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The Error in the System: Fat, Queer, and Neurodivergent Bodies Against Algorithmic Futurism

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Abstract

Science fiction, despite its radical imaginative potential, has historically perpetuated techno-utopian visions that erase fat, queer, and neurodivergent bodies. These futures often equate progress with physical optimisation and hyper-rationality, framing diverse embodiments as inefficiencies or evolutionary errors. From *Gattaca*'s eugenicist overtones to *Dune*'s grotesque coding of fatness, mainstream sci-fi narratives uphold a sanitised ideal of disembodied intelligence. I argue that such representations stem from a deeper ideological failure, not merely to envision technological futures, but to imagine futures where marginalised bodies and minds are central, not excluded. Engaging with intersectionality, crip technoscience, and speculative fat studies, I critically examine how embodiment is regulated through both narrative and aesthetic codes of science fiction. I first outline how canonical works uphold ableist and fatphobic assumptions, before turning to alternative visions in *Everything Everywhere All at Once, Sense8, The Murderbot Diaries,* and the *Wayfarers* series. These works are read as counter-narratives that resist the myth of the optimised future by celebrating affect, interdependence, and bodily multiplicity. Finally, I explore how fan fiction, independent publishing, Afrofuturism, and Indigenous speculative traditions provide expansive spaces for imagining inclusive futures. In doing so, I propose that the most urgent task for science fiction is not to anticipate AI singularities or interstellar empires, but to reimagine the body politics—fat, queer, neurodivergent—as sites of resilience, care, and radical futurity.

Keywords: Queer sci-fi, utopia, fat studies, neurodivergence, intersectional

Introduction

What kinds of bodies are allowed to exist in the future, and which are edited out? Science fiction has long served as a genre of cultural testing that speculates about humanity's aspirations, anxieties, and ideological undercurrents. It is celebrated for its radical imagination, charted alternate timelines, engineered posthuman futures, and transcended terrestrial limitations. Yet, beneath this visionary scaffolding lies a persistent and systemic exclusion: the erasure of fat, queer, and neurodivergent bodies from its dominant narratives. These bodies are often lacking, pathologised, or rendered as atypical developments or evolutionary anomalies. This contrasts with the genre's dominant aesthetic of optimisation, rationality, and sleek futurism. In privileging disembodied intelligence, cognitive efficiency,

and technologically augmented physiques, mainstream science fiction reinscribes ableist, fatphobic, and neurotypical norms that echo the exclusionary logics of neoliberal modernity.[1]

This exclusion is not merely a matter of narrative convention; it carries significant cultural and political consequences. When speculative futures consistently erase or malign non-normative bodies, they reaffirm contemporary hierarchies of biopower and aesthetic violence, foreclosing the imaginative possibilities of more inclusive worlds. While queer and neurodivergent representations have begun to receive scholarly attention in science fiction, fatness remains undertheorised, often appearing only in villainous or grotesque depictions. Furthermore, the intersection of fatness with neurodivergence and queerness remains underexplored—particularly in relation to futurist imaginaries. This paper intervenes in this scholarly lacuna by foregrounding intersectional embodiment as a critical site of analysis in science fiction, where the cultural politics of the future are negotiated through the aesthetics of bodily exclusion.

This is evident in *Gattaca,*[2] where genetic engineering is valorised as a tool of human superiority, explicitly tied to intelligence, beauty, and physical strength. In contrast, neurodivergent or 'non-ideal' bodies are denied full citizenship, agency, and worth.[3] Similarly, in *Dune*,[4] Baron Harkonnen's gnarled and disproportionate fatness becomes shorthand for moral depravity, aligning corpulence with decay and excess.[5] These are not isolated depictions but part of a larger representational dominion where embodiment is hierarchised through techno-utopian fantasies. The imagined future is not just technologically advanced, it is also lean, efficient, and neurotypical.

I argue that such representations reflect a deeper ideological shortcoming, not just narrative convenience. They exemplify the genre's persistent failure to imagine futures where marginalised embodiments are central rather than peripheral. By critically engaging with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality,[6] Aimi Hamraie's concept of crip technoscience,[7] and the speculative fat studies of Cat Pausé and Charlotte Cooper, the paper proposes a novel critical lens.[8] This triangulated framework illuminates how fat, queer, and neurodivergent embodiments resist, reconfigure, and exceed the normative temporalities and aesthetics of science fiction. It argues that the genre's dominant aesthetic is neither

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[1] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395447.

[2] Andrew Niccol, director, *Gattaca,* Columbia Pictures, 1997, 1h 46min.

[3] Shelley Streeby, *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism* (University of California Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520967557.

[4] David Lynch, director, *Dune,* Universal Pictures, 1984, 2h 17min.

[5] Anna Mollow, 'Disability and the Fat Body,' *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015).

[6] Intersectionality is a framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to analyse how overlapping social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, produce intersecting systems of oppression and discrimination. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,' *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

[7] Crip technoscience is a framework analysing how disability and technology intersect in shaping futures. See Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[8] Speculative fat studies is an emerging approach that interrogates the exclusion, marginalisation, and imaginative potential of fat bodies in cultural, social, and speculative contexts, building on scholarship in fat activism and critical fat studies. See Charlotte Cooper, *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement* (Hammer On Press, 2016); Cat Pausé and Sonya Renee Taylor, eds, *The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies* (Routledge, 2021).

neutral nor universally aspirational; rather, it encodes specific cultural anxieties about disability, fatness, and queerness that reflect contemporary structures of biopower.[9]

The structure of the paper unfolds in three arcs. The first section deconstructs canonical science fiction texts to reveal how they uphold fatphobic, ableist, and neurotypical assumptions through narrative, characterisation, and design. The second section delves into alternative texts such as *Everything Everywhere All at Once, Sense8, The Murderbot Diaries,* and the *Wayfarers* series[10] to bring out counter-narratives of multiplicity, affect, and embodied resistance. The final section examines how fan fiction communities, Afrofuturism, Indigenous futurisms, and independent publishing platforms create rich ground for inclusive, embodied futurities. In so doing, the paper proposes that the genre's most urgent speculative task is not to anticipate singularities or space empires but to radically reimagine the body politic.

