

means employing ethnoracial markers such as African American and Latina/o while also trying to indicate their limitations. Milian tries to elude those limits by employing the terms *blackness*, *brownness*, and *dark brownness*.

She asserts, “My motive is to dissect how blackness, brownness, and dark brownness operate in multiple Souths” (40). In moving through African American and Latina/o texts by W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Evelio Grillo, among others, Milian enriches our understanding of how blackness and brownness circulate through the Americas and how our racial understandings heretofore have limited our comprehension of subjects (and their cultural production) labeled as *Latina/o* and *African American*. Her book is a much-needed and challenging theoretical analysis of our complex Latinities.

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***Shockwaves of Possibility: Essays on Science Fiction, Globalization, and Utopia.* By Phillip E. Wegner. New York: Peter Lang. 2014. xix, 308 pp. Paper, \$55.95; e-book, \$55.95.**

***The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood.* By David Rosen and Aaron Santesso. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press. 2014. xii, 357 pp. \$50.00.**

***Neocybernetics and Narrative.* By Bruce Clarke. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press. 2014. 248 pp. Cloth, \$75.00; paper, \$25.00.**

Remember theory? There were many guises, both controversial and ecstatic, but everyone more or less agrees that it had its greatest influence sometime during the 1970s and 1980s—and then what? There was *high theory*, which, like the phrase *high modernism*, offered to periodize its practitioners into irrelevance; and then, suddenly, “after” theory, the “end” of theory, and so on. Now, of course, it is no longer fashionable to “do” theory, and we’ve all moved on to archives, data mining, and other less epistemologically fraught modes of analysis. Or at least that’s one way of looking at it. The truth is, not surprisingly, much more complicated, and the three books above are evidence that the heady discourse of the 1970s and 1980s is still very much with us. Each of these volumes is, in some form, a response to philosophical and literary-analytical work that emerged during the “age of theory,” and it may be useful in reviewing them to ask how these lingering loyalties (or, for some, pestering influences) continue to shape our supposedly post-theoretical discipline.

Phillip Wegner’s *Shockwaves of Possibility* owes a great deal to the essays and books that Fredric Jameson has been writing on science fiction (SF) since the early 1970s. As Wegner himself acknowledges, his book’s most central

premise (that the very *technê* of SF has an integral, even necessary connection to both modernism and utopian possibility) is basically a Jamesonian claim. Wegner does his own analysis of various SF works in due course, but all of these eventually come around to the Jamesonian argument that the genre's multiple futures and radical utopianism (as "retooled" in critical analysis) will allow us to "come to grips with . . . globalization" (xv). The premise is brilliant in Jameson's hands, but Wegner's recapitulations and revisions often fall flat. And things get worse when Wegner references other contemporary philosophers who are interested in, as he puts it, "thinking our emerging global situation" (his main sources being Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, but still, always and forever, Jameson) (42). One problem, for instance, is that most of Wegner's "theoretical" citations come as glancing name-checks rather than sustained critical engagements. In terms of methodology, the book is bogged down by extensive plot summaries and a bafflingly consistent recourse to the following rhetorical tic: "[*previous topic*] is a form of what [*theorist*] calls [*coinage*]" (to cite just a few examples: "a form of *what* Leo Lowenthal *calls* an 'anticipated utopia'" [ix]; "*what* Jameson *calls* the 'cognitive mapping'" [xv]; "*what* the philosopher Alan Badiou *describes* as the event" [xvii]; "*what* [Jameson] *calls* the 'four maxims'" [2]; "*what* Jameson *calls* 'late modernism'" [4]; "*what* Jameson earlier *called* symbolic action" [6]; "*what* Jameson *names* the 'ideology of form'" [8]; "*what* Mark Bould *describes* as the Suvin event" [10]). It would not be worth dwelling on the redundancy of this template-like approach, of course, if it were not symptomatic of Wegner's devotion to "theory" as a practice of quasi-scriptural invocation. In short, for critics of theory the book will offer plenty of ammunition.

In stark contrast to Wegner's undisciplined (or too disciplined?) performance of "theory," Rosen and Santesso's *Watchman in Pieces* sets out, with impressive scope and sophistication, to attack the vision of panopticism developed in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). In reframing the contemporary debate over surveillance, they reach a number of startling conclusions. First, they argue, Foucault's vision of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison as a "figure" for society at large is both misleading and wrong: misleading because Bentham's "intentions" were "explicitly philanthropic," and, compared to the "appalling prison conditions of the time," the panopticon was a virtual health spa (101); wrong because what Foucault's "reductive," "simplified," and "extreme" reading of Bentham precludes is "any notion of personal autonomy" or even "freedom of thought and action" (9). By contrast, they insist, the very notions of modern personhood and privacy emerge only by way of an inner/outer "dialectic" between modes of active self-creation and the state's various attempts to "allegorize" one's individuating roles in civil society (46). Thus, against Foucault's panoptic vision, Rosen and Santesso offer a "correlative history" between "individualized" personhood and the surveillance state's "field of operation," one that, unlike an oppressive prison-regime, is "linked to a whole series of positive and useful effects" and offers a fascinating

