MUTANT MEDIA–DEFORMING CODES OF HUMAN VARIATION BETWEEN 1904 AND 1964

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the social structures, laws, and censorship bodies that attempted to limit access to representations of bodymind variation in the first half of the 20th century. It begins by reading into the ways that disability and human variation is stigmatized through connections to queerness, colonized nations, and race. This dissertation focuses on three distinct media–pulps, film, and comics–and the laws which attempted to regulate them– "ugly laws," The Hays Code, and the Comics Code Authority. I argue that these regulatory strategies had a threefold impact on the representation of disability across media. First, they attempted to constrain and domesticate representations of disability as a private matter. Second, they created a spectacle of bodymind variation by continuously amplifying the threat of mutants on normative humanity. Third, they created a desire for mutant representation in audiences which blurred the line between a disgusting other and a desirable subject position. This dissertation follows the ways in which mutation and difference pivoted from the horrific and disgusting to a desirable identity among science fiction fans. The mutants of the pulps created a space in which bodymind variation shifted from a stigmatized subject position to a mantle of power–a threat to those who seemed not to understand. Science fiction films rely on the introduction of anxieties–through multiple sensoria–that are connected to social and cultural values which must then be resolved by the conclusion of the film. Science fiction comics intertwine fear, disgust, and potential to circumnavigate the Comic Book Code of 1954, maintaining a space for bodymind variance through fraught practices. While mutant media between 1904 and 1964 rendered human variation as something to be sought out and consumed for pleasure, they also amplified eugenic assumptions about its threat to normative reproduction.

This dissertation is dedicated to the people who fill my every day with variation: Jessica and Cordelia Stokes.

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Introduction

The Mutant(s) Among You

It is with no small amount of bias that I enter into this dissertation and project that tracks the early history of mutants in science fiction. Through a lifetime of injury, spanning collision with vehicles, flesh-eating bacterial infection, and the revelation of my own highly-acidic blood through manifestation of crystals in my joints, I've come to understand that my genes, and to a certain extent my phenotypic presentation, are different from your own, dear reader.[1] I present with two ribs more than the average human, two additional bones in my feet, and a mutation in my SLC2A9 gene that causes accumulation of uric acid in my blood.

It was not my intent at the outset of this project to create this chronology of mutants and their practices for deforming what humanity signified across the first half of the twentieth century. Instead, my focus had not been on this time period, nor even mutants. This dissertation began as an interrogation into the highly transformative time in science fiction (sf) that occurred in the early 1970s and 80s. At this time, the so-called 'hard' sf of the so-called 'golden age' was waning, to be replaced by authors attentive to the ways that culture, society, and human interaction impacted the possible futures that could be speculated upon in the genre. I set out to understand the mutation of science fiction itself from an ossified set of practices and generic tropes to an era of great mutation and potential.

I looked to the 1970s and 1980s to follow the careers of authors that I would argue transformed sf from a niche (but established) genre into the mainstream and wide-ranging popular culture phenomenon that it is today: Ursula K. LeGuin, Lois McMaster Bujold, Samuel

1 Within a reasonable probability, at least. This dissertation is meant to welcome as many varieties of humanity to its pages as possible.

Delany, and Octavia Butler. These authors, publishing between 1970 and 1989, fundamentally altered the genes of sf by increasing the phenotypic presentation of women, people of color, and disabled characters–all with nuanced and developed storylines. Each author, from different perspectives, reframes what human and more than human interaction can look like. They also mediate on novel new approaches to kinship, companionship, and familial arrangements. Le Guin's questioning of biological essentialism–of race, of gender, of sex–upset the assumptions that existed about the connections between genes and social structures. The work of Lois McMaster Bujold offered disabled characters–especially the central figure of Miles VorKosigan–the opportunity to flourish not as stock figures supporting others, but as intricate, complicated people utilizing social and physical supports. Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler's contributions to sf and the representation of blackness in the future fill multiple books of theory and anthologies already.[2] The work undertaken at this time to reorient humanity's ideas about the future and who belonged in it are many, detailed, and thorough. Similarly, the scholarship about this period is also rich. Looking back on this time period in a retrospective published in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, Charles R. Saunders notes that one of the problems he wanted to call out in sf was "what little [representation of black characters] there was tended… to conform to the negative stereotypes endemic to other literary genres and, indeed other media" (398). There were small pockets in which change was taking place, but it was a nascent and growing movement. Sami Schalk, writing in *Bodyminds Reimagined*, spends a chapter on Butler's work in *Kindred* and notes the importance of Butler's work to intersectional understandings of the way that gender, disability, and blackness work to

[2] See: Ytasha L. Womack's *Afrofuturism*, Sheree R. Thomas' *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, Sami Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* and many, many others.

transform readers' understandings of the ways bodyminds are represented in Black women's speculative fiction. She notes that "*Kindred*'s temporality of disability… refuses to follow simplistic and ableist conventions of a before and after binary constructed as a single directional loss" (50). This recognition of the work being done in Butler's 1979 publication highlights how some science fiction of the 1970s and 1980s was already undertaking the necessary labor of complicating racialized and disabled narratives–often in this time collapsed into simple conversations of loss and eventual death.

It had been my hope to situate a nuanced engagement with human variation from the perspective of disability studies into this conversation. I intended to trace the connections between early writers of human variation–Delany and Butler–to Lois McMaster Bujold's extended focus on disability and reproduction. Following this rich intersectional turn towards sociology, culture, and community, I planned to address questions of reproduction and its disruptions. Indeed, a fundamental point of stress in the VorKosigan Saga[3] is the reproduction of disability, the stigmatization of mutation, and the question of what constitutes a family unit. As I sought examples of physical, cognitive, and genetic difference in this time period, however, I found myself encountering two significant complications—the excessive over-representation of white, masculine mutants in the *X-Men* comics, and the near absence of other mutant narratives. To redress these complications took the dissertation in a completely different direction, one which spanned multiple archives–including the Browne Popular Culture Library in Bowling Green and the wealth of comics in Michigan State University's special collections.

To figure out where all the mutants went and why so many of them were hyper-able-bodied white men took five years of research and opened for me the window of time that this

[3] The collection of Lois McMaster Bujold's books that focus on Miles VorKosigan and his parents.

dissertation focuses on: 1904 to 1964. This period of time–which I refer to as the mutagenic window of science fiction–opens with the publication of H.G Wells' "The Country of the Blind" in *The Strand Magazine* in April 1904 and closes with the cinematic release of Sidney Salkow and Ubaldo B. Ragona's *The Last Man on Earth* in March of 1964. During this time, the representation of human variety in American culture became especially fraught, as the presentation of racial difference, disability, and women[4] were frequently scrutinized and censored. As central historicizing points, this dissertation addresses the legal structures erected to contain the representation of human variation in popular culture: so-called "Ugly-Laws," The Motion Picture Production Code (The Hays Code), and the Comics Code of 1954. Each of these structures, rather than being the sole source of censorship, represent the constriction of social and cultural values enshrined in a particular moment.

Less monolithic structures of power, they are bellwethers that guided public opinion under the guise of moral superiority, legal precedent, or pseudoscientific necessity. As such, they become generative sites for understanding why human variation, expressed through mutants, created significant friction at given moments and in particular media. Following the mutagenic window through these moments in time creates an image of the mutant as it adapts to time, society, and creative practice. Beginning with nebulous threats to white colonial power, the mutant as a symbol adapted to repeated attempts at censorship by becoming a twisted image of the censor–moving from practices of encoding that rendered the mutant racialized, feminized, and disabled to a state of existing in the image of white, hyper-able-bodied men.

This series of transformations underscores several key aspects of mutants, as well as the ways in which sustained attention to their presence could alter the fields of science fiction

[4] And their sexuality.

studies, transmedia studies, and cultural studies.[5] First, this history of mutants demonstrates the presence and proliferation of representation of human variety throughout early sf. Second, by reading against the grain, it demonstrates the simultaneous desire for and disgust about mutants in popular culture; the mutant is fearful only so far as it is coded as outside of a very limited conversation of who is 'human.' Finally, this intricately-woven lineage allows for a refocus on the mutant as a site of potential kinship and collaboration. If both oppressive social structures and their resistors can find kinship in this symbol, how/might it be leveraged as a space to rethink the importance of human variation?

In order to differentiate[6] humanity and mutants for the scope of this dissertation, I turn to the work of Black cultural theorists Sylvia Wynter, Alexander G. Weheliye, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, whose work on humanity and its porous boundaries trace decades of political and philosophical argumentation about who is permitted to claim the title of human. Jamaican critic, philosopher and scholar Sylvia Wynter argues that one of the primary sites of cultural contestation around humanity is Western bourgeois masculinity: "Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" (Wynter 260). This overrepresentation articulates centuries of Western cultural assumptions that put wealth, whiteness, ability, and masculinity at the peak of the category of human, and alternatives to any of these categories at the nadir. In her work thinking through "The Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," she describes the fraught nature of humanity as an organizing category and how it has been and continues to be used to exclude many people from humanity.

Wynter notes that the way humanity is divided into Man and other is "one that defines us biocentrically on the model of a natural organism, with this a priori definition serving to orient

[5] Something that these fields have yet been unable to do.
[6] If only for a moment.

and motivate the individual and collective behaviors by means of which our contemporary Western world-system or civilization, together with its nation-state units, are stably produced and reproduced" (296). This stable reproduction is precisely where mutants, both literary and figurative, intervene. Mutants challenge the implied and assumed stability of white, nondisabled men as the most desirable form of humanity by repeatedly threatening Man and its stable reproduction. Mutants must necessarily come from within humanity–including the overrepresented Man–and exist beyond it. Mutants, for the scope of this dissertation, are the figures that threaten humanity's stable reproduction from within–entities whose bodies, minds, and/or cultures have human origins but undermine the limited white, nondisabled, masculine futures imagined in sf. As aberrant figures, mutants arise as the result of unexpected change and include figures that have been transformed, deformed, and otherwise removed from the category of humanity *and* which are capable of reproducing this transformation, deformation, or removal from humanity.

Wynter distills the struggle of Man-as-humanity and the full scope of human variation into a hierarchical frame by looking first to the behavior of nonwhite groups entering the United States in the twentieth century and then expands this understanding into a central struggle of Man versus Human. Wynter emphasizes that a key element of being considered as close to Man as possible meant "incoming new nonwhite/non-Black groups" were invested in "putting visible distance between themselves and the Black population group (in effect, claiming 'normal' human status by distancing themselves from the group that is still made to occupy the nadir)" (Wynter 261). In this hierarchizing of humankind, Wynter emphasizes the positionality of race, sexuality, and ability in the logic of struggling for "normal" human status, where white, masculine ability occupies the position closest to so-called "normal." As such, the ideal of

humanity becomes this alleged norm, and deviation from any or all of these markers indicated a shift away from this pinnacle. In this way, Wynter argues that "all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources… these are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle" (260-1). In this struggle, Wynter emphasizes that attention and resources are focused on ensuring the reproduction of a single, limited idea of humanity at the expense of curtailing difference. The struggle here is the focus of homogenizing humanity and privileging one set of ideals at the expense of variation.

This dissertation argues that variation is both a fundamental aspect of humanity and that the reproduction of one form of human at the expense of variation–in literature as well as material existence–stigmatizes and materially impacts the stable reproduction of humanity and its oh-so-necessary differences. The ongoing struggle between "normal" Man and humanity in all of its variation, difference, and resistance is part of the oft-ignored and overlooked affective potential of the mutant. Because of the limits placed around the ideals of normalcy, Man is a fragile entity regularly threatened by the transformative potential of mutation. The reproduction of Man's projected normalcy relies on the presumption that 'normal' as a rhetorical position can be equated with concepts such as 'healthy,' 'powerful,' and 'desirable.' The relationship between humanity and Man is in a constant state of mutation, then, because the mutant is in a constantly oscillating position of being simultaneously framed as *less-than* Man while simultaneously being its *greatest threat*. It's the power of difference and variation, an inherent aspect of humanity broadly defined and the mutant in particular, that exists outside of Man.

Mutant stories as singular narratives often follow a predictable trajectory. A well-established[7] white, nondisabled man discovers or creates a mutant. The mutant, as a threat to the man, must be contained, cured, or destroyed. After a struggle, the man is saved and restored to its position as the primary figure of humanity. Unit by unit, these stories often act to reify and re-institute the importance of Man. What arises in the repetition of these stories, however, is something else entirely. In the genre of pulp fiction, both the threats that mutants pose and their stories have to become increasingly more thrilling. This means mutants must become more and more powerful, more and more different, and more and more difficult to contain, cure, or destroy. As these stories build on one another, the imposing figures of greater variation become not only more thrilling, they become more desirable until readers and viewers who once associated with Man choose to associate with the more powerful entity–the mutant. By presenting variation as a valid threat and as a continually evolving and accelerating one, mutants become one way in which variations of humanity take hold as a desirable spectacle and potential future and also become a desirable position for now-threatened Man to occupy.

The cultural and social argumentation that Wynter establishes is further entwined with disability studies and disability aesthetics by Black scholar and teacher of black literature and culture Alexander G. Weheliye, who addresses the biopolitical collapse of race and disability as it relates to the overrepresentation of Man. Weheliye notes that "all modern racism is biological, first, because it maintains the believed natural—often evolutionary—inferiority of the targeted subjects and, second, because racialization is instituted, as elucidated by Wynter, in the realm of human physiology as the sociogenic selection of one specific group in the name of embodying all humanity" (59-60). Within sf, this "specific group" is written and rewritten as the white,

[7] Through education, wealth, or ancestry.

Western, nondisabled Man as distinct from other forms of humanity. Mutants, then, trouble where the distinction might possibly be made between humanity, Man, and whatever may come next. By constantly and repeatedly shifting, mutants trouble the biopolitical divide of which variations of humanity can be removed to constitute the norm and which should be retained in the interest of greater social diversity and potential.

In her book, *becoming human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson addresses the ways that race in particular is entwined in conversations of humanity and posits the work of African diasporic literature as a way to disrupt the alleged scale between animal, blackness, and human. Looking back centuries, Jackson draws on cultural anthropology and historians of American practices of enslavement to argue "the delineation between species has fundamentally hinged on the question of reproduction; in other words, the limit of the human has been determined by how the means and scene of birth are interpreted" (4). Jackson turns to the question of reproduction not to insist on folding Black womanhood back into humanity, but to argue that historical formations of humanity–especially in terms of man–rely on practices of exclusion that specifically target Black womanhood and reproduction as sites of exclusion for humanity. For Jackson, this recognition then mobilizes a complication and search for something outside of the limited structure of human and animal, somewhere more capacious. In addressing race and gender, Jackson specifically calls on mutation, noting "our current hegemonic, 'universalist' conception of 'man' is a mutation of prior metaphysical conceptions of being… I would qualify this insight by insisting that this mutation was and remains an effect of slavery, conquest, and colonialism" (25). In framing the argument about man as a mutation from earlier religious and pseudoscientific systems, Jackson gestures to the inherent instability of the category itself. The present hegemonic system that privileges whiteness, nondisability, and

masculinity acquired these traits from imperial, Christian, enslaving forebears. For this system to then, willingly, take on the mantle of mutation–and the related stigma–in the mid-twentieth century is wildly counter-intuitive. As such, this dissertation takes on the labor to understand how mutation could so thoroughly subsume the hegemonic structures propping up 'man' as the assumed ideal form of humanity.