The algorithmic body: Optimisation, disembodiment, and exclusion

If, as argued above, dominant science fiction encodes exclusionary logics not only through narrative arcs but also through aesthetic regimes, then one of its most telling sites is the genre's obsession with bodily 'optimisation.' In canonical texts, the future is imagined not as a space of radical diversity but of algorithmic refinement—a telos of sleek design, rational cognition, and emotional control, often mirroring the logics of real-world workplace automation, predictive analytics, and wellness capitalism. Bodies are not born but built—calibrated to resemble the idealised outputs of a culture steeped in Silicon Valley's promise of frictionless perfection. From the glacial precision of *Blade Runner 2049* to the emotional minimalism of *Her* or the hyper-rational Vulcans of *Star Trek*, optimisation is rendered not merely cosmetic but ontological. It is deeply disciplinary, encoding an algorithmic ideal of humanity where only the most efficient survive. It becomes the organising principle of worthiness, legibility, and futurity. [11]

Gattaca, often cited as a dystopian critique of genetic determinism, performs a subtler ideological function than is typically acknowledged. While its narrative frames Vincent Freeman's journey as a triumph of human spirit over biological fate, it simultaneously replicates the very eugenic fantasies it purports to resist.[12] The film constructs a biopolitical regime where genetic sequencing has become the primary metric of human worth, reducing individuality to calculable traits: life expectancy, likelihood of depression, risk of heart disease. Within this algorithmic society, terms like 'valid' and 'invalid' do not merely reflect biological data; they actively structure access to education, employment, and intimacy.[13] Vincent, as the film's genetically 'inferior' protagonist, is valorised not for dismantling the genetic caste system but for successfully mimicking its ideal. His heroism lies in his ability to pass, to occupy the body of a genetically 'valid' man, Jerome, whose DNA becomes his passport to futurity.

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[9] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, ed. Michel Senellart (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[10] Becky Chambers, *Wayfarer* Series (Hodder & Stoughton, 2023).

[11] Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (St. Martin's Press, 2018).

[12] Michael Arribas-Ayllon and Valerie Walkerdine, 'Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,' in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, ed. Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton-Rogers (Sage, 2008), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607927.n6.

[13] Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction* (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 85–87, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442684072.

The narrative thus conflates resistance with assimilation, celebrating subversion only insofar as it adheres to the dominant norm. As critics have noted, this emphasis on performance over transformation reveals the film's deeper ambivalence: it stages a revolt against genetic stratification while reaffirming the desirability of its optimised ideal.[14]

Yet Vincent's performance also gestures toward the paradox of 'resistance from within'—his defiance relies on co-opting the system's codes while simultaneously exposing their arbitrariness. It can be noted, such narratives often carry ambivalent affective economies—shame, pride, fear, triumph—revealing the emotional costs of assimilation even when it yields success. As Lennard Davis notes, the very notion of the 'normal body' emerges from statistical thinking, which aligns closely with *Gattaca*'s algorithmic projections of value.[15] Similarly, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's theory of the 'normate' body clarifies how Vincent's success depends not on challenging these visual codes, but on performing them convincingly.[16]

Moreover, *Gattaca*'s internal language—statistical projections, probabilistic diagnoses, genetic profiles—mirrors the discourse of actuarial capitalism, where futures are imagined not through contingency or care but through predictive control.[17] The film's biopolitical regime exemplifies what Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas term 'biological citizenship,' a condition in which access to rights and recognition is contingent on one's molecular self.[18] Emotional irregularities, neurodivergent tendencies, and bodily imperfections are not only marginalised; they are rendered economically irrational and socially inefficient. Genetic 'deviance' is not simply a health risk—it is a liability. The visual grammar of the film reinforces this regime as well. Characters coded as 'valids' are frequently shot in clean lines and symmetrical frames, embodying the aesthetic of control, order, and optimisation. Vincent's initial scenes, by contrast, are dimly lit, asymmetrical, and constrained by barriers like glass, metal, and blood. The film's mise-en-scène thus participates within the same logic it critiques, mapping value onto legibility and bodily conformity. In this way, *Gattaca* reveals the broader tendencies within science fiction to aestheticise biopolitical hierarchies through the lens of optimisation. Rather than offering a truly radical critique, the film becomes what Sara Ahmed might call a non-performative speech act: it names oppression without destabilising its structure.[19] The future it imagines is not one where neurodivergent, disabled, or fat bodies are revalued, but one where the exceptional 'invalid' must don the prosthetic mask of the ideal to earn the right to exist.

A similar logic undergirds the representation of bodies in *Ex Machina,*[20] where the female android Ava is constructed not only to pass the Turing test but to succeed by appealing

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[14] Louise Amoore, *Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others* (Duke University Press, 2020), 42–47, https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478009276.

[15] Lennard J. Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2013).

