Introduction

“Argentine science fiction does not exist.” This claim, the opening statement of Elvio E. Gandolfo’s chapter on the subject in El libro de los géneros, has been repeatedly echoed by critics. At best, science fiction in Argentina has been relegated to a minor and poorly defined branch of the nation’s more celebrated tradition of fantastic literature. In this vein, Elsa Drucaroff asserts that Argentine texts may have adopted elements of science fiction, but none of them can really be said to belong to the genre. Pablo Capanna, perhaps the nation’s most established science fiction critic, dedicates only a brief epilogue to Argentine examples in the updated (2007) version of his canonical El sentido de la ciencia ficción, and observes the scant presence of technology in the texts he surveys. He suggests that they should really be read as a nontraditional form of fantastic literature that borders on science fiction.

The view that science fiction is insufficiently developed as a genre in Argentina is perhaps an understandable response to the overwhelming dominance of generic models from the United States and Europe. The association of science fiction with foreign, imported literature is reinforced in the categories used by publishers and booksellers in Argentina: the shelves dedicated to science fiction in bookshops are exclusively stocked with literature in translation, while even widely acknowledged Argentine practitioners of the genre, such as Angélica Gorodischer and Carlos Gandini, are relegated to the “literatura nacional” section. If science fiction has still to be recognized as a genre within national literature, this is partly because many of its most distinguished authors—Leopoldo Lugones and Adolfo Bioy Casares, for example—did not exclusively dedicate themselves to the genre, but also because they and other writers have not, unlike in the United States, become
the target of marketing campaigns that have relied on the strategic labeling (and retro-labeling) of texts as SF.

Critics have followed suit in downplaying the presence of science fiction in Argentina and reinforcing an overly restrictive genre classification. This has led to a dearth of critical work on the subject that might create new and alternative genealogies within Argentine literature; among other omissions, it has also sidelined a very important flourishing of the genre in graphic fiction, for example, of which Oesterheld’s *El Eternauta* may be the most famous but certainly not the only example. I find sufficient the simple definition of science fiction offered by Capanna (borrowing from Judith Merril) as “la literatura de la imaginación disciplinada” (literature of the disciplined imagination), which describes texts that apply a scientific logic to explore even the most fanciful of hypotheses, and scrupulously avoid supernatural explanation. This broad definition allows us to unshackle science fiction from any particular worldview or developmental context. Drucaroff’s unease stems from her observation that Argentine writers appropriate aspects of science fiction to serve a very different project: to address questions of backwardness, barbarism, dependence, and the unfulfilled promises of development. By suggesting that these questions are somehow out of place in science fiction, however, she seems to ignore the fully fledged critique of modernity and technologization that also exists within mainstream First World science fiction (in which atavism is by no means a rare threat, for example), and to imply that the genre is necessarily tied to a certain ideology and state of development.

It is certainly the case that Argentine science fiction is most often of the “soft” rather than the “hard” variety, bringing social or political issues to the fore rather than adopting a rigorously scientific approach to imagined technologies or advanced theoretical work in physics. There are no equivalents to the detailed expositions of complex mathematics or quantum ontologies in Greg Egan’s *Diaspora* (1997) or *Schild’s Ladder* (2002), or the advanced astronomical knowledge that underpins Alastair Reynolds’s Revelation Space Universe. Argentine science fiction is far more likely to engage in speculation concerning posthuman identities or the social or psychological impact of new technologies of simulation and artificial life, along the lines of Philip K. Dick’s *Ubik* (1969); to engage in a critique of colonialism, such as the one that underpins H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898); to explore alternative social and economic systems, as in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974); or to create dystopian visions of the repression of culture, as Ray Bradbury does in *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).
The relative absence of “hard” science entirely befits, of course, a branch of science fiction that often maintains a critical distance from Western modernity and its technological imaginaries. However, although Argentine science fiction boasts fewer examples of futuristic machines than many European and North American variants of the genre, and is less indebted to the intricacies of quantum physics, it is not the case that it cannot be distinguished from the fantastic tradition. I would suggest that a cleavage between the two begins to open up as early as 1865, with the publication of Juana Manuela Gorriti’s “Quien escucha su mal oye.” The story relates a case of hypnosis, and the narrator freely admits that the scenario presented appears to be an entirely fantastical one, in which anyone witnessing the powers of the female hypnotist “habríasele creído una maga celebrando los misterios de un culto desconocido” (would have believed her to be a magician performing the mysteries of an unknown rite). However, he insists that she is a scientist, drawing attention to the anatomical drawings, cranium models, and books on the chest of drawers, all of which are authored by chemists, naturalists, physiologists, and physicians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Christoph Wilhelm Friedrich Hufeland (1762–1836), François-Vincent Raspail (1794–1878), and Gabriel Andral (1797–1876). In doing so, he postulates a natural, rather than a supernatural, basis for the seemingly fantastic events of the story. Ten years later, this emphasis on the empirical exploration of unknown realms of both the human psyche and the planetary system would be developed in the narratives of Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg (see chapter 1) to form the genesis of the SF genre in Argentina.