In an ideal world, this would be a solely backward-looking endeavor. However, Peter McAllister's 2009 book, *Manthropology* models an ongoing fascination with hierarchical approaches to ranking humanity. The book opens with the provocation, written to modern men, "we are, in fact, the sorriest cohort of masculine *Homo sapiens* to ever walk the planet… in these times of masculine crises-of falling sperm counts, accelerating job losses, waning libidos, and fading masculine relevance" (1). Using this as a frame for his research, McAllister then compares figures of contemporary weightlifters, athletes, average male sexual performance, and men as parents to anthropological records that span mathematical calculations of Neanderthal strength, travel narratives of europeans visiting Africa in early colonial voyages, and observations of Indigenous Pacific Island communities. Across these comparisons, McAllister finds, somehow, that the average man is not better than these idealized images of peak performance. What is particularly interesting about this collection is that it reads with about the same punch, vigor, and vague scientific trappings of early 20th century pulps, complete with the implication that men everywhere are threatened by these examples of non-European figures from around the world. The text ends with a similar, vaguely-eugenic exhortation to restore men to their seemingly never-realized position at the pinnacle of humanity: "the dismal results outlined in this book can be traced to three causes: culture, ontogenetics, and genetics. The first two we can do something about; it's the third that's the problem" (284). McAllister argues that the

softness of contemporary men needs to be addressed through action and will to live up to the genetic potential of men. He bemoans that the state of modern men as "entirely the product of our modern sloth and inactivity. We never give our bodies or minds the stimulation–be it mechanical or intellectual–they need to fully realize the potential encoded in our genotypes" (287). This current example stands as a testament to the ongoing interest in maintaining an implied genetic superiority that is unrealized and under threat from the outside. The text assumes that the ideal form of man is one that is excessively hypermasculine: muscular, athletic, violent, and libidinous. In order to move away from this limited vision, this dissertation turns towards the mutant as a way to offer alternatives, as a way to find the value and potential in other arrangements of being.

Somewhere in between the ideals of this dissertation and McAllister's ideal Man is the work of Armand Marie Leroi. In his 2003 book, *MU(T)AN(T)S: On Genetic Variety and the Human Body*. Leroi spends a great deal of time threading the conceptual needle on the fact of human variety and mutation while addressing the historic ways in which factual knowledge of variation has been erroneously applied to the concept of race. Over the course of the text, Leroi points out the ways that human variation has alternately been demonized, cataloged, and otherwise rendered as data meant to serve existing conceptions of race and ability. While the focus of the text is "rare mutations that damage the body," Leroi notes that the more important subject that he wants to understand is "the normal variation in human appearance and attributes" (336). This interest, in the inherent variation of humanity, aligns with that of this dissertation. In his concluding remarks, Leroi emphasizes that "generations of scientists[8]… asserted that, as far as genetics is concerned, races do not exist. They are reifications, social constructs, or else they

[8] Since the 1960s.

are remnants of discredited ideologies" (338). In this treatise on variation, Leroi is careful to address the line between genetic variation and the fiction of race. The focus in the text is on the ways that bodies shift, curve, and manifest in the miniscule fraction of genetic information that varies according to ancestry. This dissertation, in turn, takes up the social elements of variation and the perceived significance of difference. In the realm of the social construct, how has the genetic presence of mutants been repeatedly taken up and amplified in stories in ways that continue to fascinate the imagination and to divide humans into categories?

As I turn to the archive of mutant stories, I focus on narratives that explicitly address mutants as transformations of humanity. However, the archive is replete with figures that straddle this distinction. Case in point: Andre Norton's[9] "All Cats Are Gray." This story, originally published in *Fantastic Universe* and later collected as part of Lisa Yaszek's *The Future is Female*, follows the mysteriously brilliant, gray-haired Steena. Steena is a computer scientist and frequenter of space bars, where she dispenses wisdom, tips, and care to down-on-their-luck spacers. Following along on one tip, Steena helps rags-to-barely-keeping-it-together salvager Cliff Moran to secure the legendary salvage of the ship *The Empress of Mars*. As the two explore the derelict pleasure-cruiser, Steena realizes that the ship is occupied by a creature–perhaps alien, perhaps multidimensional–that is invisible. Or at least it would be to anyone who doesn't have her mutation. The creature is a shade of gray that is visible to her own form of color-blindness. Color-blindness is, most often, an inherited genetic mutation. The story concludes with her blasting of the semi-invisible creature, marriage to Cliff, and life of lavish fortune; this is the end specifically because, "as we have been told, happy marriages need no chronicles" (235). Such a tale stands out to me in this project, as it aligns along a series of

[9] Originally published under the pen name Andrew North.

interesting intersections in science fiction. It is a story with a woman protagonist, written by a woman author, and features a character who has a disability from a mutation prominently. What makes it difficult to situate is that neither the disability nor the mutation are stigmatized or emphasized–instead, what I am left with is an exceptional story that exemplifies attention to disability and ascribes value to variety. Most of the mutants discussed in this dissertation are not so fortunate. They chronicle the difficult, and much more frequent, representation of mutation as threat.

In order to fully understand the intersectional forces that prop up conceptions of normativity, whiteness, and ability, this dissertation relies on the work of disability theorists who address the material impacts of disability representation in media. By turning to the work of disability theory, disability aesthetics, and aesthetic nervousness, this dissertation creates a system of knowing, approaching, and valuing variation that begins to address the mutant from a standpoint of veneration rather than stigmatization.

Disability Aesthetics and Human Variety

In the 2019 collection of essays *The Matter of Disability: Materiality, Biopolitics, Crip Affect*, editors and contributors build an understanding of the ways that disabled characters and the presentation of human variation materially impact the humans being presented. In their introduction, the editors turn to disability as a material and socially charge site in order to enact "a substantive theoretical reworking of the repetitive employment of impaired—read: socially marked and biologically determined as undesirable—bodies as diagnostic tools of things gone awry in their social and environmental contexts" (2). In this context, they argue that there is a long history of using disability solely for the sake of the narratives of nondisabled

characters/ideas/ideals,[10] and that this legacy can be altered by looking towards the ways in which lived disabled existence transforms the world and the ways in which the presence of disabled characters transform literature and other media. In building this argumentation, the editors of the text point out that disability as a category has undergone multiple changes and associations with intersectional identities, adding that "colonialism, projected fantasies of non-normative embodiment, Christian crusading, the rise of capitalism, and global conquest form the support pillars of European imperial fantasies from 1493 onward" (16). They argue that hegemonic power systems insist on the disability of other cultures, genders, bodies, and ways of being in the world in order to justify violent forms of cure, containment, or destruction. Historically enacted, this has created the implied understanding that those who do not fit the pillars of normative 'man' are in some way always already disabled in some way. These practices relied on the unspoken assumption that such differences were inherent, natural, or scientifically evident rather than socially constructed.

It is necessary to follow the ways in which this assumption of "natural" characteristics of race became codified as "normal" through scientific structures and practices,[11] especially within interpretations of Mendel's genetic inheritance. In his text *White,* Richard Dyer emphasizes this trend as part of a discourse on embodiment, noting that "all concepts of race, emerging out of eighteenth century materialism, are concepts of bodies, but all along they have had to be reconciled with notions of embodiment and incarnation" (14). In this passage, Dyer addresses the ways that materialist discourse of bodies assumed that difference in phenotypical presentation

[10] This brief summary is fully elucidated in *Narrative Prosthesis Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Mitchell and Snyder 2001.

[11] Recent examples of this tracking of the ways in which racialized practices are rendered invisible through the use of technology can be found in Simone Browne's *Dark Matters* and Ruha Benjamin's *Race After Technology: The New Jim Code*.

was evidence of a form of physical or spiritual disability; such knowledge practices began from the assumption of racial difference and sought out or otherwise reified these concepts as connected to the immediate truth of the physical body. These interpretations were made possible through application of racial symbols to biological markers and thus codified rationally as invisible and internal through genetics.

In "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," Douglas C. Baynton follows the ways in which racial signifiers became conflated with disability in American narratives regarding health, wellness, and eugenics. In this chapter, Baynton notes that "Arguments for racial inequality and immigration restrictions invoked supposed tendencies to feeble-mindedness, mental illness, deafness, blindness, and other disabilities in particular races and ethnic groups" (17). The fundamental assumptions on which racial difference were argued were assumed to be biological, natural and immutable–embodied facts–resulting in proclivities for criminality, disability, and undesirability. These assumptions became codified in medical documents of the eugenic movement. In *Medical Apartheid*, Harriet Washington follows the ways in which "eugenicists invoked the term *racial hygiene* as frequently as they did the word *eugenics*, and even a cursory glance at the charts, photographs, and diagrams used to popularize eugenic ideals reveals that the unfit were 'swarthy,' 'black,' and ugly by Anglo-Saxon standards" (191). Conceptualizations of which people were fit to reproduce in American society were medically essentialized as embodied facts and socially coded using racial imagery and values.

It is this combination of gendered, racializing, and ability-based descriptors that the homogenous category of 'man' came to stand in opposition to. As opposed to recognizing the fact that a majority of being were possible, these mutually-supporting hegemonic systems instead

established a norm based on preconceived notions of who had access to education, generational wealth, and weaponry as being ideal. In the rise to World War I, Baynton notes that "By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the concept of the natural was to a great extent displaced or subsumed by the concept of normality" (18). Arguments that racial difference was a natural aspect of embodied existence became the structuring logics for the association between health and wellness with whiteness. The systematic association between disability and racial signifiers as genetic inevitabilities structured American legal practices such as immigration restrictions and anti-miscegenation laws which remained on the books until the 1970s. Discussing immigration acts and practices begun during the first world war, Baynton notes that "disabilities stood in for nationality" (27) and that the powerful eugenic discourse around undesirable bodyminds linked stigma against both skin color and disability.

While Wynter offers an understanding of the ways in which racial logics define one manner in which white, Western Man became "the norm" in the era of the pulps, Joyce L. Huff, and Martha Stoddard Holmes offer insight into the ways in which ability and masculinity were similarly folded into the excising logics of "normal" at the time. In their introduction to *A Cultural History of Disability: In the Long Nineteenth Century*, Huff and Holmes argue that "Central to nineteenth-century Western definitions of disability was the emergent concept of the norm…[Adolphe] Quetelet's distribution curve positioned those whose bodies and minds fell within the statistical majority as representative humans, while singling out deviations as error" (5). The mathematics of measuring bodies and comparing them to ideals (of white, Western, Colonial science) became a means by which some people were disqualified from Man. The practice of collecting, measuring, and archiving bodies (not as people, but as units) was a defining practice of the long nineteenth century, which Elizabeth Donaldson describes as the

"Age of the Asylum" (Donaldson 167). Through these practices in the long nineteenth century, ideals of what bodyminds were desirable and which ones were stigmatized were codified in national policy and literature as well as social practice.

Huff and Holmes describe how race, masculinity, ability, and gender became folded into a series of rational practices. These practices defined how "the management of colonial borders in response to fear of epidemics echoed on a macrocosmic level the management of the personal boundaries that defined the individual middle-class Western body" (13). Personal and national "health" became reliant on keeping out undesirable pathogens, pathogens that were in turn mapped onto those who were non-white, disabled, non-men, or some combination thereof. The body politic was conceived of as a whole, healthy self at risk from dangerous, non-"normal" invaders. Such conceptions relied on the ways in which "Women, like non-white and disabled people of both sexes, were sometimes perceived as less evolved than normate men" and how "health was so strongly linked with masculinity in the prevailing ideology that disabled men were sometimes portrayed as emasculated or feminized" (14). The association of bodily risk and health became shorthand for all forms of human variation carrying bodily risk: risk to the political body, risk to the personal body, risk to the spiritual body, and risk to the stable reproduction of man as the pinnacle of humanity.

Turning to disability aesthetics, however, troubles and inverts the stigmatizing assumption that variation, difference, and disability are practices of risk and collapse. Instead, by focusing on the potential of disharmony, dissonance, and discord to create change and to offer alternative perspectives, disability aesthetics allow a reader of sf to look at mutant stories against the grain, witnessing the potential and power of human variation. Theorists of disability aesthetics offer scaffolding to interpret mutants in sf as a powerful, transformative figure and

herald of alternate, unimagined futures. Rather than aligning standards of beauty as order, disability aesthetics emphasizes the importance of variation to beauty. Tobin Siebers notes that "Disability aesthetics prizes physical and mental *difference* as a significant value in itself. It does not embrace an aesthetic taste that defines harmony, bodily integrity, and health as standards of beauty. Nor does it support the aversion to disability required by traditional conceptions of human or social perfection" (Siebers "Disability Aesthetics" 71, my emphasis). This framework privileges the variation at the core of the mutant figure as desirable and in its own form of beauty, one that I argue transcends a disabled readership to appeal to normative readers of sf as well.

Disability aesthetics as a method for engaging these stories insists on the primacy of two practices to redress the implied and lingering violence of stories that contain or eliminate mutants who carry signifiers of stigmatized race, gender, or disability. First, this reading practice begins from a place of valuing bodily difference and its capacity for creating a body of knowledge that works in resistance to hegemonic ideals. In his chapter of *The Matter of Disability: Materiality, Biopolitics, Crip Affect*, "Disability Ecology and the Rematerialization of Literary Disability Studies," Joshua Kupetz argues that "If disability is a material-semiotic practice, it follows that representations of disability in literary fiction can produce knowledge about disability subjectivities" (54). This entanglement of representation and lived experience signals both the barbs and benefits of approaching such texts from disability aesthetics. Recognizing that the stories we tell and the images we circulate have material impacts on bodies insists that there is, in turn, a responsibility for those who deal in and revisit the legacies of rhetorical violence. In returning to stories of mutants that violently contain, cure, or destroy variation, I do so in order to recognize the acts of resistance that such stories enact when collected as a series. Disability

culture and mutants are defined by their adaptability to adverse situations, and my return to their legacy is undertaken to emphasize how the intentional pursuit of variation in an era of censorship fostered practices for survival and transformation in the latter half of the twentieth century. The second practice I use to approach sf is the insistence that sf is and has always been a body genre.

In his work on disability and disability aesthetics, Tobin Siebers argues that the body is at the center of aesthetic engagement. Siebers uses a radically open understanding of "body" in his work—the term applies equally to bodies of living humans, bodies of art, even the practices of disabled people for living in an ableist society. In this dissertation, I discuss the body as a complex entanglement of individual, social, and experiential conversations. In his early work on disability theory, Siebers argues that "the body is, first and foremost, a biological agent teeming with vital and chaotic forces. It is not inert matter subject to easy manipulation by social representation. The body is alive, which means that it is as capable of influencing and transforming social languages as they are capable of influencing and transforming it" ("Disability in Theory" 180). By looking towards bodies in early sf, I recognize that these representations encapsulate not only representations of illness, variation, and disability, but the weight of social representation made corporeal. In Siebers' work and other disability studies work which follows it, these ideas are defined by complex embodiment. Complex embodiment recognizes the interdependent networks in which bodies participate, privileging neither the subjective experience of pain nor the incorporeal but felt impacts of inaccessible social and physical spaces. In disability theory, the body is more than a physical location, but the conflux through which physical existence, social pressure, and cultural stigma flow.

Following the work of Judith Butler, I recognize that the body is always marked by societal expectations and pressures—this is further developed in work from Siebers and Robert

McRuer into the social and societal implications of conversations around and about bodies. McRuer discusses these pressures as a form of "compulsory able-bodiedness" which states that conversations around the body "assume[] in advance that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable and what we all, collectively, are aiming for" (McRuer 303). Indeed, at the level of individual stories, this is the question-and-answer format that mutant narratives follow. It is only through aggregation of their perspectives that such a question can be complicated to privilege variation. Thinking about the pressures that assume ability is not only prevalent but desirable, McRuer demonstrates that bodies must exist and react to societal pressure that often renders them illegitimate, either for pretending to be able or for moving and acting in ways that don't at least try to be able.