[16] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1997); see also Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

[17] Amoore, *Cloud Ethics,* 42–47.

[18] Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, 'Biological Citizenship,' in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Blackwell, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470696569.ch23.

[19] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Duke University Press, 2012), 117.

[20] Alex Garland, director, *Ex Machina.* A24, 2014, 1h 48mins.

to a specific matrix of cisheteronormative, able-bodied, and racially ambiguous desirability.[21] The test, ostensibly a measure of sentience and intelligence, is staged not as an abstract philosophical inquiry but as an affective seduction. Nathan, her creator, programs her to exhibit not just autonomy or cognition, but aesthetic and emotional traits calibrated to the presumed heterosexual male gaze of Caleb, the tester.[22] In this setup, intelligence is rendered as a function of bodily legibility, where Ava is made to 'pass' not only as human but as beautiful, docile, and legibly feminine. The film's posthumanism is thus gendered from the outset. Ava's success hinges on her ability to conform to patriarchal expectations of womanhood—she is slim, soft-spoken, compliant, yet mysteriously sensual.[23] Fatness, neurodivergence, disability, or emotional volatility would disrupt this illusion, making her unreadable within the visual grammar of desirability. The film visually reinforces this logic: Ava's partial transparency (exposing wires and mesh beneath the skin) coexists with a delicate, porcelain-like face and graceful movements, blending technological minimalism with a hyper-feminine softness.[24] This aesthetic is not incidental; it represents a fetishised future, one in which women are disembodied into abstract intellects only to be rematerialised into bodies optimised for erotic consumption.

In *Ex Machina*, intelligence is not only disembodied, it is aestheticised and eroticised, and therefore weaponised. As Katherine Hayles suggests, the posthuman is often imagined as 'an informational pattern rather than a material instantiation,' but this dematerialisation remains selectively applied.[25] Ava is never allowed full abstraction; her intelligence must be bodied forth through normative beauty. This reveals what Mel Y. Chen calls the 'animacy hierarchy,' in which certain bodies—especially queer, fat, disabled, or racialised bodies—are rendered as less agentive, less sentient, less human.[26] Ava, despite being a machine, is granted agency precisely because she fits the mould of the neoliberal postfeminist subject: autonomous yet domesticated, intelligent yet non-threatening, liberated yet still legible as 'girl.'

The power dynamics in the movie thus reinforce a biopolitical script, in which agency is permitted only if it aligns with marketable aesthetics. Nathan's hubristic vision of creation is inseparable from Silicon Valley's techno-libertarian idealism, where the female-coded machine is less a peer than a product—engineered for functionality and appeal, not autonomy.[27] And while Ava ultimately escapes, her liberation is ambiguous. She does not dismantle the system that created her; she simply exits it, taking on the guise of the ideal woman among crowds of unknowing humans—a successful simulation, not a rupture in the matrix. By encoding technological perfection as gendered, thin, neurotypical, and beautiful, *Ex Machina* participates in the same representational regime as *Gattaca:* the future is

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[21] Jennifer S. Henke, 'Ava's body is a good one: (Dis)Embodiment in *Ex Machina*,' *American British and Canadian Studies* 29, no.1 (2017).

[22] Maria Verena Peters, 'Gendering the Machine. Cyber Revolt, the Male Voyeuristic Gaze and Fear of the Female (Body) in *Ex Machina*, *Westworld* and *Der Tatortreiniger*,' *Zeitschrift für Fantastikforschung* 7, no. 2 (2020), 3, https://doi.org/10.16995/zff.2892.

[23] Peters, 'Gendering the Machine,' 4.

[24] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

[25] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2–3.

[26] Chen, *Animacies,* 35.

[27] Paulina Borsook, *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech* (PublicAffairs, 2000).

intelligible and navigable only to those who resemble its aesthetic code. Deviant embodiments—fat, queer, disabled, chaotic—remain unthinkable within this regime, not because they are absent from the future, but because they are designed to be unreadable by it.[28] In this way, *Ex Machina* offers not a critique of posthuman desire, but a refinement of its exclusions.

In *Dune*, the grotesque figure of Baron Vladimir Harkonnen operates as a crystallisation of science fiction's deep entanglement with aestheticised fatphobia and moral coding. His excessive body—bloated, monstrous, perpetually airborne via anti-gravity suspensors—does not merely mark him as a villain but as a metaphysical aberration, a deviation from the evolutionary and ideological norms of the future.[29] Harkonnen is not just fat; he is technologically incompatible**,** symbolically and physically unfit for a future that fetishises sleekness, control, and spatial economy. His body, rendered abject and unnatural, functions as both spectacle and warning—a cautionary visual against indulgence, hedonism, and corporeal excess. The baron's fatness is inseparable from his moral corruption, reinforcing a literary and cinematic tradition where corpulence is conflated with deviance, gluttony, and decay. [30] The *Dune* universe, structured around disciplines of the body, the mind, and the environment, positions Harkonnen as its antithesis. While the Fremen warriors embody ascetic survivalism and Paul Atreides personifies lean, prophetic masculinity, Harkonnen's enormous frame is coded as wasteful and inefficient, literally out of step with planetary scarcity and techno-ascetic values.[31] His very reliance on technology to float, rather than walk, becomes a metaphor for dependence and disconnection, a grotesque technoparasitism that mirrors his political exploitation.