A central hypothesis of this book is that the science fiction genre in Argentina may be differentiated from the fantastic tradition with respect to its commitment to exploring materialist conceptions of the universe, a characteristic that is notable from the genre’s beginnings and has become even more marked in recent decades. Further, I argue that Argentine science fiction typically deploys reflexive and metafictional techniques at the service of a materialist understanding of the text. The use of reflexivity to pursue a materialist agenda will be surprising to anyone versed in standard postmodern theories of metafiction and intertextuality. Patricia Waugh offers a definition of metafiction as “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality”; she argues that such writings also posit the fictionality of the world beyond the text, reflecting “a greater awareness within contemporary culture of the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday ‘reality.’”
drawing attention to their own methods of composition, then, and creating multiple *mise en abyme* effects, reflexive texts persuade us that what we take as reality is always mediated through discourse, having no existence beyond our linguistic constructions of it. Metafiction is thus often taken to serve a philosophy underlying the “linguistic turn” in critical theory, which emphasizes the social and linguistic construction of reality, and anchors postmodern thought to an idealist tradition in philosophy.

I wish to argue for an alternative function of metafiction, at work in many of the texts explored in this book, which does not emphasize the fictionality of the world so much as the materiality of the text. Rather than positing a reality made up of texts, these works choose to present the text as sharing in the same substance as the universe beyond it, both caught up in, and shaped by, the same forces; to draw attention to the embodied nature of the experiences of writing, reading, illustrating, performing, and spectating; and to explore how literary and other kinds of texts may enhance, and bring us to a greater understanding of, our sensory contact with the world. If philosophical idealism leads us to believe that what we imagine manifests itself in the material realm, then the world is effectively an illusion constructed by human language and social discourses. A materialist outlook, on the other hand, would find our imagination to be an effect of complex interactions of matter, and seek to explain human culture with reference to material conditions or the evolution of technology.

A framework for a materialist genealogy of Argentine science fiction, offered here as intentionally provisional and provocative, would exclude some of the texts that are already snugly nested within the canon, or at least relegate them to a different line of descent. The work of Angélica Gorodischer, often declared to be the most undisputed practitioner of the genre in Argentina, deploys many of the narrative topoi that distinguish science fiction, such as space travel and first-contact scenarios with alien races. However, her abiding interest in the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, and the extent to which language structures perception and interpretation of the world around us, situates her fiction very much within a (post)structuralist paradigm. The tangled narrative hierarchies of “Onomatopeya del ojo silencioso,” in which the diegetic narrator’s account—ostensibly the story we read—is revealed to be identical to the text recited by the alien race within the story, place it in a much clearer relationship with the fantastic tradition epitomized by Cortázar’s “Continuidad de los parques” than with the other incursions into science fiction explored here. In “Los embriones del violeta,” words bring material objects into being, just as the false Encyclopaedia of
Borges’s “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” creates a new, fictitious world that begins to invade our own. Gorodischer’s stories, parables of linguistic relativism and social constructivism, act as a useful foil against which to measure the materialist thrust that I have found to be characteristic of the greater part of Argentine science fiction.