Using his capacious definition of bodies, Siebers narrows the definition of aesthetics to "how bodies make other bodies feel" (*Disability Aesthetics* 20). In this framework, the body (of a character, of a reader, of art, of writing, of…) is equally imbricated into aesthetic engagement. Human bodies and bodies of work engage in mutual meaning-making. Siebers does so in order to have conversations across representative bodies (works of art) as well as interpretive bodies (people reacting to art and occasionally art being defaced by people). In thinking about this interaction of sense and meaning, Siebers uses aesthetics as an ethical framework in which to redress practices of oppression that impact how bodies are felt. Siebers argues that the ways in which people feel and react to art changes how they react to people. For example, he addresses how historic paintings of dwarves as comedic elements shapes contemporary reactions to dwarves and how people reacting with disgust to a statue of a pregnant disabled woman (*Alison Lapper Pregnant*) arises from an ethics that assumes disabled people shouldn't reproduce. Using these examples, he demonstrates ways in which multiple oppressions, including sexism, racism,

classism, and ableism stem from systems that "occult… in each case the fact that the disqualified identity is socially constructed, a mere convention, representing signs of incompetence, weakness, or inferiority" (*Disability Aesthetics* 26-7). This understanding of the impact of one body on another drives my engagement with pulp fictions, comics, and films. The stories told in these media are meant to be spectacular, laden with preconceived[12] notions of how humans should interact in the interest of reproducing 'man' at the cost of curtailing human variation. In his discussion of who is disqualified from humanity, Siebers addresses the ableism that underlies symbols of inferiority and how these symbols are connected to embodied affects like disgust. This recognition of social conventions that shape how bodies are felt (or, when the representation is being crafted, expected to be interpreted) inform my affective engagements with mutants.

Ato Quayson advances the conversation of ethics and disability representation and interpretation in *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, where he identifies the ways in which the presence of non-normativity disrupts practices of recognition and cognition. Throughout the text, he demonstrates the ways in which disability narratives interrupt the expected flow of information by preventing simple cognition. He emphasizes that it is not solely a semiotic practice, but one which cannot resolve as only symbol or material, because "it is disability's rapid oscillation between a pure process of abstraction and a set of material conditions that ensures that the ethical core of its representation is never allowed to be completely assimilated into the literary-aesthetic domain" (Quayson 24). In this passage, Quayson argues that representation of disability always carries with it a material precedent (experience of or knowledge of disabled bodyminds) and material antecedents (later treatment of disabled bodyminds as a result of literary content). The ways in which disability is rendered

[12] Often, outright prejudiced

aesthetically (in text, on screen, through performance, or across comic panels) oscillate between abstractions (e.g. tropes, symbols, metaphors) and material implications (lived experience). For the scope of this dissertation, this offers the opportunity to trace the movements between social structures–those of censorship, incarceration, and/or exhibition–and representation in popular culture.

These oscillations are the result of two processes: cultural expectations of the meaning that disability narratives are expected to carry and the impacts they have on the lived experience of disabled people. The creation and display of disability is always in conversation--as panels are drawn, scenes arranged, or pages written, "every word implies the residue and echo of an anticipated response, such that the word/utterance is inescapably dialogized within itself" (Quayson 153). Using Quayson's work at the intersection of representation and aesthetics, I follow the ways that mutants shifted from stock characters of danger to humanity–via threat to the stable reproduction of man–to the ideal form of a man-after-man. In order to understand these transformations, I follow mutants not only through literary representation, but through the visual practices of comic book representation and through the visual, kinetic, and audible practices of representation that are enacted in film. My engagements with primary mutant media focus upon the social systems which presuppose meanings–often stigmatized–of mutant existence and the ways that these representations transformed these presuppositions. In so doing, I elucidate both how and why mutant narratives were so compelling that they could invert the narratives placed upon them to move from abject inhumanity to a new pinnacle form of man.

This practice offers a framework through which disability aesthetics recognizes that oppression is rooted in the devaluation of difference and obfuscation of the means by which mutant-coded bodies are devalued. It in turn creates a system in which humans of various sizes,

shapes, colors, cultures, and behaviors are instead valued for the perspective offered and transformative resistant potential encapsulated in the act of becoming the subject of a story. The practice of reading disqualification here is twofold: it involves tracking how representations of difference from an implied norm were once made aesthetically uncomfortable and acknowledging the systems that amplify this discomfort in turn reinstate the norm. In so doing, I find that mutants have a complicated and often contradictory function in science fiction–on one hand, they rely on creating *dis*comfort in science fiction audiences, often reinforcing elements of disqualification. Through their existence as spectacles and over periods of great repetition, however, they undermine this response and condition audiences to seek out greater variation in the pursuit of greater affective experience, thereby driving a desire to seek the variation which threatens the stable reproduction of man. I argue that therein lies the disruptive potential of the mutant beyond the page: by continuously testing the boundaries of humanity, they deviate and disfigure these boundaries. They ultimately upset the overrepresentation of man by becoming so desirable a subject position that those who created mutants as a warning then long to become them. Mutants do exactly what they are supposed to: disrupt the reproduction of man. However, by doing it in a way that disability aesthetics recognizes as a thrilling performance, through repeated exposure, variation becomes more desirable and the primacy of 'man' becomes less stable.

Aesthetic and affective theory is not being brought into conversation with science fiction from the outside; this dissertation draws upon an existing corpus within science fiction studies. Istvan Cscisery-Ronay does excellent work establishing and codifying aesthetics of science fiction in his *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*. Of particular importance to this conversation are his understandings of "science-fictionality." Csicery-Ronay defines science-fictionality" as

"neither a belief nor a model, but rather a mood or attitude, a way of entertaining incongruous experiences, in which judgment is suspended, as if we were witnessing the transformations happening to, and occurring in, us" (3). There are few figures as incongruous and transformative as that of the mutant. Indeed, this shifting and mutable mood is why sf in particular is the site for such monumental inversions of the desirability of difference. Understanding that the experience of sf is meant to be *felt*–body to body–Csicery-Ronay brings science fiction from the realm of ideas and ideals to the body. If science fiction is an embodied experience, as Csicery-Ronay argues, and if embodied, aesthetic experiences are a means to ethically engaging with the world, as Siebers and Quayson argue, then science fiction is the sensorial path towards ethically feeling speculative futures. Mutant science fiction, through its disfiguration of the boundaries of humanity, creates new ways to feel and connect with those who were once defined outside of one's understanding of the human and troubles why that distinction is significant anyway.

Using this bridge into the experience of science fiction, this dissertation follows how science-fictionality depends upon embodied sensation and embodied responses to mutants and mutation. This affective interaction models the oscillation Quayson describes in the unresolved semiotic-material interaction of narrative disability. Across these experiences, there is a lack of resolution, an experience of disorientation through which new meaning can be achieved, old prejudices can be reified as well as disrupted, and which excites, arouses, stimulates, and otherwise impacts readers, both contemporary to the moment they were created and in this present moment.

Such experiences of stimulation are especially tied to Csicery-Ronay's ideation of the science fictional grotesque. It is in the grotesque that he notes the dissonance between the rational and the physical. He argues that "the subject feels fearful awe at the possibility that

one's own mind—and again, the human mind in general—cannot keep up with the metamorphoses of materiality; that the categorical containments of natural physicality that we wish to see as scientific truths, and that allow us to hold physical existence at arm's length in order to elaborate unphysical, aesthetic concepts, are unstable and will undermine our thoughts by displaying to us the chaos-producing resistance of bodies to order" (188). In this generous reading of a reaction to the grotesque, Csicery-Ronay describes the respondent as one struggling to react to and ultimately change their conception, their rational framework, to accommodate difference and to re-evaluate what they assume to be scientific truths which have been demonstrated to be less-than-flawless. The grotesque is a means by which conceptual discomfort is experienced bodily, and which creates the pause in which to reflect on information presented. It is in this framework of the grotesque that the question of popular science, scientific racism, and the flexibility of rational/scientific acceptance of popular culture consumers must be tested.

It is through disability aesthetics, disability theory, and aesthetic nervousness that this dissertation establishes the mutant as a process–a transformation that functions as an emotional, cognitive, and tangible connection between the present and speculative futures. Finding the points of discomfort that destabilize the reproduction of a culture that idealizes a small subset of humanity rather than the fullness of its variety and potential allows this dissertation to track the subversive desire for change.

A wabe is the plot of grass around a sundial

In Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore's[13] story "Mimsy Were the Borogoves," published in the February 1943 edition of *Astounding*, two children escape from time and the material plane. Instructed on 4th-dimensional educational toys *accidentally* sent backwards in time, they unlock

[13] Published together under the pseudonym Lewis Padgett.

the path to another transcendental state through the–seemingly–nonsense poem of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky." Hearing his children disappear from another room, their father runs upstairs just in time to witness them travel in a direction he cannot understand, following seemingly random pieces of junk on the floor. He realizes their path was intentional, a way forward that he could not comprehend, he realizes that their process "had not been lunacy… They thought differently. They used *x* logic" (69). This *x*-logic[14] is one form of science fiction's foundational approach to storytelling, the new thing on the edge of existence. The balance of reproducing knowledge, dis/comfort, and story and producing the heretofore-unimagined is a central conflict in the genre of science fiction and the crux of its early self-reflexive criticism. The 'new thing' in a story, often achieved through some form of social, technological, or biological transformation is meant to bring readers into a state of discomfort and conceptual growth. While these children are ostensibly human in origin, I would argue that their cultural transformation disrupts the reproduction of the lineage that came before them and they take on mutant qualities through their shared reproduction of *x*-logic. It is the discomfort of this potential that aligns them with mutant fictions.

Novelty and discomfort are core elements of the aesthetic experience of science fiction. As a genre, science fiction has been theorized as a way to perceive and theorize the unknown and to make it knowable and understandable–or at least approachable. Darko Suvin, in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction,* defines science fiction as "a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment (Suvin 37). To frame this aesthetically, Suvin locates science fiction in

[14] Or x-factor, or *World of Ā*…

the sensation of being estranged from one's world and critically reflecting on that sensation of estrangement. This is accomplished via a device (an idea, concept, narrative, etc.) that is contrary to the factual conditions the experiencer is living through. This device is often simplified into the concept of the "novum" or "new thing." For Suvin, science fiction is the means by which "the new" can be folded cognitively into the present.

Within the conventions of science fiction history and theory, mutation disrupts established understandings of what science fiction is and how it works. Much of contemporary science fiction theory follows Darko Suvin's positioning of the genre around "the novum." The presence and practice of the mutant, however, is not a wholly new thing–it is a transformation that comes from within empirical existence–mutants are factual. Mutants and mutation demonstrate the inherent connection to what is estranged in a way that does not allow an sf novum to be put back once it is experienced. Mutants insist and provide evidence that variation already exists—even when not apparent to empirical observers. It also insists that the audience is a responsible party (much like a parent) in shaping speculative futures. This responsibility is the driving force behind the affective impact of the mutant. While other sf practices are marked by alterity, isolation, and otherness, the mutant insists on an immediate relationality to the audience.

From pulp stories to comics to films in the early twentieth century, the mutant is a recurring figure that evokes a multiplicity of embodied reactions and affects: disgust, surprise, fear, contempt, and fascination among them. The mutant falls by the wayside as perhaps too unruly a figure to be contained by theory. Indeed, tracing the boundaries of the mutant for this dissertation has been like working with a non-Newtonian fluid; it can only be held onto when in motion. For the scope of the dissertation, the key distinguishing features of the mutant are twofold, that the entities/concepts/practices are human in origin (often the result of unanticipated

or unintentional transformation) and that the entities/concepts/practices disrupt the stable reproduction of Man. The mutant does not come from distant stars, nor is it manufactured in part or whole. The mutant represents for humanity the potential for change from within and threatens the bodily integrity of Man. The mutant threatens this disruption through its self-reproduction and through its capacity to disrupt practices of categorization that have historically bound who can be called human. In this way, the mutant embodies what is best of humanity–variation, difference, and adaptation–while contesting the idealization of the homogeneity that is Man.

Unlike the cyborg or automaton, the mutant is not fabricated. The figures of the cyborg and automaton are engagements between a presumed-to-be-stable human figure and technology. Automatons and robots are technological figures (or objectified former humans) that have been central to discussions of the loss of humanity, especially in a modernized, technological society. Robots and automatons similarly stand in for humans who have been reduced to laboring bodies in conversations of labor, capitalism, and mass production. Cyborgs occupy similar conversations, complicating the boundaries of the interface between human and technological advancement. The mutant, however, is recognizably of human origin and an organism unto itself. While mutants may have powers, be caught up in technological futures, or be measured by their capacity to perform labor, they are deeply embodied figures that are meant to enrich the variety of humanity and trouble the future of Man.

Beyond the literary level of mutation, it is worth noting that mutants themselves have already–on more than one occasion–transformed the genre of science fiction itself. Every time that science fiction dies, it seems, mutants are to blame. In their book *The World Beyond the Hill*, Alexei and Cory Panshin point to a famous mutant, The Mule from Isaac Aasimov's *Foundation*, and argue that "'The Mule' marks the end of science fiction, and the end of our story of the myth

of science fiction" (648). In this proclamation of the end of science fiction, the Panshin brothers speak of transcendence–humanity and its stories had transcended the perceived barrier between the growing and complex animals that we were into the technologically superior entities that had harnessed the power of the atom. The Mule's existence as a mutant within the stories of *Foundation* destabilized the 'novum' of psychohistory, the idea that behaviors of humans could generally be predicted. This unpredictability was amplified by the Mule's intervention into the genre, defying science and technology in the form of biological and emotional messiness.[15] For the Panshin brothers, the schism that the Mule emphasizes is the fact that humans in reality now live among atomic power, and that the next step of the genre is to address the internal, psychic elements of this stage of human development.

The Mule was finished shortly after Germany surrendered in World War II; another central story of human transcendence and mutation, *The World of Ā* was in serialization when the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan. The Panshin brothers point to this as the end of science fiction as it was (a so-called "golden age"). Instead, the world of science fiction and the science of the world had become "intermingled, so that utter strangeness might appear suddenly in our midst, and we might also find elements of familiarity at the most remote removes of existence" (648). It is at this moment that one form of science fiction ended, and a stranger, mutated world required alternative approaches. Fifteen years after this time of transformation, fanzine writer Earl Kemp asks the pointed question *Who Killed Science Fiction?* in the zine of the same name. In the collected opinions, most responding authors said no (a matter of 2 "ayes" and 55 "nays" though 38 of these qualified it with a "but"...) (Kemp 12). Among these qualifications and frustrations a name and associated practices appear with some regularity, that

[15] One of the Mule's psychic powers was to use music and sound to impact the minds of those around him.

of the onset of "psi-," a branch of science fiction that is marked at the outset by A.E. Van Vogt's iconic mutants in *Slan*, as the lowest form of science fiction. The implication in Kemp's work is that *if* science fiction had died, it was the fault of the mutants and their chief advocate–John Campbell and his self-described mutant techniques for writing and editing science fiction.[16]

Slan, as a flagship mutant story, focuses on a form of superhuman mutant that is persecuted by humanity. The titular Slans are initially presented as a race of posthuman constructs—telepathic, stronger, and smarter than humanity. However, as the protagonist Jommy Cross later realizes, Slans are a natural evolution from humanity, not constructed through technology. The action which drives this story, however, is the resultant genocide of Slans by humanity, whose jealousy and fear of a superior being results in the widespread killing of Slans. This reaction is common, and one reason why superhuman mutants fall within the purview of this dissertation, because even the 'ideal' mutant forms represent a threat to the category of human. What's fascinating about *Slan* as well is that the very term became a rallying cry for the (mostly white, mostly masculine) fans of science fiction, who perceived themselves to be "persecuted geniuses" (Nevala-Lee 123). It is this moment of inversion, where mutants move from existential threat to desirable superman on which this dissertation hinges. These inversions of normativity, masculinity, and mutation are the dissonant aesthetics in which this dissertation thrives.

This dissertation takes on the many histories of science fiction–as a legacy of the gothic (Aldiss), a legacy of the reformation (Roberts), as a legacy of mythic imagination (Panshins)–and the ontology of science fiction–as estrangement (Suvin), as a "game of signification" (Delany), and as aesthetic experience (Csicsery-Ronay)–in order to feel and think the mutant

[16] This is discussed in detail in the chapter "Tomorrow's Children."

through its shifting significations and pivotal placement in the fraught negotiation of science fiction as genre. Following these literary genetic forebears makes space to recognize that science fiction relies not on convention, but on mutation to survive and adapt. The mutant is a means through which science fiction and its interest in human potential are challenged. As such, mutants can't be measured as a form of linear progression from one perspective to another, but are found in the liminal transformative spaces.