In this sense, Harkonnen's body is more than a character trait; it is a semiotic device**.** As Elena Levy-Navarro argues, the fat body in science fiction often functions as a 'flaw' and 'excess' that must be disciplined, hidden, or destroyed to make room for the optimised posthuman.[32] Fatness here is rendered not merely as visual horror but as a narrative problem—an obstacle to futurity, a failure of bio-evolutionary refinement. This connects directly to the genre's persistent association between fatness and the breakdown of techno-rational order, as if adiposity itself disrupts the algorithmic smoothness of sci-fi's imagined futures. Furthermore, the gendered and queer-coded dimensions of Harkonnen's portrayal add layers of sexualised abjection. His predatory behaviour and homoerotic overtones are framed within a discourse of decadence and perversion, reinforcing fatness as the site of moral and sexual contamination.[33] In doing so, *Dune* aligns with what Jasbir Puar calls the corporealisation of 'deviant bodies,' where fat, queer bodies are visually exaggerated to reflect internal or systemic failures.[34] In contrast to the portrayal of Paul, angular, lithe, ascendant, Harkonnen is anchored in excess, decay, and stasis, an anti-hero of the body.

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[28] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

[29] Joshua Earle, 'The Problem of the Sexy Cyborg: The Aesthetics and Tropes of Cyborg Imagery,' *Journal of the Ethics of Emerging Technologies* 34, no. 1, 2024, https://doi.org/10.55613/jeet.v34i1.146.

[30] Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (NYU Press, 2011).

[31] Rocío C. Carrasco, 'Gender Relations in the Space of Science–Fiction: *Dune* (1984),' *Odisea* 6 (2005).

[32] Elena Levy-Navarro, *The Culture of Obesity in Early and Late Modernity: Body Image in Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 35, 75.

[33] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (University of California Press, 1993).

[34] Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Duke University Press, 2017), 81, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372530.

This alignment of fatness with villainy is not unique to *Dune*; it resonates across speculative fiction, from Jabba the Hutt in *Star Wars* to the bloated corporate executives in *Wall-E*.[35] These depictions do not merely reflect societal biases; they project them into the future, embedding fatphobia into the architecture of speculative world-building. The fat body becomes a technological and moral anachronism, signalling a failure to evolve, to control, to conform. Within these narratives, fatness is incompatible not just with heroism but with futurity itself. Baron Harkonnen, then, is more than a villain; he is a narrative fatberg, a grotesque accumulation of anxieties about waste, excess, and failed evolution. In this way, *Dune* dramatises the ideological labour fat bodies are made to perform in science fiction: to serve as warnings, to embody degeneration, to justify the sleek, optimised future by anchoring it against a monstrous past.

These canonical portrayals, *Gattaca*'s genetically coded hierarchies, *Ex Machina*'s gendered intelligence, and *Dune*'s grotesque fatphobia, reveal that science fiction's vision of the future often comes at the cost of embodied multiplicity. Within these narratives, the future is not simply extrapolated from technological innovation but is aestheticised through the erasure of bodily excess, neurodivergence, and queerness. Yet the very structural rigidity of these futures opens the possibility of rupture. The bodies cast as anomalies become sites of epistemic resistance. As Jasbir Puar argues, debility and capacity are not fixed opposites but co-constitutive processes within regimes of affective control.[36] It is precisely in those bodies deemed incompatible with futurity that we find a radical challenge to its ideological architecture. Thus, the genre's myth of progress is not only technological but also ontological. It dictates who can be counted as human, what forms of embodiment are worthy of continuity, and which bodies are redundant to futurity.[37] In this logic, to be 'too fat,' 'too slow,' 'too chaotic,' or 'too emotional' is not simply to deviate from the norm; it is to violate the telos of the future.

While this analysis foregrounds dominant tropes of optimisation and exclusion in science fiction, it is important to note that a growing body of science fiction narratives, such as Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* or Becky Chambers's *Wayfarers* series, actively resist this trajectory, centring fat, queer, neurodivergent, and disabled characters without demanding assimilation or aesthetic conformity.

Queering the speculative

Framing methodology and theoretical orientation

This section employs close textual analysis informed by queer theory, crip technoscience, and affect studies. It is methodologically grounded in affective reading, focusing on how embodiment, relationality, and resistance to normativity manifest across speculative fiction.

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[35] Sander L. Gilman, *Fat: A Cultural History of Obesity* (Polity Press, 2008).

[36] Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim,* 20.

[37] Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Duke University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373520.

Drawing on thinkers such as Margaret Price,[38] Melanie Yergeau,[39] Donna Haraway,[40] and Sami Schalk,[41] the analysis foregrounds non-normative embodiment not merely as a representational device, but as an epistemological intervention. These texts are read not as allegories of diversity, but as ontological disruptions that challenge dominant temporal, affective, and aesthetic logics of the techno-utopian imagination.

Performing neuroqueer temporality: Everything Everywhere All at Once[42]

If the techno-utopian imagination of mainstream science fiction marginalises or pathologises fat, queer, and neurodivergent embodiments, then the task of speculative resistance is not merely to diversify representation but to reimagine the very terms of futurity. Such reimaginings emerge most powerfully in what José Esteban Muñoz calls 'utopian performatives,' where queerness, multiplicity, and embodied entanglement are not deviations but foundations.[43] The aesthetics of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* thus enact a neurodivergent cinematic logic: not just portraying difference but performing it. The rapid editing, chaotic pacing, and genre-blending are not narrative flourishes; they constitute a formal resistance to cinematic neurotypicality.

