

As Alain Badiou explains in *Philosophy For Militants*, "In any period of time, in any sequence of history, it is important that we maintain a relationship with what exceeds our possibilities—with what, as an idea, exists beyond the natural needs of the human animal. In crucial experiences, such as the construction of love, artistic creations, scientific discoveries or political sequences, we are offered the chance of exceeding the limits of our vital and social determinations. Within our own humanity, we must come to terms with the obscure, violent and—at the same time—luminous and peaceful element of inhumanity within the human element itself."

Badiou characterises our relationship with crucial experiences as heroic because he believes that such experiences make a decisive break from our current mode of unblinkered survival under the thumb of capitalism in order to maintain a relationship with the impossible, the utopian and the abstract. In this way, crucial experiences aspire towards the highest calibre of human capacity. Like art, science fiction fits the criteria of such an experience in its prerogative to examine and imagine a new potential for humanity's shared capacity. Science fiction accomplishes this by projecting that capacity into a completely improbable context, into galaxies light years away. Against such fantastic constructs, the context of our current experience shrinks dramatically in significance. Science fiction's foreign worlds, life forms, logics and capacities provide the enthusiast with a yardstick to measure humankind against, whether it is through the blunt predictions of speculative realism or the pure dystopic destruction porn of the post-apocalypse. These impossible constructs become a petri dish in which human logic and form is exaggerated, extended over time and space, and combined with impossible variables so as to interrogate its properties, to examine our best and worst traits.

It is this ability which led one of the greatest sci-fi novelists of the English speaking world—Octavia E. Butler—to declare that science fiction is "... potentially the freest genre in existence." It functions as a crucial experience, able to define itself within the potential of infinite possibility. This could not be more at odds with the current hegemony of neoliberalism, which reduces possibility and freedom to the consumer's right of choice. In this world, we are encouraged to forget about the bigger picture and are actively rewarded for restricting our focus to capitalism's ever-present present, in which self-sustenance at all costs and at any expense is the sole objective. Within this situation, it is not difficult to see why science fiction (when it's good), as with Badiou's other crucial experiences, requires a scope of vision that is capable of harnessing real revolutionary potential. Of course, science fiction doesn't automatically work towards emancipatory ends, and Ursula Le Guin famously warns us against the underlying conservatism at play within a sci-fi story that cannot imagine a future universe without the existence of the police state. However, when it is 'crucial', science fiction is more urgent than ever, as the ways in which we survive and function in total service to the economy increasingly stifle our imagination and our capacity to ask 'What if?'

Science Fiction is, wrongly in my opinion, conflated with the fantasy genre as escapist, a day dream for those who cannot deal with 'real life' (whatever that means). But as is demonstrated within the works of *Space Junk Alert*, art and science fiction are both capable of bringing to the surface that which is currently beyond the human capacity—but not beyond its imagination—to witness in the world around us. Whether science fiction functions within these works as an ongoing influence for the artist, as a subtle, indirect inspiration or as simply something new and special to pay homage to, *Space Junk Alert* proves that the relationship between science fiction and visual art is a seamless, dynamic and relevant conversation. As crucial experiences, what art and science fiction reveal is our capacity to exceed ourselves, no matter how confronting this exercise may be. Because as Arthur C. Clarke observed in his masterwork *2001: A Space Odyssey*, "Someone had once said that you could be terrified in space but you could not be worried there. It was perfectly true."

— Carmen Ansaldo