Mutants, Mutants, Everywhere and Not a Thought to Think

Rather than attempting to set (yet another) beginning or end to science fiction, this dissertation focuses on a critical window of time during which conversation between science fiction creators, fandom, and theorists permitted the genre to be mutagenic. The infrequent appearance of mutants and the dis-unified conversation about them treats the figures as mutated individuals rather than as a pattern. As a project, it takes on the task of following early mutants and mutations as aberrations which shape the future of the genre. The earlier moment of this window opens with the publication of H.G Wells' "The Country of the Blind" in *The Strand Magazine* in April 1904. This story focuses on a remote community in Ecuador that has adapted to being perpetually blind–it is a mutant community of disabled[17] people that a sighted man stumbles into. Assuming his sense of sight will allow him to become a king, he quickly learns that a myopic man in a community of the blind will be treated as delusional. Wells' story plays with inverting disability, as the community attempts to cure the main character of his sight, which he violently flees. In a later rewrite (the 1939 re-publication) the ending is also revised to destroy the community with a rockslide. I begin with this story as an example of a thriving,

[17] I use the term disabled here as the perspective of an outsider–as the story models, being blind is not a disability within the community of the story.

threatening mutant society that has branched from humanity as an example of early mutant fiction from which other stories of difference branch off. The mutagenic window closes in the mid-1960s in fits and starts across media. In the realm of literature, I focus on Kemp's declaration that science fiction is dead, and the author feedback that points to mutation, psionics, and John Campbell as the reason. Within the realm of comics, I argue that the first run of *X-Men* in September of 1963 re-sets and overrides previous uses of mutants and mutation, taking over the conversation and ushering a new moment within the medium. In the medium of film, *The Last Man on Earth*'s release in 1964 marks a transformation in mutant narratives and an onset of new horrors on the silver screen.

In researching the mutants of the first half of the twentieth century, I repeatedly found myself breaking new ground. I found one anthology of stories, *Mutants*, arranged and introduced by Robert Silverberg in 1974 and one collection from the author Gordon R. Dickson, *Mutants: A Science Fiction Adventure* published in 1970. I found little to no critical attention in textbooks. Regarding mutants in comic books, I found no serious discussion of their presence prior to Stan Lee and *The Uncanny X-Men* in 1963. This dissertation critically intervenes in the field of science fiction by gathering mutant stories that have been obfuscated, forgotten, or otherwise shifted out of sight in favor of more ruly and rulable science fiction figures. It marks the first collection of these stories in an academic context and the first attempt to collate and correlate their importance to science fiction as a genre and to the cultural impact of mutants and mutation.

In each primary chapter of the dissertation, I take on one medium of science fiction: literature and the pulps, film, and comics. Each chapter is arranged according to its media in recognition of the conventions of that medium in particular. It would be an act of synesthesia to discuss the sound of mutants while discussing the pages of Capt. S.P. Meek's "The Earth's

Cancer" or to discuss the ways bodies are drawn when looking to the live-action representation of the vivisected Panther Woman of *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932). Instead, I have organized the chapters around their sensory experiences. The first chapter deals with literature, narrative, and language. The second chapter addresses the sights and sounds of film as disability and mutation becomes disembodied, circulated instead as something alienated from humanity or mapped onto the animal world. The third chapter addresses the visual codes of mutants on the pages of comic books, considering the serial ways in which characters mutate over time and thorough contexts.

In the chapter on pulp fictions, my work follows the ways in which mutation and difference pivoted from the horrific and disgusting to a desirable identity among science fiction fandoms. Taking on the mantle of the persecuted mutant in the wake of A. E. van Vogt's *Slan*, science fiction readers identified more with the mutant than with established humanity, casting their eyes towards the (to borrow from another van Vogt's work) Man-After-Man. Because of the affective power of mutants in science fiction, they became symbols of persecuted exceptionalism rather than disgusting outsiders. In so doing, the mutants of the pulps created a space in which bodymind variation shifted from a stigmatized subject position to a mantle of power–a threat to those who seemed not to understand. Pulp writers adapted to this change in mutants through the use of intentional ambiguity, marketing the mutant as something that can be read alternatively as freak, hero, outsider, and pinnacle of humanity's next step. The chapter concludes with a reading of Richard Matheson's "Born of Man and Woman" as a thought exercise of what it means to extend care to a mutant that one is uncertain of until the end–what does it mean to be capable of extending care for an exceptional mutant only to discover one is caring for something utterly beyond categorization?

In the chapter on film, my work turns to the audible and visible practices of the mutant in science fiction cinema. The medium of film utilizes entirely different cognitive processes to present the audience with one of many possible futures of the human race. This research builds off of film philosopher Daniel Yacavone to discuss the ways in which participation in filmic worlds becomes a phenomenological process, moving through bodily, cognitive, and artistic understandings. Science fiction films rely on the introduction of anxieties–through multiple sensoria–that are connected to social and cultural values which must then be resolved by the conclusion of the film. Central to this argumentation is attention to bodily variation, its centrality as an aesthetic motivator, and the relationship between disability representation and lived disabled experience. In order to understand what sights, sounds, and descriptions might be affectively thrilling, the chapter draws extensively on the social pressures that led to the creation of the Hays Code to censor films, emphasizing the limitations put on depictions of race, implied sex, and the threat of reproducing a non-human future. Closing with *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), the chapter addresses what fascinating potentials exist in embracing a future without humans, a future in the hands of "freaks" and "mutations."

The chapter on comics is framed on either side by the alleged "first mutant" of comics, Namor, The Sub-Mariner. Following the arc of mutant representation between his first appearance in October 1939 and his first appearance in *The Uncanny X-Men* in January 1964, the chapter follows the ways that mutation–particularly as an expression of disability–moved from solely activating sensations of fear and disgust to signaling potential: both for great harm and great good. Looking at examples brought before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, the chapter addresses the language of argumentation against mutants that specifically touches on youth, reproduction, and public health. It weaves this recognition

together with the specifically maternal framing of how censorship was applied to comics: as an act of policing the reproduction of human ideals. Focusing on the popular position of comics as media, the chapter recognizes the dissonant pathways that mutants in comics followed to move from solely disgusting harbingers of the end of humanity to complex, intersectional figures that show the depth, breadth, and variety of human potential–for good and ill.

Taken together, the dissertation argues that the mutagenic window of American science fiction between 1904 and 1964 was deeply entwined with the representation of disability. To revisit these texts with a critical disability aesthetic potential allows readers to understand that, far from being empty symbols of shock and discomfort, mutants did necessary cultural work to lay the foundation for desiring difference. While mutants bear the stigmata of race, disability, femininity, and queerness, they do so in a way that was so radically captivating that unstigmatized groups began to seek out the title and capacity of mutation. At the same time that science fiction stories across media held space for representing disabled characters in a time when disability was being pushed out of perception, they continued to stigmatize disabled existence. While mutant stories amplified eugenic assumptions about their threat to normative reproduction, they destabilized that very reproduction, making variety and difference something pleasurable to be sought after.

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Tomorrow's Children

Introduction

Stories that center science and technology in fiction predate the term later used to describe them–science fiction.[18] The science fiction pulps of early twentieth century North America became a piton by which the genre climbed from small, select readerships into a cultural phenomenon. In his *History of Science Fiction,* Adam Roberts notes that "the centre of gravity of the genre shifted in pronounced ways towards North America with the predominance of pulp" (vii). The pulps of the early twentieth century were produced rapidly, formulaically, and with increasing specialization to tap into specific groups of readers. The very medium by which these stories circulated (cheap pulp paper) signaled the medium and its concepts as temporary and continuously changing. Roberts offers a great overview of the ways in which pulps were conceived at the time: "pulp is a word used to denote a particular type of story printed in a series of niche-marketed magazines. The stories were written by prolific hack-writers (so, not too expensive for editors to buy) and printed on cheap paper manufactured from treated wood pulp—hence the name—rather than more expensive traditional papers" (254). There's a particular beauty in the recognition that exists within this process for science fiction stories. They were created by authors fighting to make an impression in a market defined by temporary waves of emotion, excitement, and recognition with stock figures: intrepid explorers, enigmatic and unknowable alien others, and the thrilling, threatening mutant. It's this wild changeability and attempt to tap into the surface thoughts and emotions of readers that permits mutant media to evade attempts to contain it.

[18] Since "scientifiction" never took off.

Such elusive writing became a hallmark for many authors who would later become established voices of science fiction. In his first published story,[19] Poul Anderson and co-author F. N. Waldrop tapped into one of the key thrills of the figure of the mutant: its threat to the existence of humanity as the pinnacle category of being. First published in *Astounding* in 1947, "Tomorrow's Children" occurs at a peak moment for mutant fiction–in the height of atomic anxiety and prior to the collapse of the mutant as a meaningful symbol. However, the story stands out as the one that "said everything that needed to be said about the genetic damage an atomic war might wreak" (1). In the annals of anthologized mutant fiction, this story acts as a harbinger of what mutation symbolizes in Western literature–fear of the inevitable change of the status quo. "Tomorrow's Children" emphasizes the inevitability of mutation, the deep human anxiety around who and what qualifies as human (and how that category changes), and the often violent responses to bodyminds[20] that threaten the category of Man. Building on the work of Sylvia Wynter, Alexander Weheliye, Ato Quayson, and Tobin Siebers, this chapter interrogates the ways that Man was implied to be the pinnacle of progress in Western narratives while continuously beset by the fundamental variation that drives humanity.

"Tomorrow's Children" is a slow-burning narrative that follows scientist Hugh Drummond as he surveys the surviving population of America following a world war that used nuclear and biological weapons. The first half of the story is given over to exposition of the ruined United States, its backup capital in the Pacific Northwest, and Drummond's travels to meet with assorted surviving villages. Following this post-nuclear anthropological survey, the

[19] It is of no small significance that at this time, many science fiction authors who would later be addressed as "grand masters" wrote and published first a piece of mutant fiction. Richard Matheson's "Born of Man and Woman" and Judith Merril's "That Only a Mother" join Poul Anderson's "Tomorrow's Children" in this trend.
[20] In the field of disability studies, the term "bodymind" exists to undo the Cartesian divide between body and mind in recognition of the ways in which mental function impacts physical existence as well as the reverse.

second half of the story is given over to an argument between Drummond–whose cold affect is the result of a lost family and detached understanding that the world can never be the same–and the acting president General Robinson, whose fear is of a world lost to humans as he ponders the future of his pregnant wife. In the course of their argument, Robinson offers a series of correctives for the seemingly inevitable supplantation of humans by mutants: first, "racial death. All mutants and their parents to be sterilized whenever and wherever detected," and second, isolation as "we… save the true human stock" (21). These responses are common threads in the persecution of those deemed not to be Man. They are either to be euthanized and sterilized in the old eugenic ways or isolated as racially-coded or class-coded others from the so called "true human" stock.

What is particularly interesting about "Tomorrow's Children" is the response offered to Robinson by Drummond, that humanity's moment is over and the only possible way forward is a coexistence between human and mutant as equals. Drummond's retorts to the calls for extermination and isolation is a call to "abandon class prejudice and race hate altogether, and work as individuals" (23). This call ruptures previously existing frameworks that privilege humanity (and a narrowly defined humanity at that) as the pinnacle occupants of the planet Earth and destabilizes the usual resolutions for mutants offered in pulps and literature: to be killed, sterilized, or incarcerated.[21] Instead, Drummond offers recognition that mutants can and should be recognized in terms of the highest state of psychological cognition at the time: individuals.

In an analysis of Individualism and the process of individuation in Jungian psychology, Murray Stein explains that "It is absolutely fundamental to human beings to distinguish

[21] These outcomes of mutant figures echo the phenomenon of "Narrative Prosthesis" addressed by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder in their work of the same name–that disability and disabled characters must somehow be resolved by the conclusion of a text.

themselves from their surroundings. This is the essential nature of individual consciousness: to be itself, it must create distinctions and separateness" (Stein 3). In "Tomorrow's Children," Drummond recognizes the potential of the mutant population to meet or exceed the level of self-fulfillment that humans are capable of and places them on equal footing. Drummond pushes this envelope further as Robinson leaves to view the birth of his tentacled (but otherwise productive) son when he calls not only for abandoning hate, but working towards an integrated culture: "our problem is to learn to live with the mutants, to accept anyone as –Earthling– no matter how he looks, to quit thinking anything was ever settled by violence or connivance, to build a culture of individual sanity" (24). This radical openness of the category of Earthling pushes back against the standardized mutant story of noticing a difference, isolating the difference, and resolving the difference. Instead, what Drummond proposes is a broadening of the category of Man–perhaps even abolishing the category in favor of the Earthling.

Anderson's story holds together many of the responses to the presence of mutant while offering a radical and salient way forward: to recognize difference, to abandon the violence with which difference is met, and to develop new perspectives on the category of Man[22] (humanity). As discussed in the previous chapter, Man (as a concept) is the idealized and seemingly rigid figure of the white, Western, affluent, educated, able-bodied masculine figure which was cast as the protagonist in most sf pulp fiction stories and which is upended and defied by the existence of mutants.

As a popular culture medium, pulp science fiction reflected, amplified, and transformed opinions about bodymind differences in the first half of the twentieth century. There is an

[22] Throughout this dissertation, I distinguish and develop both understandings of humanity broadly in conversation with the very particular category of capital-M Man. This is in recognition of the extreme ossification of the category of Man during the mutagenic window about which this dissertation is written.

extensive corpus of writing about the ways that aliens carried out this work in contemporary science fiction literature, however there is a dearth of focus on some of the most unstable and sensational figures of the era: mutants. Drawing on eugenic histories, imperialist framing of racial/racist science, and the desire for entertainment, mutant fictions in particular excited audiences while undermining the primacy of white Western masculinity as the paragon of progress. Because mutation must necessarily come from within, mutants became symbols for the threat that human variety posed to Man as a category and symbol. Through their accelerating threats to Man, mutants slowly came to occupy the desired position of power and control for readers, upending and reinforcing the stigmatization of human variation.

A Rough Timeline of Pulp Mutants

To comprehend just how radical Anderson and Waldrop's approach is, it's helpful to understand the broader timeline of mutants in science fiction, and to appreciate the ways in which stigma around variation changes in mutant fiction. A rough timeline of mutants can be established following stories that focus on biological and social mutations as a result of variation. Mutants in pulp fiction demonstrate and transform the social anxieties they activate. At the turn of the 20th century, mutant humans and plants present a threat to the colonizing, rational Western heroes of their stories, who subjugate variance in the interest of civilizing and standardizing Man. These mutants are often isolated individuals described as slipping backwards down the rungs of progress.

In the act of dominating their thrilling weirdness, Man is idealized as a standardizing force that roots out and (often through technological superiority) quells the unruliness of mutants and mutation. In stories such as 1899's "The Purple Terror," this takes the form of a flowering vine and the Indigenous person leading Western explorers to its territory. In one of the earliest

combinations of social and physical mutants, H.G. Wells' "The Country of the Blind" from 1904 follows an explorer as he is dropped into an isolated population of blind Ecuadorians. In this social space, our viewer is treated as delusional by the people he has joined. During his time in the community, he falls in love but cannot bear to be blinded and flees.

A pivotal text from these early mutant stories is J. D. Beresford's *The Hampdenshire Wonder*, published in 1911. *The Hampdenshire Wonder* follows the life and early death of fictional wonder Victor Stott, a mutated child who is capable of extreme feats of intellect. The story is peppered with references to contemporary scholarship, including Henri Bergson, Richard Owen, and other biologists, eugenicists, and philosophers of the turn of the twentieth century. It also carries with it extensive commentary on the treatment of any figure that is non-normative, as passers-by and medical authorities exclaim "not to exhibit freaks like that in public," (7) "Wouldn't it be better to let it die...?" (74) and even the (seemingly benevolent) narrator folds together the wonder and a local disabled child: "they both had enormous heads—and the idiot was the only human being over whom the Wonder was never able to exercise the least authority" (237). This early mutant story lingers on the precarious divide between humanity and mutants of allegedly superior and inferior ability. In each of these cases, the difference in body and society is contained, be it through violence, through abandonment, or through mysterious death.