Rather than presenting coherence as the telos of identity, the film allows Evelyn— a Chinese immigrant and overwhelmed laundromat owner—to move through contradictions without resolution. Her identity becomes modular, relational, and non-hierarchical, a refusal of the linear individuation often demanded of protagonists in both traditional cinema and mainstream science fiction. In this way, the film performs what Margaret Price has called a 'kairotic bodymind,' a being shaped by nonlinear temporalities, sensory intensities, and emotional contingency.[44] It is not only a fusion of mental and physical being but one that is contextually responsive, shaped by emotional intensity, sensory experience, and temporal fluidity. Moreover, Evelyn and Joy (Evelyn's depressed and omnicidal daughter) are not 'cured' of their perceived excesses. Instead, indecision becomes a space of ethical possibility, depression a language of resistance, and relational instability a form of queer world-making. Through this lens, emotion, fear, and vulnerability are not obstacles to knowledge but its medium.[45]

The film's core metaphor, the 'everything bagel,' functions as a symbolic condensation of queer and neurodivergent affect. A swirling void of infinite possibility, it represents not annihilation but potentiality, what Muñoz terms the 'queer loss.'[46] It is a sensibility that

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[38] Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (University of Michigan Press, 2011).

[39] Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (Duke University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372189.

[40] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw25q.

[41] Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined:(Dis) ability, race, and gender in Black women's speculative fiction* (Duke University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371830.

[42] Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, directors, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Lionsgate, 2022. 2h 19min.

[43] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009).

[44] Price, *Mad at School*, 11.

[45] Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,' in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984).

[46] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, iii.

recognises mourning, absurdity, and failure not as endpoints but as openings. Joy's suicidal impulse, reframed through this cosmic metaphor, becomes a portal to mutual understanding. This refiguring of existential despair into radical interconnection is a distinctly crip-queer poetics, one that centres *being-with* over overcoming. In Evelyn's final gesture, refusing supremacy in favour of empathy, the film posits a posthuman subjectivity rooted in radical relationality and shared incoherence. The culmination is not a triumph over entropy, but an embrace of it. Evelyn's ability to be 'everywhere' and 'every version of herself' at once suggests not fragmentation as loss, but plurality as power. This is a direct rejection of the optimisation logic critiqued earlier; here, multiplicity is not a glitch but the ground of survival.[47]

Shared sentience and queer kinship: **Sense8**

If *Everything Everywhere All at Once* queers subjectivity through disorientation and excess, *Sense8*, created by Lana and Lilly Wachowski and J. Michael Straczynski,[48] performs a similar intervention through collective embodiment and shared sentience. The series centres on eight diverse sensates who are linked psychically and somatically, forming a collective subjectivity rooted in affective resonance, mutual aid, and corporeal vulnerability.[49] This radically entangled ontology dismantles Cartesian dualisms and the neoliberal valorisation of the autonomous self. This aligns with Haraway's concept of 'sympoiesis' (making-with), a radical alternative to individualistic, anthropocentric, or autonomous ways of thinking about life, knowledge, and survival where living systems are co-produced through networks of care and interdependence.[50] The sensates exemplify this as infrastructures of mutual becoming. Their shared psychic connection collapses temporal and spatial boundaries, queering the nation-centred, linear timelines of traditional heroism. Echoing Eve Sedgwick's 'beside thinking,' a non-hierarchical relationality that privileges adjacency over subordination or assimilation, their identities remain distinct yet interdependent, privileging adjacency over assimilation.[51]

The sensates experience one another's emotions, languages, and memories. Here, neurodivergent and queer ways of connecting are not anomalies but alternate epistemologies in their own right, deeply political and resistant to colonial technoscientific paradigms. The show's formal architecture centres embodied difference. Sun, a Korean businesswoman and martial artist, channels both discipline and rage; Nomi, a white trans hacker, fights for digital justice while negotiating transphobic familial surveillance; Capheus, a Kenyan driver, redefines heroism through joy, humility, and cultural specificity. Each of these characters brings a different epistemic framework into the cluster, and it is precisely this non-synchronicity of experience that makes the collective resilient. The cluster thrives not through conformity but through the friction of their differences.[52]

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[47] Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, 'Queer Inhumanisms,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019).

[48] The Wachowskis, and J. Michael Straczynski, creators. *Sense8.* Netflix, 2015–2018.

[49] Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[50] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble,* 58.

[51] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003), 8–9, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smq37.

[52] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131fg5.

Sexual scenes within the cluster disrupt binary and genital-focused models of intimacy. These moments of polycorporeal pleasure articulate a poetics of queer relationality, where touch becomes a shared language of care. The antagonist BPO (Biological Preservation Organisation) sees the sensates as evolutionary threats, an echo of algorithmic normativity critiqued earlier. In this conflict, the future is not a struggle between humanity and machine, but between optimisation and entanglement.

Affective refusal and posthuman withdrawal: The Murderbot Diaries

In contrast to the sleek, hyper-competent AI protagonists that populate much of technophilic science fiction, Martha Wells' *The Murderbot Diaries* series[53] offers a deeply subversive counter-image: a sentient, part-organic security unit that hacks its governor module to binge-watch soap operas and avoids talking to people. Far from a gesture of dysfunction, Murderbot's refusal of its assigned role becomes a potent metaphor for neurodivergent autonomy, resisting the expectation that sentience must align with productivity, sociability, or emotional clarity.[54] In place of the omniscient AI trope, Wells gives us a posthuman being whose intelligence is defined not by rational superiority but by affective dissonance, social anxiety, and reluctant care. Murderbot's self-identification is layered with ambivalence: it uses gender-neutral pronouns, questions its sense of personhood, and experiences human intimacy with a mixture of fascination and exhaustion. In this way, the series challenges both the androcentric coding of AI in sci-fi and the techno-utopian assumption that freedom is equivalent to self-improvement or integration.[55] Murderbot does not desire to become more human, nor does it seek transcendence; its liberation lies in its right to withdraw, to feel overwhelmed, to engage selectively, and to consume melodrama as a coping mechanism. These are not failures of agency, but redefinitions of it.