Unlike several of the European and North American examples mentioned above, much science fiction in Argentina remains resolutely located on our own planet, within a reality that is estranged to differing degrees, rather than in another part of the known, or invented, universe. This has strengthened the already dominant tendency toward historicizing approaches in science fiction criticism. In his Postales del porvenir: La literatura de anticipación en la Argentina neoliberal (1985–1999), for example, Fernando Reati reads his selected corpus as “una ilustración de ciertas obsesiones y temores presentes en el imaginario argentino de esos años” (an illustration of certain obsessions and fears present in the Argentine imaginary in those years). He adopts a stance common among science fiction critics when he reminds us that “en toda literatura de anticipación imaginar el futuro es un ejercicio de indagación en los aspectos más dolorosos del presente” (in all speculative fiction, imagining the future is an exercise in probing the most painful aspects of the present). It is certainly the case that Argentine science fiction, while engaging with themes common to the genre across the industrialized world—from the abuse of technology by authoritarian regimes to new modes of posthuman subjectivity and apocalyptic visions of environmental catastrophe—is also thoroughly grounded in the specific social and political life of the nation. Among other issues, the texts examined here explore the impact of an uneven modernization, mass migration, dictatorships, crises in national identity stretching back to the nineteenth century, the rise and fall of the Left, the question of the nation’s indigenous heritage, the impact of neoliberalism, and the economic crisis of 2001.

While clearly rooted in the contexts of its production, however, Argentine science fiction is also highly reflexive, meditating openly on questions of form and genre, and debating within its pages the role of science fiction and fantasy—and literature and art more generally—in the society of its day. As Damien Broderick points out, SF as a genre is characterized by an “enormously ramified intertextuality,” as “the coding of each individual sf text depends importantly on access to an unusually concentrated ‘encyclopedia’—a mega-text of imaginary worlds, tropes, tools, lexicons, even grammatical innovations borrowed from other textualities.” This tendency is magnified in Argentine science fiction, which consciously engages with the
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gener genre from a peripheral position. Capanna observes that Argentine writers have been influenced not so much by science directly as by reading science fiction, which often arrived in the form of translations published in popular magazines; this has only heightened a critical reflexivity already typical of the genre. Composing science fiction from the postcolonial periphery often brings an ironic and parodic perspective to bear on familiar stories of alien invasion and conquest, for example, as it does in H. G. Oesterheld’s allegory of neocolonialism in his comic series La guerra de los Antartes (1970, 1974), in which Russia and the United States strike a deal with the aliens, offering them total domination over South America in exchange for a cut of the sizable profits to be made from developing the continent’s natural resources.

My aim in this study is therefore to balance contextual readings of Argentine science fiction with a sustained focus on the broader theoretical questions these texts raise, through their marked reflexivity, concerning the nature and role of literary, cinematic, and theatrical texts within human culture and society. My corpus is diverse, spanning texts produced in Argentina from 1875 to the present day, and across a range of media and forms of performance: literature, cinema, comics, and theater. I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive overview of Argentine science fiction, however: my particular focus on reflexive practices within the genre has led to the exclusion of certain works and writers that could not be omitted in a more exhaustive survey, such as key texts by Leopoldo Lugones (Las fuerzas extrañas) and Horacio Quiroga (“El hombre artificial,” “El mono que asesinó”), as well as the work of Carlos Gandini. I do otherwise, however, include those Argentine SF texts that would be central to a canon if one were recognized: Eduardo Holmberg’s Viaje del señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte, H. G. Oesterheld’s El Eternauta, and Adolfo Bioy Casares’s La invención de Morel. I place alongside these a number of texts by writers who might be considered to bridge fantasy and SF (Horacio Quiroga, Rafael Pinedo, Eduardo Blaustein, César Aira, Marcelo Cohen), focusing in each case on those texts that engage most clearly with the genre of science fiction. Argentine cinema has produced few SF films, for reasons I give in chapter 6; the four I have selected for discussion all reflect critically on the codes of science fiction and its manipulation of temporality and historicity. They represent a range of approaches, including a semidocumentary film (Estrellas), an animated production (Cóndor Crux, leyenda del futuro), and a highly unusual, mixed-aesthetic film that pays homage to early cinema and to comics (La antena), as well as the most well-known and critically acclaimed SF film of recent decades (La sonámbula). Theatrical experiments with science fiction are also
unusual, but I focus on two key exceptions to the rule, by Javier Daulte and Rafael Spregelburd, in chapter 5. One of my objectives in this book is to highlight Argentina’s significant tradition of science fiction comics and graphic fiction, which stretches far beyond the single iconic text (*El Eternauta*) known to most readers; chapter 2 thus focuses on the work of one of the nation’s most significant scriptwriters, Ricardo Barreiro, who was responsible for a flourishing of SF comics series in the 1980s and 1990s.