On the heels of these figures of scientific fictions, the mutants of the 1920s and 1930s are usually one-offs. They become localized threats to individuals or terrifying mutants that are inhuman and signal the end of humanity. They're often the offspring of experimentation, cosmic rays, or non-reproductive practices. At this time, mutants function as a scrying glass, a window into the future of the human psyche depending on how well or poorly humanity has practiced eugenics. As mutant and mutation stories accelerated, the mutability of life-forms and the

potential for humanity to become unseated proliferated. Captain S.P. Meek's "The Murgatroyd Experiment" tells the story of a future where peace reigns thanks to an interracial world government; however, without war and eugenics to curtail "defectives," the world has become over populated. The titular experiment is an attempt to improve humanity by transforming physical "defectives" into highly-efficient tree-people: The group of defectives on which the experiments were to be performed were very carefully chosen. There were no mental or moral defectives among them" (82). The story quantifies morals, mental acuity, and bodily proclivity to disability and attempts to rectify bodily disability through physical transformation into plant matter.[23] The resulting tree-people begin to reproduce and threaten the peaceful world that wanted to experiment upon them, and they are only just killed off by a fortunate fungus cultivated by the Man of the hour, Harry, and circulated through Dr. Murgatroyd's noble sacrifice (as a disabled man, he considered himself disposable).

In "Seeds of Life," published in *Amazing Stories Quarterly* in 1931, presents a series of mutations, first of thought and then of body that result in the end of humanity. Neils Bork is bombarded with radiation to transform him from bumbling assistant to a super intelligent man. However, his mutant offspring Miguel de Soto uses his superior thinking and ability to re-create evolution at a fast pace to demonstrate how humanity is doomed as a pinnacle of being. To hasten its destruction, the world is bombarded with rays that will turn all in-vivo babies into monstrous reptiles.

The mutants of this era become increasingly shocking and dangerous, building up the threat to humanity from within, becoming ever more powerful mutant offspring and boundary defying figures. Stanley G. Weinbaum's "Proteus Island" from *Astounding Stories*, August 1936

[23] It is not disclosed what solution or experimentation was to be done with those with low moral or mental scores.

follows the explorations of the white zoologist Carver on a recently charted island full of "Mutants, freaks, and individual species" (102). In the course of the story, he navigates an island where no two forms of life are the same and comes to learn that all of the island has been infected by highly mutagenic material created by "radiation and injections" (19) by a then-dead scientist. There's a small-scale war and a brief love story wrapped up in the midst of the story of the island, but ultimately the wildly mutated and irregular life forms become just a curiosity that will eventually return to "normal," solely because "the normal strains, hardened by evolution, are stronger" (120). The story ends with a lingering threat of mutation and reproduction in humans, however, as Carver's love interest may be tainted by the machine responsible for creating the titular island.

Then, from 1940 to early 1960 there was a mutant explosion, featuring both atomic horrors and the rise of genetic supermen. During this period, mutants moved from fascinating horrors to relatable, persecuted geniuses, to an overused and tired trope for difference. This moment became a polarizing period in which mutants are either the worst possible outcome of atomic war or the means to becoming the Man-after-Man. In this explosion of texts were the relatable, lovable, Man-After-Man (superman) figures of the Slans, the Baldies, and the *homo gestalt*. Opposite these empathic figures were the variant monsters and deviations so different from Man as to be nearly indescribable: figures such as the anti-social and brooding Edmond of *The New Adam*, Matheson's green-dripping genderless child in "Born of Man and Woman" or Judith Merril's singing, limbless, super-intelligent baby in "That only A Mother."

The 1960s marked the end of these pulp mutations and the closing of the mutagenic window for the pulps. As Robert Silverberg notes, "there were so many of these [mutant] stories that readers wearied of them and editors stopped buying them; most of them are altogether

forgotten today" (1). Following the arc of relatability and the move to collective thought, the mutant bubble burst. Having reached their affective limit and the ultimate fracturing of its relationship to Man, mutants were avoided, forgotten, and relegated to a simple symbol for difference until later resurgences in the 80s and 90s. In this window of time, they simplify into an undifferentiated "other," a collapse of social, sexual, racial, and able difference. Rather than continuing to press the boundary of Man, the figure of the mutant collapsed into itself and lost its definition and specificity in the pulps.

The mutant in pulps and literature is a figure that incrementally pushed the boundaries of the human until readers of science fiction found themselves desiring to be outside of it. By making mutants more spectacular, more powerful, and more interesting than the repeated flat Men who conquered them, authors set the stage for readers to align more closely with mutants than Men. The mutant existed as both a release and inciter of anxiety, amplifying scientific and popular assumptions about race, sexuality, gender, and ability as they pertain to Man. As the mutant was repeatedly tapped for its affective potential, it continued to press the bounds of how Man was defined and offered gaps through which readers could slip into and out of the category, if even for a few pages. Because of the frequency with which the mutant was used and the way in which it was considered more a sensation than a concept, it is treated with less critical inquiry than its counterpart: the Alien. Therefore, As a central locus of repetition and amplification, the pulp/literature mutant sent ripples of anxiety into comics and films, which attempted to encapsulate its anxieties and grotesqueries visually and audibly.

In the pulps, the primary figure of otherness used to cut away non-white, non-masculine, disabled figures from Man is the alien. Alien figures are stand-ins for subject positions outside of Man, and offer the cognitive comfort of being entirely separate. On the subject of aliens, two of

the main histories of science fiction, Brian Aldiss' *Trillion Year Spree* and Adam Roberts' *The History of Science Fiction*, have a great deal to say. In Aldiss' seven-hundred page text, the term "alien" appears two hundred twenty one times; in Roberts' five hundred and thirty seven pages, it appears three hundred and thirty eight times. The figure of the alien is an immediately noticeable figure (if, by nature, not immediately recognizable) in both the content and history of sf. As such, its use as metaphor to convey meanings of social, political, racial, and ideological values has been much remarked upon. In order to understand the intimate intervention that the mutant offers, it is helpful to consider the positionality and practice of its counterpart: the alien.

The Erotic Power of the Alien

In pulps and literature, the category of Man is beset on all sides by figures that threaten body, mind, and society. In *The Love of Ruins: Letters on Lovecraft*, Dr. Scott Michaelsen traces "a compass rose of figures that surround the four sides or borders of an embattled 'humanity'... a barricaded anthropocentrism finds itself beset by that which it has conveniently forgotten, set aside, and excluded from its own self-conception of itself to constitute itself as present to itself"(68; see also figure I).

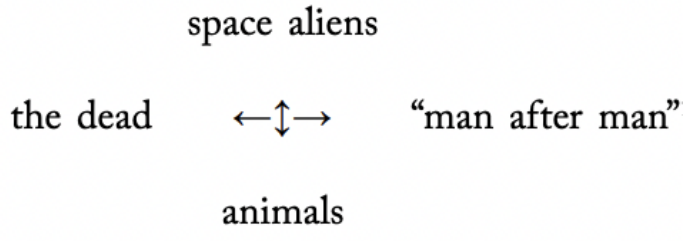

Figure I: a graph showing the relative location of humanity to its many threats.

Whereas Man is a culturally-constructed figure, sf locates this assemblage of white, masculine, able-bodiedness in the midst of a conflict for superiority and survival. To that end, the threats

around it shore up the category itself. The animal is the wild, uncertain, biological form from which Man distances himself through intellect and technology. The dead inhabit the void of what is known and knowable as animate beings and often occupy stories of paranormal terror and the occult.

In *Trillion Year Spree,* Aldiss provides an explanation for the ease by which the metaphorical figure of the alien arose: "the writers realized increasingly that man's behaviour, alone among species, was not species-specific, and that that plasticity could best be expressed by using aliens as if they were merely behaviourly different kinds of men (though disguised maybe by fangs or scales)" (279). This statement encapsulates the function of the alien within sf broadly--to wholly separate certain groups of humans from Man while disguising the practice with green instead of Brown or Black skin. However, what this description omits is the group of humans which are then privileged in not becoming alien: most often white, able-bodied, Western men. By taking on these writing practices, authors of science fiction implicitly enact a separation between Man and these markers of identity, establishing a series of codes that mapped nonwhiteness, disability, femininity, and queerness as outside of the boundaries of humanity. The whiteness of protagonists, alongside their accompanying markers of ability and masculinity, establish a gap between Man and alien.

What results, with the figure of the alien, is an entity that is framed as separate from Man: an erotic and eroticized other that can be rendered knowable through conquest or abandoned as wholly separate from human cognition. Discussing the figure of the alien other, sf historian Adam Roberts "offers the suggestion that 'at the root of all science fiction lies the fantasy of alien encounter. The meeting of self with other is perhaps the most fearful, most exciting and most erotic encounter of all'" (McCracken qtd. Roberts 280). As this encounter was codified in

the medium of the pulps, it took a far more explicit turn, as "all the pulps traded in more or less explicitly coded sexual fantasy. What's significant about the SF version of this is the way its more radically othered imaginary spaces, and its forceful technological possibilities, mediate this erotic desire" (263). In the pulps, then, the sexual fantasy becomes a site that juxtaposes the reader with an image of a racialized but wholly separated other. The existence of the racialized alien allows the reader to approach an other with cognitive distance in a way that the mutant does not–the alien offers some semblance of 'safety' in its divide from Man.

The complete split between the alienated other and the Man are exemplified in C.L. Moore's "Shambleau," which binds non-whiteness, non-masculinity, and non-humanity together in an alienating explanation of the myth of the Medusa. The story follows Northwest Smith, a rough-tough space outlaw with tanned skin and a penchant for whiskey as he is seduced and laid low by Shambleau. Before recognizing this alien as it is, he first perceives the alien as a "berry-brown girl" who he takes under his protection from a mob (532). His declaration of this status as protector fills the mob with disgust, and in order to clarify the source of this disgust, the narrator declares that "Lakkdarol was anything but a puritan town--it did not enter [Smith's] head for a moment that his claiming the brown girl as his own had caused that strangely shocked revulsion to spread through the crowd" (534). A tremendous amount can be read into this clarification offered by the narrator. At the simplest level, it is in anticipation that the reader would (or at the very least *could*) be shocked by a white man claiming a relationship with a brown woman. Second, it logically holds that, in ostensibly puritan towns in the future in which "Shambleau" is set, this shock continues to exist. Finally, it establishes that the alien nature of Shambleau is not separate from, but built first upon, her brown skin.

The erotics of this action demonstrate practices described by Sharon P. Holland in *The Erotic Life of Racism*, where she traces the removal of "black.female.queer" from literature and the various practices associated with the violent categorization of black and white. In this text, she charges readers to "get comfortable with loss so that we can account for our forgetting in the first instant… while *not* replacing the representation" (12). This charge asks readers of historical documentation to notice and follow the potentials carved into texts. In "Shambleau," this traces the removal of the "berry-brown" girl from the story and accentuates the violent void of "alien" which removes her from the text.

The future in which this story takes place notes Brown skin as the basis on which later alien features veer away from humanity--four fingers on each hand, feline pupils, claws, pointed teeth, and later giant entrail-like tentacles that suck the soul out of a Man.[24] It is this very alienness that both attracts and revulses Smith; the bulk of the story is given over to his reluctant surrender to Shambleau. The story does not end with the triumph of the alien. Instead, the arrival of Smith's partner results in the death of Shambleau, creating a resolution of this encounter with the alluring and horrifying alien via its eradication.

In brief, the alien has been repeatedly remarked upon as an erotic other, something wholly removed from Man which can be erotically triumphed over, surrendered to, or otherwise rendered as knowable by traversing the void that allegedly exists between Man and Alien.To encounter the alien is to recognize something separate from Man and therefore completely outside of Man. These encounters resolve through triumph, re-enacting colonial and imperial values, through the intellectual triumph of bridging the void and rendering the unknown known,

[24] The story emphasizes that both myths in the past and in its (future) present that surround Shambleau describe all Shambleau as women and a threat to men.

or through loss to the unknown and unknowable. As a threat to humanity, the Alien is rendered as much separate from humanity as the animal and the dead.

To return to the compass rose offered at the beginning of this section, we are left with an undertheorized figure that can never fully be cognitively separated from Man: the Man-after-Man. The language used here is taken from A.E. Van Vogt's description of a mutant human with two brains in *The World of Ā*. Where the alien stands in as a being wholly separate from Man, the mutant can only ever be articulated *through* humanity–the mutant is always part-Man, always contingent, always a discomforting reminder of the connection between the reader and the being on the page. Thus, the mutant becomes not an erotic figure of otherness, but a discomforting reminder of the responsibility of the reader for the mutant on the page–it is a cognitive dissonance of the grotesque mésalliance of Man and the variety of bodyminds that make up humanity. Where the other points of the compass are separate from Man, the mutant is internal and emerging from man. The mutant bulges out of Man[25] and challenges the borders and boundaries of what aspects and traits fit within the category.

The Affective Discomfort of the Mutant

In the association of threats to Man, the mutant stands out as the threat from within, the threat that already is and will be. On the path to the Man-after-Man, the mutant lingers as a continual association and point of connection to Man and humanity more broadly in the present moment. The figure of the mutant is striking and under-theorized precisely because it denies or otherwise defies the clear cut and resolution the alien offers. Mutation is the recognition and acceptance of variance among humanity–anathema to practices of separating and isolating that Man demands. The mutant cannot be made wholly separate from Man precisely because it is of

[25] Like a tumor or cyst, the mutant disrupts the expected boundaries of Man.

Man (and woman) born. The mutant resists resolution precisely because it is unpredictable--it stumbles into the pulps weighed down by centuries of ableist assumption of how the body ought to work, tripping over the one-way narrative of Western progress, and twitching through its performance of the eugenic bogeyman. The alien bears resolution: it can be triumphed over, succumbed to, rendered knowable, or returned to the box as utterly arcane. The mutant lingers. The mutant is the unseen and unknowable variable that arises through the countless repetitions the pulp genre offers. The mutant is the only means to the superman while simultaneously carrying the risk of species-wide variation. Indeed, it is the mutability and uncertainty of the mutant as category that grants it both broad aesthetic appeal and limited resolution.

The individual mutant story itself does not upset the carefully laid-out territory of Man itself. Science fiction as a genre is deeply investing in sparking sensations of discomfort in order to shock, stir, and hold on to their readers, who were continuously inundated with stories that promised to be even more shocking than last month's predecessors. The shock value of the pulps were their key selling point; they were meant to introduce readers to concepts they had never imagined before, to offer perspectives that were wildly different from what is usually seen, and to provide ideas and images that were thrilling/surprising/titillating all under the auspices of scientific validity. In order to carry out its affective experience, pulps first had to promise the audience that something shocking/thrilling/non-normative would be put on display. This priming had to confirm, affirm, or otherwise promise that the audience was different from the alien other. The resulting story then had to gesture, threaten, or otherwise defamiliarize the audience's understanding of their position as separate or safe from the other by providing an idea *in excess* of their pre-existing assumptions. Finally, in order to ensure the safety and comfort of the audience, the excessive other must be contained or otherwise resolved. As the pulps promised

increasing shocks and thrills, more representation of difference became necessary to achieve these sensations, and more and more diversity of mutant figures became necessary to continue the conversation.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a smattering of variation in science-fiction-ish stories.[26] The scientific romances of the time (predating the term "science fiction") offered up metaphors for a non-Western world grown wild in its variation and status as wilderness. In addition to the novels published by Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, a great deal of short fiction circulated in magazines such as *The Strand*. *The Strand* was a magazine filled with general interest stories and short fiction. In 1899 it published the earlier-mentioned "The Purple Terror." This is a short story about mutant orchids in Cuba that threaten a group of "West Point naval [dandies]" as they cross the island to deliver a letter. Spanning nine scant pages, the story encapsulates the inherent discomfort of readers at the time engaging with others. It folds together the residents of Cuba with the titular Purple Terror: carnivorous plants referred to as the "devil's poppy" as being mutual threats to the colonizing ship (245). In their brief interaction, the colonizing force realizes that both the guide they take with them (Tito) and the local wildlife are not as passive as they seem. Instead, Tito leads them into a grove of the carnivorous plants, where chaos ensues. However, due to the iron nerves of the main Man, both Tito and the Purple Terror are rendered docile once more. This brief encounter with a human, made separate from Man due to his colonized state and association with a mutant plant, relies on the disconnect between the hybrid form of both Tito and the plant and the colonizing force of orderly, knowable, Western Man. In this recognition, the mutant plant and by extension Tito are representative of the dangers of variance, of existing beyond the limited definition of Man.