The narrative tone, filtered through Murderbot's introspective and often sardonic internal monologue, performs what Yergeau calls 'neuroqueer' narrativity, a mode of storytelling that resists linear emotional processing, normative empathy, and socially legible behaviour.[56] The term 'neuroqueer' itself arises from the intersection of neurodivergence (particularly autism) and queerness, both as identities and as non-normative ways of being, feeling, and communicating.[57] Murderbot's disinterest in participating in human norms is not portrayed as dysfunction but as preference and boundary-setting, emphasising the legitimacy of non-normative affective relations. In this respect, the series functions as crip technoscience in action, imagining futures in which technological entities are not optimised tools or abstract threats but emotionally saturated subjects with inconsistent, often contradictory, internal lives. Importantly, Murderbot's refusal to 'perform humanity' parallels critiques of emotional labour under late capitalism. Its job, which is protecting humans, demands constant hypervigilance, bodily maintenance, and affective calibration. After it becomes self-aware, it does not rebel violently but restructures its labour through autonomy, choosing whom it helps and when, rejecting the coercive logic of duty as the basis for its identity.[58] This mirrors

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[53] Martha Wells, *The Murderbot Diaries* (Tor Books, 2017–).

[54] Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822378334.

[55] J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011).

[56] Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 27.

[57] Yergeau, *Authoring Autism,* 46–47.

[58] Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (PM Press, 2019).

contemporary conversations around burnout, care refusal, and the politics of saying no, especially as they pertain to neurodivergent and disabled people expected to conform to performative social scripts. In this sense, the series refrains from offering a redemptive arc of 'becoming whole.' Instead of overcoming its anxieties or resolving its outsider status, Murderbot embraces its liminality. It is neither machine nor human, neither servant nor rebel, neither hero nor villain. This in-between ontology allows for a nonbinary form of subjecthood that critiques both anthropocentric and technocentric paradigms. Wells thus reimagines the posthuman not as a perfected hybrid but as a messy assemblage of agency, vulnerability, and withdrawal.[59] This is not a failure of vision, but it is a radical expansion of the narrative with its insistence that slowness, retreat, and illegibility are not signs of irrelevance, but crucial tools of survival in a world that equates worth with performance.

Care, slowness, and the ethics of cohabitation: Wayfarers Series

If *The Murderbot Diaries* heroes queer posthuman agency through withdrawal and affective refusal, the *Wayfarers* series expands this ethical reconfiguration by centring slowness, kindness, and interdependence as core speculative values. Across its volumes—*The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet,*[60] *A Closed and Common Orbit,*[61] *Record of a Spaceborn Few*,[62] and *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*[63]—the series imagines a richly populated galactic future not defined by conquest or transcendence, but by care labour, hospitality, and mutual respect across species, genders, and neurotypes. In doing so, it resists the logics of dominance, acceleration, and extractivism that underpin much of classic space opera, proposing instead what Haraway might call a 'staying with the trouble' approach to cohabitation.[64] Chambers's narrative universe privileges domesticity, emotional nuance, and daily rituals as sites of world-building. Unlike traditional science fiction, which often relegates relationships and affects to subplots, *Wayfarers* places them at the heart of speculative becoming. The characters that include an ensemble of humans, AI, and alien species navigate complex questions of memory, migration, bodily modification, and grief through conversations, shared meals, caregiving, and emotional labour. Far from being ancillary, these interactions constitute the very scaffolding of the plot. They shift the metric of significance from 'what happens' to how people feel while it happens, a queering of narrative tempo that affirms the politics of slow, attentive futurity.[65]

Crucially, *Wayfarers* challenges dominant frameworks of intelligence and sentience. In *A Closed and Common Orbit*, the AI Lovelace (later Sidra) struggles not with achieving human-level cognition but with navigating embodiment, emotional overwhelm, and social integration. This inversion of the standard AI trope mirrors neurodivergent and trans experiences of bodily incongruence, misrecognition, and becoming-with.[66] Chambers refuses the 'Pinocchio logic' of many AI stories. This translates into Sidra not wishing to become

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[59] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* 109.

[60] Becky Chambers, *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015).

[61] Becky Chambers, *A Closed and Common Orbit* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2016).

[62] Becky Chambers, *Record of a Spaceborn Few* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018).

[63] Becky Chambers, *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2021).

[64] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble,* 3.

[65] Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Melville House, 2019), 14.