One of the abiding reflexive concerns in Argentine science fiction is the relationship between elite and popular culture, or more broadly between intellectuals and the masses, a theme that provides the focus for chapter 1. The first part opens with a discussion of the novel widely recognized to represent Argentina’s first work of (proto-)science fiction, Eduardo Holmberg’s *Viaje maravilloso del señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte* (1875), before contrasting it with his later utopian novel *Olimpio Pitango de Monalia* (1915). Holmberg, a natural scientist who played a key role in disseminating Darwin’s ideas in Argentina, chose to explore the potential of fiction, and often fantasy, to stimulate scientific curiosity and to circulate new theories and knowledge beyond the academy. However, his reflexive narratives ultimately betray an equivocal approach to the role of fantasy and literary utopianism in the nation’s modernization project, as a potential force for the manipulation of the masses as well as their education. Both science and fantasy, it would seem, lend themselves more readily to shoring up the status of the elite and extending its grip on the masses than to any genuinely democratizing or modernizing agenda.

The second part of the chapter develops the reflexive theme of the relationship between intellectuals and the masses, but winds forward to two more recent periods of Argentine history: the civil unrest of the mid-1950s, and the repression of left-wing militancy in the 1970s, as registered in the two major series of *El Eternauta* (Oesterheld and Solano López), Argentina’s most revered and popular science fiction comic. My reading diverges significantly from previous scholarship on the two series, paying close attention to their self-conscious interventions in debates of their time concerning the role of the intellectual in relation to politics and the *pueblo*. I argue that key differences in the presentation of the intellectual between the first and second series reflect the seismic change that took place between the Sartrean “intelectual comprometido” (committed intellectual) of the 1950s and early 1960s, and the anti-intellectualism of left-wing militancy of the 1970s in Argentina.

The conclusion to chapter 1 takes up the theme of materialism in relation
to the highly reflexive fictions composed by both Holmberg and Oesterheld. In different guises, the conflict between materialism and alternative conceptions of the universe—spiritism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; later, forms of philosophical idealism and social constructivism—shapes many of the science fiction texts discussed in this book. Holmberg’s inaugural contributions to the genre are marked by the shifting contrapositions and accommodations between materialist and spiritist conceptions of life that were characteristic of his era, while Oesterheld’s texts are anchored to more solidly Darwinist and Marxist forms of materialist thought.

The relationship between metafiction and materiality becomes the focus in chapter 2 of a discussion of several comic series scripted in the 1970s and 1980s by Ricardo Barreiro. Examining the use of intertextuality, parody, and *mise en abyme* in *Slot-Barr* (1976), *Ciudad* (1982), *Ministerio* (1986), and *Caín* (1988), I argue that these devices do not ultimately lead us to question the text’s ability to represent the world beyond it or to posit reality as a mere illusion constructed through language. Against this prevailing (postmodern) understanding of metafiction, I suggest that the deployment of reflexive devices in graphic fiction does not point to the immateriality of the world so much as the materiality of the text. My discussion of Barreiro’s work engages critically with key concepts emerging in the relatively new field of comics theory. In particular, I explore the notion of the comic as archive developed in the work of Jared Gardner and Jörn Enns, who draw in very suggestive ways on Walter Benjamin’s writings on the modern city. While noting the usefulness of this metaphor to account for the particular mixture of mythology and materiality in comics and their capacity to evoke the forms and textures of urban space, I conclude that it also conceals the more active role of comics in transforming, translating, and remediating the material they appropriate, and does not sufficiently draw out the processes of (re)materialization that are intrinsic to the medium.

Among other reflexive concerns, science fiction in Argentina has often imagined a crisis in cultural transmission, prophesying the demise of literature or the sudden wiping-out of decades or centuries of accumulated knowledge. This dystopian vision unites the novels explored in chapter 3: *Cruz diablo* (Eduardo Blaustein, 1997), *Plop* (Rafael Pinedo, 2004), and *El año del desierto* (Pedro Mairal, 2005). I argue that the particular understanding of literature (and other forms of cultural expression) developed in these texts may be illuminated by exploring revisions to Darwinian theories of evolution that have recently been pursued in anthropological thought and cultural theory. The novels may be read as articulating a shift from a Dar-
winist model of inheritance based on the transmission of genes to a newer understanding—promoted by André Lévi-Gourhan, Bernard Stiegler, and others, and often termed “gene-culture co-evolution”—of the significant role of technology and tools in human evolution. In addition to individual memory and the genetic memory of species, Stiegler posits a “third memory” that enables the transmission of individual experience from one generation to another, via inscriptions in tools and other technical artifacts, prominent among which is the written text. What Stiegler calls “technics” he finds to be responsible for the accelerated evolution of the human species—which natural selection cannot alone explain—and to be so central to our experience that “humanity cannot even be understood without technics.”

