal present) and "deterritorializzazione" (the uprooting of the individual from his original space), provokes both widespread infantilism and a flight from responsibility. The result is a new type of alienation, as Sartre would have said, none the less dangerous for not being wholly conscious.

The risk with this type of study is that its subject - in this case science fiction - may finally become a simple, potentially interchangeable tool used for a purely sociological demonstration. Luckily, this danger does not materialize. The author sees science fiction as a kind of narration particularly suited to perceiving the links between tradition and modernity, between technology and identity and between the sacred and the scientific imagination. This ability exists independently of any futile debate on the "literary" or "paraliterary" value of this type of works. While science fiction is understood as being a "privileged sociological indicator" (81), better able than most to clearly show "the relationships between collective memory, the structures of daily life and individual identity" (117), it is not used merely as a means to an end. In fact, it becomes quite rapidly the main focus of the author's attention.

The argument develops around a symbol of place and a symbol of time. The place is Los Angeles, the post-modern megalopolis *par excellence*, one of the favourite locations of American science fiction (*Blade Runner* comes to mind among many), and also the heart of the movie industry - the most powerful means of propagation of contemporary science fiction's visions. The time is that of the moon landing, understood as the emblematic moment when the past definitely ended and, paradoxically, the future did as well. The "will to go forward" becoming exhausted, what is left is a static and finally empty present. The realization of the age-old dream of setting foot on the moon is seen as corresponding with the gradual lessening, and the final disappearance, of mankind's thrust towards the future.

Instead of only seeing in science fiction what its *aficionados* often see, namely the crystal ball that will show you things to come if you look at it the right way, Fattori

prefers to focus on its nature as a parallel history. The study deals mostly with science fiction novels narrating events that were supposed to be set in the future for the author, but that are already part of the past for us modern readers. A future that stopped for good at the time of the moon landing, when the reality of the present time, combined with the exponential development of modern communications technology, left the expectations of the writers way behind.

The body of works studied has been chosen on the basis of the term "science fiction" itself, used in English instead of the Italian "fantascienza". This linguistic choice answers to an historical analysis. Fattori argues that true science fiction only appears in 1926, with the creation of the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* by Luxembourgish immigrant Hugo Gernsback in the United States. The previous production, for which the term "proto-science fiction" has recently been suggested, has one main difference from what followed: its vision of the future is based upon a quantitative increase of whatever the present day of the time had to offer. More speed, more duration, more performance based on premises that are well-known and accepted. True science fiction will propose qualitative changes, centered on the anticipation of technical improvements that will alter the world as it is known.

The author actually identifies three related periods. First, the one we will refer to, for simplicity's sake, as proto-science fiction, that has emerged from the fantastic genre and is still very close to it. Second, actual science fiction, based on a critical approach to the possible directions progress can actually take. Third comes cyberpunk, seen as a contemporary manifestation of a desire for a science fiction-type of narration that "focuses the reader's attention on to the relationship between perception and reality." (65)

Among the representatives of the first period we find the rather predictable, but inevitable names of Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson. The discourse on these authors is somewhat swift, but it touches upon the most important points and is generally quite satisfactory. One could have wished to see a more in-depth analysis of the debate on the image of the double in Stevenson's novels, possibly based on Ian Hacking's *Rewriting the Soul. Multiple Personality and the Sciences of memory*, which shows how fantastic and gothic novels helped the creation of the modern science of pathological psychology. Fattori, however, provides a clear and interesting reading of Jules Verne, opposing him, as an Italian critic is inevitably wont to do, to Emilio Salgari, "the Italian Verne". It would be unfair, however, to explain the preference of the critic for Salgari simply on the basis of national preference. Fattori is able to show how Verne's perspectives are still highly limited by the expectations of his age. He rightly identifies the fundamentally reactionary nature of Verne's apocalyptic opposition to progress, as incarnated in the main character of his early novel *The Marvels of the Year Two Thousand* (*Les merveilles de l'an deux mille*). To the dark, but finally predictable vision of the French author, Fattori opposes the still very dark, but symbolically more fruitful vision of the Piedmontese writer. A vision that becomes a metaphor for the misfortunes that await modern man, as he loses parts of his identity in the frantic pursuit of a future that becomes the enemy of the present time and of life itself.

A fairly long analysis also deals with Fredric Brown, and in particular with his novel *What Mad Universe*. Fattori distances himself from the habitual view of this novel as

the symbolic bridge between the *space opera* style stories of the pulp magazines and true, serious science fiction. He prefers to focus on the concept of identity, in its relationships with time and space, as it is illustrated and questioned in the novel. His reading is original and worth perusing. It is always interesting to see how Brown's writing, which has been almost entirely forgotten in North America and is rarely reprinted, as well as being considered quite unimportant, continues to attract attention in Europe. From this perspective, Brown's case is similar to that of David Goodis, the mystery writer whose works are even harder to find and whose fame among *aficionados* in Europe is greater even than Brown's. The unusual and fruitful approach chosen by Fattori could certainly be used with other books of the same author. The short stories of *Space on my hands* come to mind, where questions of identity are also central. This is a path that still needs to be explored.

The critic's analysis leaves behind the historical-pedagogical approach - as undeniably interesting and well-documented as it may be - in its treatment of the influence of modern communication technology on the visions of science fiction. Image's invasion of the realm of the text is traced back to the naïve and enthusiastic prints of the late XIXth century, with their representation of an imaginary future based on the development of a fundamentally benevolent automation, and from there to the pervasive influence of TV. This influence is seen as manifesting itself both as a boon to the spread of modern science fiction's imagery, and as a virtual realization of the abolition of space and time in people's everyday lives. The last section of the book deals abundantly with the analysis of several recent movies and with the two-way relationship between literary and cinematic creation.

The main focus of the study remains determined by what one could call a "humanist" approach. The goal is to identify the nature of the roads that took us where we are. The motivation is a very urgent concern about the nature of contemporary life. "The movies on the one hand and science fiction on the other have become the perfect interpreters of, and the perfect channels for, the results of the fundamental anthropological alteration that transformed twentieth-century society through the mutations the development of communication technology provoked in daily life over the last two centuries. These modifications have profoundly influenced the perception of space and time themselves, as well as their relation to individual identity." (81)

Fattori's book is a valuable and useful contribution to the study of the contents of modern science-fiction, liable to be further continued but nonetheless pleasant to read and undoubtedly to be recommended to students of this genre.

Of the same author, see also "*Di cose oscure e inquietanti* (Ipermedium. Napoli, 1995), a collection of articles on related themes.

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