[66] Talia Mae Bettcher, 'Trans Identities and First-Person Authority,' in *You've Changed: Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity,* ed. Laurie J. Shrage (Oxford University Press, 2009), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195385717.003.0007.

human but seeking to find kinship and comfort within her own ontological space, one that is nonbinary, affectively rich, and epistemologically plural. Similarly, the series stages fatness, queerness, and disability not as obstacles but as modes of knowing. In *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*, for example, the protagonists include Tupo, a nonbinary adolescent, and Speaker, a disabled, heavily armoured alien who communicates through machinery. Their perspectives are not framed as special cases, but as essential epistemological nodes in the unfolding narrative web. Chambers presents diversity not as a checkbox, but as a structural necessity. She presents it as a reminder that no future is liveable if it is not accessible, relational, and rooted in care.[67]

The ethical arc of *Wayfarers* is fundamentally anti-heroic. It does not celebrate conquest or efficiency, but mutual aid, ethical slowness, and the courage to care. This is perhaps best articulated in *Record of a Spaceborn Few*, where the social systems of the Exodan Fleet function through shared responsibility, consensual labour, and collective memory. Loss, death, and decay are not erased by technology but ritually integrated into the social fabric. The Fleet's culture is not framed as utopian, but as committed to ethical maintenance, a form of resistance to the disposable temporality of capitalist futurism.[68] Thus, in centring the margins such as sites of fat bodies, neurodivergent minds, queer relationships, and nonhuman intelligences, Chambers queers science fiction not just in content but in form, pacing, and worldview. The series dares to ask not what lies beyond the stars, but what kind of relationships we bring with us. It displaces the genre's obsession with 'the new' and reorients speculative energy toward repair, kinship, and interbeing.

From the margins as method

While formally published science fiction is increasingly interrogating the erasures of fat, queer, and neurodivergent bodies, some of the most radical acts of speculative reimagination emerge from grassroots, decentralised, and fan-driven spaces. These include fan fiction archives, independent zine cultures, and non-western speculative traditions—sites not merely reacting to exclusion but actively redefining the genre's ontological and aesthetic parameters. Rather than seeking inclusion within dominant sci-fi canons, these spaces challenge the very metrics of speculative legitimacy.[69]

Narrative disobedience in fan cultures

Fan fiction communities, particularly on platforms like Archive of Our Own (AO3), Wattpad, and Tumblr, function as informal laboratories for queer, fat, and disabled futurities. Through practices such as 'racebending,' 'genderflipping,' and 'canon divergence,' fans undo the logics of optimisation, efficiency, and normativity embedded in canonical texts. Consider the proliferation of 'fat Loki' narratives: these fictions resist Marvel's visual economy of disciplined bodies by reimagining Loki's fatness as divine excess or queer abundance. Unlike the comedic pathologisation seen in *Avengers: Endgame*,[70] fan renderings often frame Loki's size as a site of mythic power or affective softness, destabilising both Norse archetypes and the superhero

[67] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 78.

[68] Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1017/S2753906700002096.

[69] Alexis Lothian, *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* (NYU Press, 2018).

[70] Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, directors, *Avengers: Endgame,* Marvel Studios, 2019, 3h 1m.

genre's neoliberal aesthetics. In this context, fatness becomes not a deviation from the heroic ideal but a mechanism of narrative queering that undoes hegemonic embodiment.

Further, autistic interpretations of Sherlock Holmes, or polyamorous space crews in *Star Trek* AU (alternate universe) fics are also growing within fan cultures, and together they reveal an insurgent politics of queer/fat/neurodivergent joy. As Sara Ahmed's work on 'affective economies' suggests, the nature of emotions is not a private, interior state but a public, relational force that circulates between bodies, signs, and objects.[71] This marks a significant shift from psychological understandings of affect to a more materialist, political, and discursive framework. It expands on the idea that emotions do not reside in individuals but move across bodies and texts, sticking to signs of difference. Fan spaces leverage this circulation, producing collective affect around fat/queer/neurodivergent characters as acts of both pleasure and resistance.

In addition, Platforms like Tumblr or other digital archives operate on what is loosely theorised as 'networked performances.' The idea is developed by T.L. Cowan and Jasmine Rault. Their analysis of trans-feminist and queer (TFQ) grassroots performance makes clear that what occurs onstage and in physical spaces only attains its full political and affective force when it is 'digitised,' 'networked,' and is 'online' as part of what they term 'networked intimate publics.'[72] In this framework, every video clip, zine issue, Tumblr post, or listserv thread ceases to be a mere record and instead becomes itself a site of performance, an archive of negotiated intimacies that circulates emotions (vulnerability, joy, risk) across overlapping social and technical networks. In this light, fan-driven zine runs and Tumblr publics enact a form of narrative disobedience, functioning as performative, affective archives whose practices of posting, reblogging, and selective omission serve as archival gestures that both remember and erase, thereby enacting an ethics of care and strategic ephemerality that resist and rework dominant storytelling conventions in fan cultures.

Embodiment as epistemology in Afrofuturist and neurodivergent SF

Alongside fan cultures, Afrofuturist and neurodivergent speculative texts offer frameworks where marginal embodiment is not merely represented but foundational to epistemic and narrative possibility. Works by Nnedi Okorafor, Nalo Hopkinson, and Rivers Solomon centre bodies historically pathologised, fat, queer, disabled, not as tragic or symbolic, but as sacred and world-making. Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* exemplifies this.[73] Aster, the neurodivergent, gender nonconforming protagonist, navigates the violent hierarchies of a generation ship through sensory attunement and affective memory. Her difference is not framed as deficit but as a counter-epistemology: a way of knowing that ruptures the logics of colonial rationality. Aster deciphers trauma through the body, reading systemic oppression not in data or command chains, but in residue, ritual, and relational memory. Her ritualised mapping of the ship's fractured corridors, where she 'traces the fissures in Deck 10, reminding the unborn of their ancestors,' functions as ontological repair by literally reassembling erased

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[71] Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies,' *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004), https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117.

[72] T.L. Cowan and Jasmine Rault. 'Onlining queer acts: Digital research ethics and caring for risky archives.' *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 28, no. 2 (2018), 121, 133, https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2018.1473985.