[26] The practice of referring to the genre as "science fiction" didn't come about until the mid-1920s, after Hugo Gearnsback tried (and failed) to apply the moniker "scientifiction" to such stories in *Amazing Stories*.

In the center of the conversation of Man are figures that inherently offer a counter-narrative to the practices of removal necessary to define Man as a singular ideal. These entities straddle the descriptors of human and Man. Through mutation and other forms of difference also open space for a grotesque collapse of category, inviting in elements of the world that have been cut away from Man. A figure in the midst of the grotesque and horror the demonstrates this discomfort and the attempted creation of distance from the natural world is Irvin S. Cobb's titular Fishhead. In January of 1913's issue of *The Cavalier*, "Fishhead" tells the story of a lynching committed by two brothers against a being described as "a human monstrosity, the veritable embodiment of nightmare!" who is the mutant offspring of a Black father and half-Indigenous mother. What is interesting in this story is the command that Fishhead has of the natural environment. He is described as a master of the swamp in which he is found, where "his broad splay feet, with the prehensile toes outspread, gripped the polished curve of the log as he moved along its swaying, dipping surface until he came to its outer end, and stood there erect, his chest filling, his chinless face lifted up, and something of mastership and dominion in his poise." This physically different and naturally-inclined figure is situated in a position of belonging and mastery in the swamp. However, this space of belonging is interrupted by two invading white men with a grudge. When Fishead is killed by these two white brothers, they are, in turn, destroyed by the monstrous fish of the lake where Fishhead lived. This figure is one of the first wondrous, grotesque mutants to demonstrate power on the pages of popular magazines in the early twentieth century in a way that challenged the homogenous superiority of Man. Despite attempts to align Fishhead racially and symbolically with a world less-than-Man, the powers afforded to the mysterious mutant make him more fascinating than the simple brothers that take his life.

By creating a series of symbols around mutants, the political, social, and scientific practices of the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century generated an affect of discomfort when such figures were introduced into popular media. Huff and Holmes articulate how "the body and disability are central to the sensation novel… a genre grounded in the 'reader's 'nervous' reactions to dramatic, surprising, and/or scandalous plotting that often involves characters' parallel bodily crises or transformations'" Mossman and Holmes qtd. Huff and Holmes 20). Here, the parallel of sensation of nervous energy and discomfort arises from the simultaneous transformation of affect (scandal) and body (becoming disabled). As a predecessor to the pulp, another media grounded in sensation, these novels became an early literary space in which not being "normal" and/or becoming "abnormal" was simultaneously fascinating and stigmatized.

At the same time that legal institutions utilized disability as a framework for hierarchizing nationalities and race, popular culture and its investment in popular science was establishing similar conversations on the significance of national health. In "Epidemic Entertainments: Disease and Popular Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century America," Nancy Tomes addresses the ways in which hygiene and health became central topics of magazine stories and advertising in the interwar period. She notes that "narratives of disease serve not only as personal accounts or ideological markers of cultural anxieties; they also constitute potentially profitable forms of news and entertainment" (627). Following the sensational racializing of the 1918 influenza pandemic as the Spanish Flu, especially in codified terms as an outsider threat to American public health, Tomes notes follows the ways in which discourse around health and wellness was especially invested in emotional impact and shock. She deftly summarizes these practices as noting how "It was not the desire for health, but '*fear of ill health that [was] the*

powerful appeal in advertising"" (author's emphasis 639). Magazine producers, from the mid 1910s to the 1930s, were heartily invested in epidemic narratives that threatened ill health and the anxieties such narratives stoked. So frequent were images of dread disease and public failure that "disease templates developed in interwar news and advertising carried over into popular entertainment forms" (642). The anxiety of health, both personal and public, became a significant genre convention in the interwar period, leading not only to greater focus on health, but especially on presenting and emphasizing the threat of illness. Dangers to public health moved through popular entertainments not only as scripts, but as distinct aesthetic codes. In *A Cultural History of Disability: In the Long Nineteenth Century*, Joyce Huff and Martha Stoddard Holmes discuss how this preoccupation with health and wellness was mapped onto non-Western communities: "the management of colonial borders in response to fear of epidemics echoed on a macrocosmic level the management of the personal boundaries that defined the individual middle-class Western body" (13). Such boundary work become the similar site of mutant fiction, where humans that were not Man became troubled and troublesome narratives that pressed at and challenged the boundary of the middle-class [implied to be white] Western [able] body. Huff and Holmes address ways that the borders separating political and racial categories operated in parallel to boundaries between Western and non-Western physicality. In this way, popular culture collapses the distance between personal and social anxieties.

This aesthetic codification aligns with the practices of demographers and philosophers during the same time through the mutation of political practices Michel Foucault terms "biopolitics." By his definition, "Biopolitics deals with the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem" (245). Because the mutant challenges prevailing political, biological, and national practices of

categorization and hierarchy-creation, it offers a space in which to reconsider the place and value of human variety as it challenges Man as the ideal social figure. In their analysis of "health" as a measurement, Ayo Wahlberg and Nikolas Rose note that in the first half of the twentieth century, "demographers and epidemiologists began tabulating, calculating and comparing birth, death and morbidity rates in different parts of the world by compiling so-called 'life tables', populations could be ranked according to their levels of modernization and associated patterns of disease" (Wahlberg and Rose 61). These biopolitical practices are echoed in mutant texts, such the previously discussed story "The Murgatroyd Experiment." In *The Biopolitics of Disability*, David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder offer bodily variety (through disability and queerness) as a necessary response to limiting practices of biopolitics and neoliberalism, which "theorize the degree to which treating crip/queer people as an exception valorizes norms of inclusion" (13). To that end, the focus on very particular populations with what they term "Peripheral embodiments," the residents of 'surplus humanity' who are excluded by the fictionality of normativity based on their defiance of culturally inculcated norms (14). The figure of the mutant troubles the fictions of normativity by challenging where an assortment of bodies and minds can be placed in the discourse of Man and health.

Within a biopolitical framework, the mutant is both the target of violence (at the level of the story) and an agent of transformation (at the level of the genre). Addressing the "shortcomings of Foucault's approach to race and racism," Alexander Weheliye addresses the biopolitical collapse of race and disability as it relates to Man: "all modern racism is biological, first, because it maintains the believed natural—often evolutionary—inferiority of the targeted subjects and, second, because racialization is instituted, as elucidated by Wynter, in the realm of human physiology as the sociogenic selection of one specific group in the name of embodying

all humanity" (59-60). Within sf, this "specific group" is written and rewritten as the white, Western, able-bodied Man as distinct from the biological relatives that embody variance and variety. Mutant fictions, then, trouble where the distinction might possibly be made between Man and everything else. Mutants betray the truth that Man is not a stable category, nor even an individual entity. It is a myth constructed of imperial convenience to justify violence against various forms of humanity. By constantly and repeatedly shifting their performance, origins, and symbols, mutants trouble the biopolitical strategies for how best to divide variations of humanity from Man.

The connection between the performance of normality, public health, and the assumption of able-bodied superiority are closely detailed in narratives around the neoliberal state and ablenationalism. In *Crip Times*, Robert McRuer defines the neoliberal state as one that "implicitly calls for and explicitly generates a constant monitoring of both self and others" (McRuer 16) to enact specific identity formations that are deemed to be normal. Such commodified identities are described by Mitchell and Snyder as ablenationalism, where "citizens are increasingly subject to the dictates of how to be more alike than different" (Mitchell and Snyder 14). In this framework, it can be read that there was an implied relationship between normality and ability that was desirable to a national image of health and wellness. Populations that were not associated with health and wellness, then, were stigmatized and sensationalized as threats to communal health.

One such community that began outside of a conception of health and which was later folded into the technological superiority of Man were premature infants. In "The Incubator Babies of Coney Island: Science, Spectacle and Sentimentality in the American Amusement Park," Elizabeth Stephens traces the problematic history of the incubator for premature infants as

a sideshow prior to its widespread adoption as medical technology in the 1940s. Often viewed as tragic figures that perhaps ought not to be kept alive (like the titular Hampdenshire Wonder), premature infants largely lacked an established care routine prior to Dr. Martin Couney's clinic at Coney Island. Stephens notes that "With their weird mishmash of the spectacular, the scientific, and the sentimental, Couney's incubator baby shows represented a convergence of things which are now, but were not then, seen as distinct: they were a sideshow attraction, a public health exhibition, and a fully functioning medical clinic, all at once" (Stephens 3-4). Couney's practice revolved around making a spectacle of children whose birth and conditions varied radically from the norm through technological intervention. Through the ongoing repetition of the show and his demonstration of the technology for keeping premature infants alive,[27] this technological intervention, this shocking display, became a normal part of hospital operations.

The ways in which the desirability of normality was enforced on the small-scale were through practices of making a spectacle of mutation and then resolving it. As a result of the powerful assumptions of superiority behind the category of Man, those who ruptured, challenged, or passed through its boundaries became charged with affects of disgust and wonder. At the turn of the twentieth century, disability in particular was stigmatized in public spaces. In her book, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, Susan M. Schweik outlines the plethora of laws that swept the United States banning disabled people from appearing in public. One of the earliest ordinances was ratified in San Francisco in 1867[28], and by the end of the century, "ugly laws" were on the books across the country. The language of these laws prohibited the public appearance of "any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to

[27] To thereby grow into adults who fit within a narrowly described norm.
[28] In her introduction, Schweik tracks the progress from San Francisco to Chicago and beyond.

be an unsightly or disgusting object… an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares, or public places" (Schewik 1). The language of the law rendered people too far from the desired "normal" from appearing in public spaces for fear of being fined. To be significantly different carried with it the weight of being a threat to the public eye and public health. Those whose bodies didn't fit the ideal of Man were made into something simultaneously less and more. They were considered to be lesser beings (less "evolved," less "civilized," less "proper"), but at the same time they became coded as excessive (more risky, more dangerous, and more interesting), they were threats to be contained and observed. What results from this twinned practice is a complicated aesthetic valence, where increasing difference became more thrilling over time while also destabilizing the alleged boundaries of Man.

A partner in the affective combination of wonder and disgust through the display of human variation is the freak show. With the advent of the ugly laws, disabled people and nonwhite disabled people lost agency in the display of their bodies, becoming objects of study or objects to be cared for in the domestic world. As such, many disabled people were siphoned into care houses (later to become state asylums), into medical learning spaces such as lecture halls, and into the freak show. Schweik notes that at this time the "disfigured body might well in fact be out in public, even as a central object, but only as an adjunct to someone else's subject; a diseased body might be a spectacle, but only under someone else's orchestration; a maimed body might be an explicit body, but someone else had to write its meaning upon it; and, most importantly, the unsightly body in deformance would invite only certain kinds of audience response" (Schweik 47)[29]. Here, Schweik articulates the ways that the disabled body becomes

[29] While this chapter does not directly address it, there exists an ongoing discussion about the ethics of addressing the freak show and its commodification & display of disabled people and people of color, disabled and nondisabled alike. A focus on the community of the freak show arises across Bogdan and Adams, which has further support and consideration provided by Nadja Durbach's "Atypical Bodies" in *A Cultural History of Disability: In the Long*

spectacle–a comparison of the desirable Man and the undesirable mutant for the sake of medical knowledge or for public thrill at witnessing taboo bodyminds.

Both pulp magazines and the freak show rely on the affective practice of inviting the gaze of the Man to the mutant as a matter of spectacle and education. This interaction has a fraught duality in that singular instances reinstitute the desirability of Man while repetition creates a desensitization, and thereby desire to witness greater variation. When describing the performance of the freak show in *Sideshow USA*, Rachel Adams notes that "Freak shows are guided by the assumption that freak is an essence, the basis for a comforting fiction that there is a permanent, qualitative difference between deviance and normality" (6). The affective engagement that is sought by the audience is one that re-inscribes the normality of Man in contrast to an assortment of others as both cognitive action and embodied sensation. These shows were arranged very specifically to reach a broad audience under the auspices of providing scientific and anthropological information and to confirm or otherwise bolster arguments for Western cultural superiority, the assumed value of the white, masculine, able body, and behaviors of restraint and abstinence.

Describing the assortment of events on display in the freak show, Robert Bogdan and Adams structure them into two forms of acts based on bodily or cultural performance. In Bodgan's formulation, this is described as "The *exotic*, which cast the exhibit as a strange creature from a little-known part of the world; and the *aggrandized*, which endowed the freak with status-enhancing characteristics" (author's emphasis 97). Exotic exhibits in this case cover shows with titles such as "The Missing Link," "The Wild Men of Borneo," and "The Last

Nineteenth Century. A deeper discussion of freak community, resistance, and the necessity of public visibility of non-normativity would be necessary for further work in connection to sf, especially considering the prevalence of disability in sf authors and editors (e.g. Robert Heinlein, Farnsworth Wright, and Ray Palmer).

Pygmy." These shows were presented as scientific interventions and exhibitions, showing (often) white, middle class audiences glimpses of the world beyond their (implied to be) civilized locations. Bogdan's *exotic* shows reify racialized conceptions of progress narratives in which white, scientific, rational societies are positioned as superior and inevitable results of development.

Anthropologically, these exhibitions established binaries within the popular imagination that associated whiteness and ability with order, science, and the future and non-whiteness to savagery, disability, and the past. This is not to say that such discussions were contained to one small portion of popular entertainment; building on Bogdan's earlier work, Rachel Adams emphasizes the centrality of freak shows in popular understandings of the world by emphasizing that "Anthropological exhibits at the freak show often provided American audiences with their primary source of information about the Non-Western world" (Adams 28). This argument overlooks a particular shared audience with pulp science fiction–lower income men who did not have access to higher education. The freak show and early science fiction pulps were targeted to lower-income audience. For the pulps, this audience is also predominantly Men. A brief look into the advertisements that populate pulp magazines shows a disproportionate number of advertisements targeted towards "Men!" with the opportunity to make more money (Figure II).

Figure II: A composite of advertisements from *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Stories* between 1927 and 1935 calling out to MEN.

This shared audience of low-income men and young men implies such shows and stories were primary popular cultural spaces in which low-income but scientifically interested Men interacted with or developed understandings of the world cut away from Man. Through these popular entertainments, mutants became closely associated with freakdom, spectacle, and savagery.

The centrality of freak shows, later billed as traveling museums, as sources of cheap (and often dubious) knowledge about the world more broadly is the result of interest in popular science and its significance to popular culture. At the cusp between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interest in the possibilities of science and practices of the scientific world were pouring into cultural circulation through popular magazines, world fairs, and the freak show. Adams discusses in length the ways in which the freak show used adornments of scholarly and collegiate backing as a way to claim legitimacy for their exhibitions, noting how "Freak shows had always drawn on the ethnographic and medical discourses to grant legitimacy to the fantastic narratives they wove around the bodies on display" (28). By creating a scientific discourse around the

embodiment of performers, freak shows used scientific language (if not always scientific principles) to appeal to audiences, claiming they were selling not only a thrill, but an education.