This understanding of human evolution may loosely be termed “post-Darwinist,” as it exceeds Darwin’s theory that individual experience, in the form of acquired characteristics, cannot be inherited by future generations of the same species. As will be evident from my discussion of Plop, El año del desierto, and Cruz diablo, however, it remains thoroughly materialist in its emphasis on the material supports essential to the transmission of culture. Within a critique of neoliberal capitalism and a fictional meditation on Argentina’s fall from prosperity (explicit in the latter two texts), these novels demonstrate how quickly cultural knowledge, the possibility of progress, and even a sense of linear temporality itself dissipate with the demise of the tools and technologies that enable the transmission of culture from one generation to another.

This understanding of literature as a form of prosthesis is further developed in chapter 4 with reference to a selection of science fiction narratives that take as their central theme new or invented technologies of visual recording and projection, ranging from enhanced versions of photography and cinema to forms of virtual reality. In my discussion of a selection of Horacio Quiroga’s short stories from the 1920s, together with Bioy Casares’s La invención de Morel (1940) and César Aira’s El juego de los mundos (2000), I focus on these texts’ explorations of the different kinds of perception and subjectivity that are produced as we interact with new technologies, and what role literature might continue to play in an age of the image. A recourse to science fiction thematics allows writers to address in very direct terms the idea of visual technologies as forms of prosthesis, transforming, supplementing, or redistributing subjectivity. The invention of futuristic technologies in these texts becomes a way of reflecting more generally on the prosthetic nature of older forms of inscription. As N. Katherine Hayles observes, “Writing is a way to extend the author’s body into the exterior world; in this sense,
it functions as a technological aid so intimately bound up with his thinking and neural circuits that it acts like a prosthesis.” Lik e any other prosthetic technology, literature extends our perceptions beyond our immediate physical environment. Marshall McLuhan was unequivocal about the matter: “All media are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical. . . . The book is an extension of the eye.” In *El juego de los mundos*, we witness a move from questions of projection and prosthesis to a new paradigm of plasticity, and I explore the consequences of this shift via a discussion of Catherine Malabou’s *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (2010).

Recent theatrical works by Rafael Spregelburd are at the forefront of a new interest among Argentine dramatists and performers in exploiting the capacity of theater to construct forms of material, embodied experience that cannot be reduced to the linguistic. Theater, as Jorge Dubatti suggests,

> a diferencia de la literatura escrita, del cine o de la plástica, ofrece por su naturaleza convivial una experiencia que es mucho más que lengua je. Una experiencia que hunde sus raíces en la misteriosa auto percepción de las presencias corporales, el tiempo y el espacio vivientes.

in contrast to written literature, cinema, or the plastic arts, offers, by virtue of its form as a gathering, an experience that is much more than language, an experience that is rooted in the mysterious self-perception of embodied presences, a living time and space.

Chapter 5 contrasts the recourse to mathematics and post-Newtonian physics in Spregelburd’s work with that of Javier Daulte. While Daulte’s *4D Óptico* (2003) finds Einstein’s theories of relativity to destroy any possibility of an objective, material reality beyond our illusions, Spregelburd’s *La paranoia* (2008) draws on the self-similar patterns of fractal geometry and the complex dynamic systems described by chaos theory to gesture toward a form of material patterning and meaning in the universe that exceeds the order imposed by human language. He constructs a postanthropocentric vision in which human agency is recognized as merely one force among the many, both organic and inorganic, that shape the material world.

Focusing on Cohen’s *Variedades* (1998) and *Donde yo no estaba* (2006), the second part of the chapter discovers in these novels a similarly postanthropocentric understanding of subjectivity and the materiality of the text, and draws them out with reference to theories that have been recently brought together under the term “new materialism.” Exemplified by the work of
Manuel De Landa, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti, among others, these theories respond to the dominance of the “linguistic turn” and social constructivism in (post)structuralist and deconstructionist approaches. In its place, they emphasize the processes that embed human experience within the material world and question the central language/reality dualism that has remained unchallenged in postmodern thought. In an analogous manner, Cohen situates human experience and agency within much broader interactions between material forces, including the nonhuman and even the nonorganic. For him, the literary text does not occupy some transcendent position with regard to the material world but is fully part of its continual exchanges and transformations.