vision of the literary “passage from the epic to the novel” (23–24, 193). Actually, sorry, all the quotations in that last sentence were by Foucault. But it is, basically, what Rosen and Santesso argue, and I mix them up here on purpose as a way of pointing to what I fear is a failure to recognize the deeply “correlative” and “dialectical” reading between “personhood” and “surveillance” already offered in *Discipline and Punish*. (At one point in *Watchman*, Rosen and Santesso do seem to recognize that there may be a difference between “Foucault’s assertions” and the “highly reductive versions of them” that have “so entered popular consciousness.” In that spirit, then, we might take their overall interpretation of “Foucault” as a rhetorical strategy rather than the more interesting reading they might have done of his work.)

Still, Rosen and Santesso might argue that there’s an important distinction between the processes of “individualization” that emerge in Foucault’s theory (wherein we all live, essentially, in a “prison”) and the true “autonomy” and “personal freedom” that emerge in their own reading of liberal personhood (wherein we all live, they suggest, in a “casino,” still under surveillance, of course, but having loads of fun [54–55]). Yet one could easily imagine Foucault countering, “Okay, but how *autonomous* is one, really, inside a casino? Free to do *what* exactly? And what of the over two million people living today in *actual* prisons?” Still, if the book’s retheorizations seem rosy-eyed at times, its efforts to reframe a vision of surveillance that has been overdetermined by a particular reading of Foucault are as comprehensive as they are provocative.

Unlike the varying degrees of celebrity that emerged around both Jameson and Foucault during the 1970s and 1980s, one area of theoretical discourse that flew mostly under the radar of mainstream literary theory at the time had to do with the extended legacy of cybernetics. Known today as “social systems theory,” or sometimes “second-order cybernetics” or “neocybernetics,” these systems discourses expanded on the notions of “autopoiesis” operating in “closed” circuits at the cellular level (as articulated in the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela during the early 1970s) from their biological to their “metabiotic” applications in the social and psychic realms (primarily via scholars like Heinz von Foerster, Gregory Bateson, George Spencer-Brown, and especially Niklas Luhmann). These figures have experienced a resurgence in the last few years, and Bruce Clarke’s *Neocybernetics and Narrative* is perhaps the most exciting summary and literary-theoretical application of their ideas. Put simply, if one is looking for a coherent, rigorous, and persuasive argument for the virtues of systems theory, this is the book. But make no mistake, what Clarke (and the scholars he is channeling) invoke with terms like *autopoiesis*, *system*, and even *self* is not an ontological categorization but rather an epistemological one, and it would be a mistake to try to align these theories too closely with those of, say, Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory or the group of scholars working today in object-oriented ontology. Neocybernetics, as Clarke describes it, accepts as a starting premise the still-very-

mysterious leap into self-referentiality made by cellular organisms, insisting that anything smaller than that cannot operate according to the kinds of auto-poietic “self-observations” necessary for “cognition.” However, once one accepts this basic premise (and why not?), a whole host of fascinating epistemological insights follow in the realms of media and information theory, narratology, poststructuralist linguistics, and even climate change. Indeed, this book alone is enough to make one feel that the glories of “theory” are far from gone, and that we may be entering a new golden age of theoretical work—rethinking the age of theory, certainly, but also revisiting bolts-of-lightning brilliance that may not have seemed relevant back then but are now more urgent than ever.

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***Corridor: Media Architectures in American Fiction.* By Kate Marshall. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press. 2013. xvii, 233 pp. Cloth, \$75.00; paper, \$29.95.**

***Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media.* By Jessica Pressman. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. 2014. xiv, 224 pp. Cloth, \$99.00; paper, \$29.95.**

***Virtual Modernism: Writing and Technology in the Progressive Era.* By Katherine Biers. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press. 2013. 280 pp. Cloth, \$75.00; paper, \$25.00.**

In these studies of American modernism, new critical muses preside. Cultural theorists still appear in the wings, but center stage belongs to media studies. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have been supplanted by Friedrich Kittler; Jürgen Habermas is edged out by Katherine Hayles. Like earlier studies, these books seek to understand how modernist art is embedded in wider social and material contexts. But for Kate Marshall and Jessica Pressman in particular, the analytic frame no longer comes from one or another variant of historical materialism; it comes instead from the materiality of media itself, from the infrastructure of medial forms, institutions, and processes that leave their stamp on any meaning they transmit. The medium is the modernist message. Taken together, these studies suggest a marked departure from the interpretive methods we can trace back to the cultural critique of the Frankfurt School. Learned and richly descriptive, these studies open fascinating vistas for students of literature even as they raise an unasked question: when we read under the sign of media studies, whither literary interpretation?

For Kate Marshall, literary approaches to modernism necessarily bring built-in limitations, blind spots that media studies can help us overcome. She argues that literary interpretation tends to assume either the transparency of language and its ability to represent human interiority, or else imagines that