Both Bogdan and Adams discuss the relationship between the early freak show and the scientific community and the later separation of these communities in the interest of public respect. Early in freak show history, the bodies of performers were posthumously sold to universities or hospitals for study. However, in the decades between 1900 and 1930, "The respectable scientific community was asserting its control and dissociating itself from the public exhibition of people" (Bogdan 66). At this time, people who were considered to be freaks were transitioning from being public spectacles and commodities into pitiable figures that required medical intervention and containment. As eugenic discourse further connected 'deviant' bodies with social health, criminality, and disease, freak shows became less permanent institutions, becoming traveling museums until ultimately being replaced by other popular entertainments. Following this timeline, Bogdan notes how "The eugenics movement promulgated the idea that physically and mentally inferior people were far from being benign and interesting; rather, they were a danger. Many were segregated in large state-financed and physician-run custodial asylums that grew and multiplied during the first quarter of the twentieth century" (62-3). This pathologization of non-normative behaviors and bodies created both a medically-structured and scientifically-encapsulated set of ideals which stigmatized disabled bodyminds and nonwhite bodyminds, disabled and nondisabled alike.[30]

The use of racial discourse and bodily health in sideshows is not a matter of vague trends, but an element of a longer legacy of American imperialism and cultural manipulation. In *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions*, Robert W. Rydell

[30] A more detailed understanding of the conflation of nonwhiteness and mental illness arises in conversations with Harriet Washington's *Medical Apartheid* and Jonathan Metzl's *The Protest Psychosis*.

explains the relationship between side-shows and the social and political capital leveraged in the American world fairs. Introducing their connections, he argues that "World's fairs, held at different times in different regions of the country, did not stand in isolation as creators of popular racial images. Exposition promoters drew and reshaped such sources as…the circus, the museum of curiosities, [and] the dime novel" (6). He explicitly connects popular entertainment with the image of scientific authority, especially in terms of how race was leveraged as a symbol for continued American policies for social health and as justification for violence abroad. When discussing the expositions that took place in 1915 and 1916, Rydell emphasizes the place of Man at the pinnacle of eugenic symbolism, especially as connected to American progress, noting "it was the anthropology of government science and the evolutionary racial doctrines espoused by Hrdlička that reached the public. His exhibits won praise from lay visitors and scientists alike" (223). Referring to a multi-room exhibit that divided races along physical indicators, Rydell notes the ways in which scientific racism[31] was used to separate white Men from other aspects of humanity in ways that appealed to attendees not at the level of knowledge, but at the level of sensation. He draws on the testimony of Frank Morton Todd to emphasize the striking nature of the layout, that "the booth devoted to eugenics 'was so admirably arranged that you didn't have to ask many questions; all you had to do was just to look, to see the necessity for its work'" (226). These demonstrations at world's fairs were intentionally curated not as venues for scientific progress, but as sites for hegemonic control and political maneuvering. In discussing the 1915-16 fairs, Rydell emphasizes the ideological work being undertaken by the physical

[31] Note that the term "scientific racism" neither connotes or denotes scientific justification for racism, but an acknowledgment of the racist practices of scientists to use measurement to affirm pre-existing assumptions about divisions between humans. Rydell emphasizes the ways in which this form of racism was intentionally leveraged in the interest of those already in power–"Scientific racism, if accepted by the lower classes, meant acquiescence in the power relations of the status quo as necessary to progress and therefore as legitimate and right" (236).

anthropology displays of scientific racism as one that was intentional. He argues that "By 1904 exposition promoters sponsoring the Saint Louis world's fair incorporated the midway into the main exposition grounds. By century's turn, in short, midway entertainments had come into their own… they simultaneously gained legitimacy and offered legitimacy to a particular view of the world–one that was avowedly imperialistic" (236). Over the course of seventeen years, between the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876 and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis in 1904, curators of the fair went from denying freak shows and side shows to incorporating them into the programming by folding the midway into the fair itself. This practice was an intentional maneuver to legitimize racial divides in service to upper-class desires. Rydell concludes that "their [midways] development into integral components of the expositions reflected the growing efforts by the upper classes, threatened by class conflict at every turn, to influence the content of popular culture" (236). Offering the seeming legitimacy of Smithsonian scientists, the world's fair helped to advance the pseudo-scientific claims of sideshows and popular culture commentary on race because "they legitimized racial exploitation at home and the creation of an empire abroad" (236). It is this series of practices that shaped the ways in which human variation was stigmatized and made into a spectacle. Beginning with dubious scientific claims, the exhibition of human bodymind variance moved from world fairs to sideshows to science fiction.

The rise of the freak show in the late nineteenth century was charged by the medical-scientific discourse around non-"normal" bodyminds and the desire to witness (without being seen by) the other. This desire for one-way viewing, now less socially acceptable due to changing opinions on disability, transferred objects from people in cages, tents, and the Bronx

zoo[32] to spectacles in other places. It was in this gyre of public opinion where echoes of colonial narratives of progress away from savagery and in eugenic ideals of moving towards whiteness, civilization, and ability that weird fiction and science fiction found some of the greatest affective tools to enjoyably discomfort their readers. The desire to be filled with wonder and disgust remained in popular culture, and the rise of popular science and pulp science fiction was prepared to fill this gap. Competing with the fading posters of traveling museums were the lurid covers of stories that promised thrills like readers had never felt accompanied by scientific knowledge that no university could offer. What lingered in this moment was a low-income audience that was interested in the possibilities of science as well as the affective thrill of viewing or imagining deviation from Man: mutants. Whereas aliens had the allure of being separate and fantastical, mutants were by definition *already among us*. Where the freak show created a physical space for the spectacle of the mutant as a freak, science fiction created a cognitive, symbolic-yet-tangible space using mutants.

The Shocking Science of the Pulps

The ideals of Man, having been codified into scientific "fact" through progress narratives and the scientification of eugenics stoked the early sf pulps with a plethora of spectacles: impossibly twisted bodies and minds from unknown corners of the world to compare to the Men reading about them on cheap, pulp paper. In shaping a discussion of the affective nature of science fiction, especially regarding popular science fiction/pulp fiction, sf author and historian Adam Roberts offers the following:

> What can get forgotten in the focus on technological and scientific novums is that the ground of the pulps' appeal was fundamentally *affective.* These texts are about

[32] For more information, see the work of the performers billed as "The Wild Men of Borneo" and the life of Ota Benga. There's an extended meditation on Ota Benga's time spent living in the Bronx Zoo with an Orangutan in Eli Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection.*

> generating certain feelings, with a particular emphasis on excitement, wonder, sexual arousal and self-satisfaction, mediating the emotional response of their readers through technology and science. It is precisely because they are so invested in particular affects that they are sometimes read as crude; but it helps us get to the heart of their widespread popular appeal. (Roberts 259)

In this densely packed paragraph, he offers an understanding of sf that works contrary to, or perhaps alongside, its grappling for legitimacy as genre. Adams emphasizes sf's investment in excess, in wrapping emotional and cultural conversations in scientific novums, and in reaching a broad audience to stir sensation and cultivate wonder. His reading of sf as drawing from the sensation novel demonstrates the through-line recognized by Huff and Holmes in *A Cultural History of Disability: In the Long Nineteenth Century*: that bodyminds beyond the "normal" had been codified to offer thrill, excitement, and wonder to readers. This description aligns with Rachel Adams' description of freak show methodologies, where "the structure of the freak show has typically been described as a form of spectacle, a term that accurately captures the sensational, formulaic qualities of the exhibition space" (12). Both sf and the freak show are spaces in which the primary mode of affective engagement is sensationalism. Both sf and the freak show utilize science as a means towards legitimacy while legitimizing embodied sensations and prejudice in reaction to variation. Pulp sf as a genre was meant to be *felt*, just as entering a sideshow tent was meant to stir the heart.

Behind the sf pulp, however, was a readership that was dedicated to the power of the "fact" and which insisted on at least a facade of scientific rigor. Where the freak show was an embodied thrill that was permitted through simple mental gymnastics, a scientific mythos sprang up around the pulps. While early pulps such as *Amazing Stories* featured "Gernsback's insistence on didactic science" (Roberts 259), later magazines began to hold onto the artifice of science while "featuring stories in which an emphasis on high adventure, excitement and exoticism was

given priority over science (259). What results is a genre in which science is given both lip service and a great deal of leeway. This convoluted set of values later ossified into the recognizable style of the so-called "golden age" of science fiction in the 40s and 50s, which Adam Roberts defines as "idea-fictions rooted in recognisable science… can-do stories about heroes solving problems or overcoming enemies; expansionist humanocentric (and, often, phallocentric) narratives; extrapolations of possible technologies and their social and human impacts" (287).

In order to carry out its affective experience, a script had to be followed in which the audience was primed for something non-normative to be put on display. This priming had to first confirm, affirm, or otherwise promise that the audience was correct in their assumption of difference between themself and the freakish person/object/society on display. This display then had to gesture, threaten, or otherwise defamiliarize the audience's understanding of their position within Man as separate from mutants by providing an idea *in excess* of earlier assumptions. Finally, in order to ensure the safety and comfort of the audience, the excessive variation must be contained or otherwise resolved. The performer must return to their cage, the alien must be vaporized and the vigilant American military personnel put on alert for the future, the time-traveler must fade away, the catastrophe which spurred him into our savage present (his past) prevented.

The shock value of the pulps was a key selling point; they were meant to introduce readers to concepts they had never imagined before, to offer perspectives that were wildly different from what is usually seen, and to provide ideas and images that were thrilling/surprising/titillating all under the auspices of scientific validity. As can be seen through its connection to the practices of the freak show, it relied on both the spectacle of variation in

another and some recognition of the lingering connection between them. The mutant other is a being, entity, place, or concept that is distanced from Man through connotations of race, transgression of gender roles, or through a spectacle of bodily difference–however it cannot be rendered wholly separate or distant from the viewer.

The Mutant Arms Race

Perhaps the most in-depth discussion of mutants and mutation is in Alexei and Cory Panshin's *The World Beyond the Hill*, in which mutation figures as a metaphor for John W. Campbell's editorial practices at *Astounding Science Fiction.* The Panshins use mutation as a metaphor to locate both the 'end' of science fiction and the literary character that ended it[33]. More specifically, in *The World Beyond the Hill*, the Panshins discuss in detail the history of science fiction as "literature of the mythic imagination" (Panshin and Panshin 1). Using this framework, the Panshin brothers follow science fiction from their origins dating back to 1685–the onset of transcendent science–to its end in 1945, in the figure of Isaac Asimov's "The Mule."

"The Mule" is one story of the monolithic series written by Asimov, referred to collectively as *Foundation*. Asimov's *Foundation* is one of the most frequently-referred to creations of science fiction from the mid-twentieth century. It is often held up as an example of what science fiction is and ought to be—scientifically informative, predictive, and systematic in a way that is interesting and informative. Spanning a thousand years, the stories follow the collapse of a galactic empire and its rebirth. What makes this chronicle special is that in the world of the story, all of these elements were predicted by Hari Seldon using the new technology

[33] According to its scholars and practitioners, sf has "ended" on multiple occasions. For the Panshin brothers this was in 1945 with the introduction of the Mule. For Earl Kemp and contributors to the fanzine *Who Killed Science Fiction?* Sf was dead by 1960, and again largely to blame were mutants–characters with telepathy and other forms of psionic powers.

of psychohistory. This new predictive social statistics was meant to shorten the time it takes to create the foundation of a new galactic empire from thirty thousand years to one thousand. Psychohistory is a predictive sociology that uses mathematical modeling to predict general behaviors and practices of humans throughout the galaxy. Prior to the Mule—both character and story—everything in Seldon's plan was functioning perfectly. While Asimov was resistant to upsetting this plan, Campbell insisted. This resulted in Asimov writing "The Mule" and "one of the best twist endings the genre had ever seen, and its titular antagonist, a mutant telepath, introduced a welcome element of chance into a series that often seemed constrained" (Nevala-Lee 207). It is this mutant, his twist, and the upsetting of science fiction as genre that the Panshin brothers base their ending of the genre upon.

At the end of their history of the genre, Alexei and Cory Panshin conclude with the remark that "'The Mule' marks the end of ("golden age" or "classic era") science fiction, and the end of our story of the myth of science fiction" (648). This declaration asserts that Asimov's "Mule," created at Campbell's prompting, ended the period in which science fiction was centered on and fixated upon transcendent science (where technology was the means of becoming more-than-human). The Panshins further argue that the following era of science fiction is one in which transcendence is refigured as a primarily mental activity -- as new ways of thinking and being via a more capacious or enlarged mind –rather than affiliated with the accouterments of space ships, guns and computers. In a letter to Isaac Asimov in February of 1953, Campbell spells out this argument clearly: "Our whole culture today is based on one basic fallacy—that in <u>all</u> things there is <u>one and only one</u> right way… it takes two eyes, seeing differently, to produce a three-dimensional understanding" (Chapdelaine 85, Campbell's emphasis). Campbell here tries to overturn the fallacy that there's a singular way of thinking and

being in the world, and, in this long exhortation to Asimov, he turns to bodily metaphor (cliché, really) to make his point:

> "In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king"
> No, he isn't. Because he will use his one eye, and get a one-way view of things, while the blind, forced to rely on their two ears, their two hands, and so on, will have a better understanding of life. He won't be king; he'll be the Scout. (Chapdelaine 85)

Returning to the Panshin brothers, it's surprising that the mutant figure at the center of their historical periodization project is only briefly commented upon. The Mule indeed is capable of disrupting Seldon's plan specifically because of his mutant characteristics. He is a surprise: a disruption of galactic humanity and its behaviors. The Mule's physical differences, psychic capabilities, and capacity for mental and empathic manipulation are an afterthought and an echo in their discussion. The only way in which The Mule is resolved in this story is that his name signals his sterility—his characteristics cannot be inherited. Seldon's plan relies on broad, systematic behaviors of large populations. Because the Mule is a singular mutant whose traits cannot be reproduced, the *Foundation* series is permitted to continue shaken, but not entirely upset.

By following prominent mutant figures and practices, it is possible to witness the ways in which their disparate repetitions and reliance on an aesthetics of otherness create a cognitive/emotional map of what non-normative bodies can do for readers, for texts, and for shifting perspectives of what is shocking about variance. The Panshin brothers offer an initial formation of how mutation operated for John W. Campbell when he took over *Astounding*. In his first "mutant" editorials and covers, "Campbell made an editorial point of declaring that what was being depicted was not reality, but things *as they would appear to human perception*" (Panshin and Panshin, authors' emphasis, 429). In this declaration, he claimed that a painting of

Mercury was a mutant cover in that it wasn't factually accurate, but accurate to how a human would feel and perceive being on the surface of Mercury. The sun was painted too large, and Campbell compares it to how humans see the size of the moon when it is closer to the horizon rather than higher in the sky. As I read this engagement with mutation as a form of media is that it focuses less on fact and more on sensation. Campbell makes the argument that his editorial arc is not towards the arc of science, but towards the arc of the sensational. Under the auspices of science, these pieces then are more intentionally curated to emotionally impact readers than to inform them.

Campbell's mutation, for the Panshins, is an intervention into the discourse of science fiction because it explicitly claims to no longer exemplify the one and only way of knowing: scientific, empirical accuracy. Instead, it represents a conceptual transformation as a way to reflect cognitive/perceptual accuracy. The explicit "mutant" action Campbell is taking is to cast off one of the foundational illogics of science fiction, its claim to empirical truth—or as close as possible when predicting the future—, and to move into conversations of embodied perception. Generating this perception requires exaggeration to pull the audience along, conceptually and bodily. Campbell is creating and curating speculative futures as he imagines his audience will perceive it. As a practice of science fiction, I argue that mutation functions as a cognitive hinge on which emotional and conceptual knowledges pivot, organized by assumptions of how science fiction creators think an audience will perceive variations of humanity. In this way, mutants signal the fundamental internal conflict of science fiction–that science relies on telling factual information and that fiction relies on non-factual stories to tell stories.