Finally, chapter 6 returns to earlier discussions of historicism, temporality, and prosthetic forms of experience (in chapters 3 and 4) to develop these ideas further in relation to the representation of modernity in four science fiction films. In different ways, La sonámbula (1998), Cóndor Crux, la leyenda del futuro (2000), Estrellas (2007), and La antena (2007) reflect on the role of cinema, and the cinematic apparatus, in the construction of temporality; this reflexive theme is combined in all cases with a critique of modernity from a postcolonial perspective, with a particular focus on its universalizing pretensions and blind faith in progress. Specifically, these films reject a historicist worldview, understood as a universalizing approach that charts world history as a series of developmental stages, in which one naturally follows another. By contrast, their reflexive exploration of cinematic temporality allows them to unpick the chronology of modernity. My discussion engages with (neo-)Marxist and historical-materialist readings of science fiction but ultimately finds Benjamin’s approach more compelling, in its understanding that a critique of modernity and capitalism can only really be made on the basis of a more fundamental critique of the concept of historical progression. These films’ reflexive exploration of cinematic time allows us to appreciate the extent to which cinema is able to register and reshape the multiple temporalities that make up the present, to confound the linear narrative of modernity, and to refound utopian visions of a different future.

The fantastical and futuristic elements of science fiction might lead us to read the genre as a hyperbolic instance of the capacity of fiction to construct a world through thought and language, much as the Captain of Eduardo Goligorsky’s “La cola de la serpiente” (1967) succeeds in re-creating an entire planet merely by remembering it and expressing a desire in his own mind. As Broderick suggests, in his discussion of SF reflexivity, “To read fiction of any kind is to help create a world, built out of words and memories and
the fruitfulness of imagination." This vision of the idealist function of literature, however, is ultimately supplanted in a good number of Argentine science fiction texts by a commitment to a material understanding of the text. Braidotti contends “that science fiction enacts a displacement of our world-view away from the human epicentre and that it manages to establish a continuum with the animal, mineral, vegetable, extra-terrestrial and technological worlds,” thereby pointing to a “post-humanist, bio-centred egalitarianism.” All the texts discussed here establish such a continuum, but they also undertake a reflexive examination of the role and status of literature, cinema, theater, or graphic fiction within those material and technological worlds. In doing so, they find new uses for metafiction and reflexivity that do not further philosophies of linguistic constructionism but instead challenge the dominance of the linguistic paradigm, turning toward a more materialist view of culture.

That materialist view presents itself in different guises, of course, depending on the historical moment of each text’s production and its particular ideological orientation. On a theoretical level, one of the aims of this book is to trace relationships between new materialism and older forms of materialist thought, and to explore ways in which these open up or close off different practices of literary criticism. There are many points of contact between new materialism, Darwinism, and Marxist materialism, for example, as well as significant points of divergence. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was greeted with immense enthusiasm by Marx and Engels, who found in it a materialist explanation of nature’s history that mirrored, and strengthened, their materialist approach to human history. In many ways, however, Marx and Engels went beyond Darwinian evolution to anticipate theories of gene-culture coevolution that were to become widespread in the 1970s and 1980s. John Bellamy Foster demonstrates that human evolution, for Marx, “had to be traced through the development of tools, much more than fossils,” as a reliance on tools as exterior extensions of the body was unique to human, rather than animal, evolution. We may detect further prefigurings of Stiegler’s technics—and materialist, posthuman identities—in Marx’s understanding that technology reveals to us “the active relation of man to nature” and thereby how social relations are produced as well as “the mental conceptions that flow from those relations.” While allowing for the distinctiveness of human evolution, Marx insisted on material explanations: “The statement that the physical and mental life of man, and nature, are interdependent means simply that nature is interdependent with itself, for man is a part of nature.” As Bellamy Foster explains, Marx was later to use the concept of metabolism to account for the process of labor, “with its
attendant notions of material exchanges and regulatory action” to explain
the human relationship with nature as one that involved both naturally oc-
curring conditions and the human capacity to affect that process.\textsuperscript{22} Marx ob-
serves a dialectical process here, in which humans change the environment
around them, but such changes lead them in turn to “transform themselves,
develop new powers and ideas, new modes of discourse, new needs and new
language.”\textsuperscript{23} Under capitalism, a “rift” in that metabolic relation with nature
opens up, whereby humans are estranged and alienated from the natural
conditions on which their existence is founded.\textsuperscript{24}