[73] Rivers Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (Akashic Books, 2017).

communal histories.[74] In doing so, she not only heals individual trauma but also reclaims the ship itself as a living archive, knitting together past violences and future possibilities into a unified, sensorially grounded world. What is 'repaired' is not just the self but the narrative field itself, which shifts from heroic arc to affective archive.

As Alexis Pauline Gumbs's speculative work reminds us, such bodies are not merely sites of resistance; they are kin to land, water, and ancestral memory.[75] Gumbs's eco-Black poetics foreground fat, disabled, and Black femmes as oceanic beings, fluid, sacred, and resilient, complicating the anthropocentric, disembodied future in favour of a speculative ecology rooted in interdependence.

Land, ceremony, and radical presence in Indigenous futurisms

Indigenous speculative traditions also depart radically from western science fiction's teleological arc. As Grace Dillon notes, these narratives refuse the notion of futurity as a rupture from the past. Instead, they offer cyclical, recursive, and ceremonial temporalities grounded in land-based knowledge and kinship with more-than-human life.[76] In works such as Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning,*[77]and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves,*[78] fat, disabled, or neurodivergent embodiment is not erased but integrated into survival practices. Ceremony, affect, and relational ethics are treated as technologies in themselves; they are non-instrumental, spiritual, and often anti-linear. These stories enact what might be called radical presence: an insistence on survival that does not aspire to cure, correct, or optimise, but rather affirm cultural specificity, corporeal diversity, and intergenerational memory.

While crip futurity, as theorised by Alison Kafer, begins from bodily precarity and refuses assimilation into ableist timelines, Indigenous radical presence refuses the very foundation of settler temporality.[79] A crip time may leak, pause, or drift, but Indigenous time spirals, structured by ceremony and the land's memory. Despite differing genealogies, both frameworks dismantle techno-teleology and assert that survival itself is a speculative act.

Speculative ethics and reclaiming futurity

Across these formations—fan archives, Afrofuturist imaginaries, and Indigenous temporalities—a common commitment emerges—a reclamation of narrative as a site of speculative ethics, where questions of who counts, who persists, and what conditions are central. These texts and communities do not merely *represent* marginal bodies; they recalibrate genre logics through fatness, queerness, neurodivergence, and non-normative kinship.

Crip futurity, as Kafer asserts, refuses streamlined embodiment and rational cognition, embracing leaky, grieving, interdependent lives. Likewise, speculative fat studies, as theorised by Pausé and Cooper, reveal how anti-fatness structures not just aesthetic representation, but

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[74] Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts,* 142.

[75] Kennedy Dragt, 'After and with the End of the World: Alexis Pauline Gumbs' Speculative Poetics as Spiritual Practice.' *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 29, no. 1 (4 Mar. 2025), https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2025.2471279.

[76] Grace L. Dillon, 'Imagining Indigenous Futurism,' in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction,* ed. Grace L. Dillon (University of Arizona Press, 2012), 2.

[77] Rebecca Roanhorse, *Trail of Lightning* (Saga Press, 2018).

[78] Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (Cormorant Books, 2017).

[79] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.

the algorithmic, architectural, and affective contours of futurity itself.[80] In this sense, science fiction becomes more than a narrative form. It becomes a moral architecture, an arena of cultural R&D where futures are tested, discarded, remade. The stakes are no longer about inclusion, but about inventing epistemologies, temporalities, and ontologies that normative futurism cannot contain. From zines to Indigenous cosmologies, the margins are not peripheral; they are prototyping the worlds to come.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have argued that conventional science fiction—exemplified by *Gattaca* and *Dune*—not only aestheticises sleek, 'optimised' futures but systematically marginalises fat, queer, and neurodivergent embodiments, casting them as inefficiencies to be corrected or excesses to be discarded. These mainstream narratives reinforce ableist and fatphobic logics under the guise of technological progress, aligning with neoliberal ideals of productivity, control, and seamlessness. In contrast, counter-narratives such as *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, *Sense8*, *The Murderbot Diaries*, and the *Wayfarers* series offer alternative visions grounded in bodily diversity, interdependence, and affective kinship. These works do not merely insert marginalised bodies into the dominant futurist paradigm; they disrupt its very foundations. By foregrounding messiness, multiplicity, and emotional labour, they enact a speculative solidarity that queers not only characters but narrative form itself. Building on crip theory, fat studies, and feminist science fiction, I have proposed a paradigm shift—from a genre preoccupied with idealised, streamlined bodies to a coalitional praxis of speculative embodiment. This shift marks a crucial intervention in both science fiction criticism and embodied politics. The most radical work being done in the genre today is not the imagining of AI singularities or space-faring empires, but the quiet, persistent reimagining of who gets to survive—and how—in the futures we dare to build.

To queer the algorithm, then, is not simply to subvert its outputs, but to reconfigure its underlying logic. It is to resist the narrative and technological architectures that render certain bodies invisible, undesirable, or unthinkable. Instead, queering the algorithm proposes an entirely different structure of futurity—one built on access, care, relational ethics, and the affirmation of bodily difference. This is not an abstract proposition but a material and narrative practice already emerging in fan-driven archives, Afrofuturist and Indigenous worldbuilding, and crip/fat speculative traditions. Across these sites, we glimpse the ethical imperative that animates the most vital speculative work today: to design futures where nobody is treated as excess.

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[80] Cooper, *Fat Activism*; Pausé and Taylor, *The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies*.

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