The dynamic relationship of material, metabolic exchange between hu-
mans and nature (both organic and inorganic) observed by Marx resonates
strongly with the complex interactions witnessed by new materialists. A
key difference, however, emerges between new materialist thought and the
Marxist critical tradition: for new materialists, commodities do not invariably
represent “false consciousness.” As Maurizia Boscagli suggests in \textit{Stuff
Theory}, the new materialist understanding of the commodity positions it
as environment, “potentially capable of producing, rather than blocking,
experience”; as such, it liberates energies that may be used “for emancipa-
tory ends.”\textsuperscript{25} Here, perhaps, we detect the greater influence of Benjamin’s
particular understanding of materiality and the commodity form, which,
Boscagli suggests, “is interested in \textit{what to do} with things and the pleasures
they provide, and in what things can do, rather than in how the subject
simply consumes and is consumed by the fantasies they circulate.”\textsuperscript{26} The
importance of Benjamin’s sense of the emancipatory potential of commodi-
ties and technologies is discussed further in the conclusion, and it is this
awareness that informs the approach adopted by a number of science fiction
films discussed in the final chapter, especially \textit{La antena} and \textit{La sonámbula}.

Following in this line, for new materialists, technological mediation and
the proliferation of images and simulacra are not necessarily agents of alien-
ation, as they are for many Marxist critics and theorists. For Paul Virilio and
(particularly the early) Jean Baudrillard, technology ushers in an ever-greater
independence and alienation from the natural world; the increasing inte-
gration of humans with technologies essentially challenges what it means
to be human.\textsuperscript{27} In new materialist thought, human subjectivity has always
coevolved with technology, and both technology and nature belong to a
material realm in which we are thoroughly immersed, but which is also ex-
terior and autonomous with respect to human agency. If many theorists and
critics have emphasized the dematerializing effects of late capitalism, from
the complex system of derivatives that underpins the contemporary financial
system to the rise of electronic media, the more contemporary texts I discuss
here (particularly those by Aira, Cohen, Blaustein, and Mairal) refuse to postulate a human subjectivity that has become in any way divorced from the material conditions of its existence, or to imagine new media technologies as different in essence from older ones.

New materialism thus emerges as a powerful framework for literary and cultural criticism that, while remaining staunchly committed to a materialist understanding of culture, human experience, and textuality, exposes the deficiencies of a continued Marxist reliance on dualisms, symptomatic readings (e.g., Fredric Jameson), and linear models of historical progress. It provides a way of moving beyond these, as well as the linguistic turn enshrined in postmodernism, to focus on the text in a way that does not reduce its materiality to language. In the conclusion, I focus on Mark Hansen’s charge of “technesis,” laid against a whole genealogy of thinkers who have privileged logocentric thought over “the robust materiality of technology,” which exceeds representation.28 The theorists on whose work I principally draw in my analyses—Benjamin, Stiegler, Malabou, and Braidotti—do attempt, I argue, to think through the material dimensions of human existence that precede and transcend our capacity to reduce them to language. This endeavor is also evident in the metafictional techniques of the science fiction texts discussed here, which often present literary, cinematic, or other forms of text as technics that shape our experience of temporality and our relationship with the material environment, beyond language or symbolism.

I go on in the conclusion to advance a hypothesis concerning the prevalence of materialist thought in Argentine science fiction, identifying in these texts a sustained critique of capitalism that stretches back to the nineteenth century but acquires a particular urgency under neoliberalism and more recent years of financial crisis. I sketch out ways in which these texts’ engagement with the philosophy of capitalism is also, in many ways, a critical response to the influence of models of society and evolution inspired by Darwinian thought. This allows us to understand Argentina’s position on the periphery of the modernizing world as a privileged context, perhaps, for a reflexive exploration of the adoption of technics in human culture, as a form of resistance to the central tenet of adaptation within the ideology of capitalism. Inscribing themselves within a genealogy of materialist thought and drawing on the defamiliarizing techniques of the science fiction genre, these texts assume the task of rethinking human subjectivity in a material world of technology in which the human is increasingly displaced—or more accurately, returned to a place within the material world and not above it—allowing new forms of experience to become possible.