Through the rise of science fiction as a popular genre to the end of the mutagenic window in the mid 1960s, the need for spectacle and sensation to sell stories expanded exponentially.

Thinking back to earlier mutant fiction, the threshold for thrill was a minor disruption to the categories of Man. In the pulps, early mutants were often already non-human expressions of anxiety about the world beyond Western "civilization." As previously discussed, White's "Purple Terror" was one of many stories that straddled science fiction and the weird to convey anxiety between hierarchies and clashes of Man and the rest of existence. The twist offered in this piece was miniscule: carnivorous plants capable of eating human-sized creatures. It was a small but predictable thrill that readers might expect of the wilds beyond the civilized West. In the intervening years between its publication in 1899 and the publication of Kadra Maysi's[34] "The Isle of Abominations" in the October 1938 issue of *Weird Tales*, the needs of readers to experience thrills demanded the introduction of more scientific interpretation, more racial codification and hierarchization, and more viscera than its forebear. This acceleration and disruption of expectation became the go-to for mutant media.

As a model of the acceleration of mutant thrills, I turn to this later plant-based mutant story as a parallel. In "Isle of Abominations," doctor Dicon Croyce and his partner Harvey travel to a mysterious island off the coast of the Carolinas (likely the Beaufort Sea Islands) to clear the island and settle the estate of an eccentric scientist. They have been hired to catalog the plants for value and to guide two teams of workers, one Black and one Irish, in the best ways to harvest the plants of the island. Taken as a whole, the story is a long-form commentary on not using science to upset "natural" orders. The plants are described as abominations for transgressing their docile nature and becoming carnivorous. Alongside this terror, Dicon similarly hierarchizes the order between himself and Harvey as educated, white Men above the "low white" Irish laborers (431), and in turn reifies the positon of these workers above Black Laborers (431). This hierarchy is

[34] Pen name of Katherine Drayton Mayrant Simons.

established by Croyce in terms of rationalism in the face of the terror of the "unnatural" category-defying carnivorous plants that he cannot distinguish if they are "animal or vegetable" (438). As he evaluates this horror, he notes that the camp of Black laborers has been scared away because of extreme superstition, but that "the Irish will think they exaggerate. Being superstitious themselves, they have no belief in other people's superstitions" (438). Instead, Croyce offers a false explanation of the situation to appeal to the limited rationality of the Irish camp, creating a hierarchy of reason in which is his the pinnacle, above the Irish laborers who in turn position themselves above the Black laborers.

While ostensibly an echo of "The Purple Terror" in its othering of places adjacent to the United States through mutant plants, "The Isle of Abominations" assembles around it the trappings of scientific knowledge through its main character. Through his appearance as an authority on the hierarchies of Man and Nature, Croyce articulates the hierarchization of Man and the practices of stigmatized groups (in this case, the Irish) to create distance between themselves and Black people, who Sylvia Wynter described as being "made to occupy the nadir" of the hierarchy of "normal" (Wynter 260). "The Isle of Abominations" comes to hold the multiple levels on which the mutant pulp story functioned–striving for some form of scientific validity for division of categories while offering increasing thrills of transgression of category.

The acceleration of the mutant arms race that later burst the mutant bubble in the 1960s created a greater and greater need for different and shocking kinds of mutants in order to continue hooking readers. Looking back to the rough timeline of mutant stories which opens this section, one notices a few mutant stories coming together in the late 1920s, such as "The Tissue-Culture King" and "The Murgatroyd Experiment" followed by a fast acceleration in the 1930s

with "The Earth's Cancer[35]," "The Adaptive Ultimate[36]," "Faceted Eyes[37]," and "Proteus Island[38]" to name only a few. In the midst of these short stories, an early example of the later Man-After-Man appeared in the form of Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John* which follows a queer mutant through his life, search for other mutants,[39] creation of a socialist utopia, and death.

Many stories continued to portray shocking, horrific, and threatening mutants as a way to titillate and shock, inviting readers to carom off the boundaries of Man as they continuously sought the spectacle of those on its edge. L. Sprague de Camp's "The Merman" offered readers a safe, temporary glance into what it might be to become mutant-for-a-day in *Astounding's* December 1938 issue.[40] "The Merman" opens, as many such stories do, with a well-meaning scientist,[41] a Man who is on the cusp of wealth and marriage, making an honest mistake and exposing himself to an experimental chemical that transforms his lung tissue into gill tissue. What results is a day in a shark tank, where he repeatedly mourns his non-normativity as a result of the accident. He bemoans his becoming unmarriable, "You couldn't expect a girl to marry a man who lived underwater" (443), insists on maintaining his masculinity, "the male of 'mermaid' is 'merman,' you ape!" (445), and sinks into a sleepless terror about no longer being recognizable as human, envisioning how "his hands would turn into fins. He'd grow scales–" (446). This day as a merman is meant to contrast his rational existence as a Man with the terror and irrationality of being a mutant on display.

[35] Capt. S.P. Meek, *Amazing Stories*, March 1931
[36] Stanley G. Weinbaum (under the pen-name John Jessel) *Astounding Stories*, November 1935
[37] E.L. Ross *Astounding Stories*, October 1935
[38] Stanley G. Weinbaum *Astounding* Stories, August 1936
[39] "Save for [a very few], John found nothing but lunatics, cripples, invalids, and inveterate old vagabonds in whom the superior mentality had been hopelessly distorted by contact with the normal species."
[40] This short story was deemed exciting enough to be the cover art for the issue as well.
[41] Named Vernon Brock, but this is less common than the other elements of such a story.

What is particularly fascinating in this story, however, is not the main character's experience, but the cast of humans on his periphery as he navigates it. The caretaker of the aquarium, Sam Baritz, is repeatedly framed as less-than the main character through insults, his unwillingness to do work, and his being the only voice written in dialect. While Baritz is never described physically, his voice affectations and the insult of "ape" hurled at him from the main character implies some form of racial or socioeconomic difference between the two of them that the reader is expected to pick up on. Similarly, there is another character, Oscar Daly, who is repeatedly referred to as a "little man with a wry nose" (445) that makes the main character uncomfortable by repeatedly staring at him. As the story comes to a close, it is revealed that Daly is a former circus performer, now old and injured, looking for a new way to make a living. The main character and Daly go into business together, making Daly a new act in a circus: Oscar the Merman.

This dalliance in freakery, then, establishes a series of affective recognitions and misrecognitions. At the fore is the implication that the main character is normal and shouldn't be a spectacle–he is Man after all. However, what this simultaneously accomplishes is a recognition that there are legitimate ways to become a spectacle, for instance, when an already outside-of-Man figure such as Oscar is disabled and needs a new line of work. "The Merman" denies the threat of mer-person transformation as a permanent genetic change–instead nullifying the threat of the mutant by making the transformation temporary. The story functions along the affective pathways of the freak show and the creation and resolution of discomfort in presumed-to-be-Man readers. Encouraging readers to think through the divide of who ought to be a spectacle (anybody but Man) and who should facilitate being on display (Man), "The Merman" demonstrates the

porosity of these mutant stories, making the divide between Man and mutant still more tenuous through repetition.

The need for greater and greater variety and opportunity to transgress the boundaries of Man accelerated to a tipping point in the 1940s and 1950s, during which time key mutant stories changed how such stories would be read. This resulted in readers who were more accustomed to seeking out, accepting, and enjoying the temporary otherness that the mutant offers. In this way, mutant fiction forced the boundaries of Man to become porous enough that sf fans (imagined to be Men) could find themselves on both sides of the Man/mutant boundary in a new form: the Man After Man.

The Man After Man

In the 1940s and 50s, the pulps began to run mutant stories unlike the previous generations of monsters, threats to humanity, and horrifically other beings. Instead, authors such as A.E. Van Vogt, Lewis Padgett,[42] and Theodore Sturgeon began writing of mutants that were more than human, mutants who came to be indicative of superhumans, or mutants who were simultaneously disabled and hyper-abled. These superhuman mutants were immediately recognizable to sf fans as both the thrilling and chilling variance they had become accustomed to and as figures they closely associated with as part of their own in-group mythos of superior intellect and quality.

From September to December of 1940, *Astounding Science Fiction* released the four segments of the novel *Slan* by A.E. Van Vogt. *Slan*, as a mutant story, focuses on a form of superhuman mutant persecuted by humanity. The titular Slans are initially presented as a race of posthuman constructs—telepathic, stronger, and smarter than humanity. In this way, they are

[42] Pen name of the combined work of Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore.

made to be recognizable figures: scientifically controlled and enhanced humans. However, as the protagonist Jommy Cross later realizes, Slans are a natural evolution from humanity, not constructed through technology. The slans are a true mutation, and in the framework of the text become exemplars of what humans can become in the world of psi-: telepathic, physically superior, and more Man than Man.

The action which drives *Slan*, however, is the genocide of Slans by Man, whose jealousy and fear of a superior being results in widespread massacre and persecution. This reaction became increasingly common as mutants became more relatable. If mutants could become more Man than Man, then they became deserving of empathy and connection. As opposed to the horrors of so-called regressive mutants, the progressive superhuman mutants were cast as unfairly persecuted heroes: monuments to the progress potential of Man. While these mutants were recognizable and pitiable, however, they still represented a fundamental threat to the category of Man–if Man were no longer the pinnacle achievement of humanity, then what of the readers and their assuredness of their superiority?

What came to pass, then, was an association between readers and the persecuted superhumans. No longer was Man the ideal around which to rally, but the Man-after-Man. Shortly after its publication, "Slan" became a rallying cry for the (mostly white, mostly masculine) fans of science fiction, who perceived themselves to be "persecuted geniuses" (Nevala-Lee 123). The Mutant threat to Man became desirable through repetition of deviance, until it finally became a desirable outcome when it was associated with exaggerated ideals of Man: Slans were hyper-intelligent, hyper-masculine, hyper-able beings, being persecuted for this superiority. These exaggerations of normativity, masculinity, and mutation become a dissonant aesthetic, where the ideals of Man become twisted, and the formerly grotesque other of the

mutant becomes the desirable future of the fan. Because of the positionality of sf as popular but degraded literature, "Fans of sf often embraced these psychic wounded, seeing in them something heroic and undervalued. 'Fans are slans' became an only slightly self-mocking banner" around which fans gathered to celebrate their status as Man-after-Man (Broderick 10)[43]. The mutability of the mutant figure became a symbolic banner around which multiple fan communities could gather around. However, this tended to exacerbate hierarchies of fandom which privileged whiteness, masculinity, and ability (i.e. Man) while gatekeeping and excluding other fans.

Following the success of *Slan*, Van Vogt created another mutant novel in 1948, *The World of Null A*[44], a book about a super-powerful mutant who was able to exist across multiple bodies. In this text, Gilbert Gosseyn and his multiple other embodiments steadily manipulate humanity on both Earth and Venus to create a race of Man that is hyper-intelligent, hyper-logical, and hyper-social. The story follows Gosseyn,[45] a man without a true past who is trained in the ways of Ā (non-aristotelian logic) as he discovers galactic conspiracy, multiples of his own body, multiples of his own brain, and the future of human society. Throughout the course of the narrative, *The World of Null-A* exemplifies non-Aristotelian logic as the means by which humanity as a society can advance. In response to a galactic invasion, Gosseyn notes how "As one man, Venusians had realized the situation, and without agreement, with no pre planning or warning, had done what was necessary" (228) to resist an invasion fleet that amounted to a sixth of the entire population of Venus. What is notable in the alien-invasion aspect of this is the utterly un-alienness of the galactic peoples. They are warlike, bureaucratic, manipulative, and all

[43] See also "It is a proud and lonely thing to be a Man/Fan" starting in *Astounding*, June 1949 and running through commentary in the 50s.
[44] Also titled *The World of Ā*, when publishers have the budget for less-standard typeface.
[45] Pronounced "go - sane" a nod to the implied insanity of those who have not accepted Ā philosophy.

ostensibly Man. One character remarks, “I’m glad they’re men, and not alien monsters" (58). Indeed, the description of the political intrigue of the galaxy sounds more like a UN negotiation than a political system of beings that think differently from Man. The ease with which the alien is folded into the narrative then leaves only the mystery of Gosseyn and his extra brain as an affective generator of thrill.

To summarize briefly the life (lives) of Gosseyn, he is mutant and he is legion. The world of the story establishes the premise that brains which are similar enough can be made to vibrate and share information, and thus transfer between bodies if a clone is available. Gosseyn is revealed to be nearly every major mover of events in the narrative. Gosseyn I lives for four chapters and is killed; Gosseyn II lives for the rest of the book; Goesseyn III is killed in-vitro before his body can be activated; the main figure of horror and disgust, X,[46] is a previous version of Gosseyn (categorized here as Gosseyn X-I), and the invisible force working against the galactics at the end of the narrative is revealed to be the latest in a 500-year series of clones (classified here as Gosseyn X-Y) that are guiding all of humanity towards Ā. This clone/mutant/legion is a variation of Man which retains a second brain (which for others is destroyed by the stress of existence) that is capable of enforcing will on matter and energy, permitting such feats as teleportation and telepathy.[47]

It is worth lingering in these variations of Gosseyn for a moment, as they span the history of the mutant, its subjugation, and its rise to that which is desirable. The figure of Gosseyn X-I embodies the ways in which variance and mutation were rendered as horrific and affectively disgusting. His status as a disabled man who is still hyper-intelligent is frequently billed as

[46] Described as: Cripple (49), Half-man (50), Creature (46), Semi-plastic (53), Frightfully injured, [with an] abnormal ego (98), Plastic monstrosity (124), and Plastic nightmare beetle (126).
[47] Except with members of the opposite sex, as Gosseyn determines that “a man could not tune in on a woman” (248)

discomforting and horrifying, and in a final monologue from Gosseyn X-Y, it is just these monstrous attributes that allowed so many Gosseyns to exist, because Gosseyn X-I was "damaged… and speeded up" which Gosseyn X-Y describes is "cruel, but it made him the 'greater'" Gosseyn (268). The "greater" nature of Gosseyn X-I permits the other more-than-Man versions of Gosseyn to move about and foil the galactic invaders while also wearing the mantle of the persecuted super-Man. Gosseyn (across variations) is meant to represent a physical analog to the logic of Ā. Those who analyze him determine that he is "a true mutation, the man after man" and as such the necessity of his continued existence outweighs the entire population of Venus (144). The mutant, in this era, is the outcome of hundreds of years of physical, social, and logical eugenics. A super-Man capable of collective action with other superMen and the next step on the one-way staircase of human progress.[48]

In between Van Vogt's publications, C.L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, writing together as Lewis Padgett, published a series of telepathic mutant stories in 1945 in *Astounding,* later gathered together as the collection *Mutant*. The stories of *Mutant* follow a mutation of humanity–baldies–that are few in number but possess the capacity to read human minds and join in a collective telepathic network. At the heart of these stories is a conflict analogous to that of *The World of Null-A*–the relationship between the individual and the collective. Told through a series of shared memories, the stories in *Mutant* trace the lineage of humanity after nuclear war, when communities have shrunk and specialized as communities. Everyone has nuclear weapons, and any time a community might get too big or independent, they can and will be destroyed. In the space of these stories, readers are folded into the perspective of the Baldies–something that the

[48] There is a longer form of this discussion which critiques the racism inherent in creating a society based entirely on one individual repeating themself over and over again in Gary Westfahl's "'You Don't Know What You're Talking About' : Robert A. Heinlein and the Racism of American Science Fiction."

narrators of these stories find difficult because "it was horribly difficult for an ordinary man to conceive that a Baldy was—the same. It was the difference that men looked for, and found." (19). Moore and Kuttner frequently return to the ways in which humanity has historically defined itself by cutting away difference. One thread which connects the stories is the threat of "paranoid" Baldies, ones that behave like humans in their desire to control and be the superior race.

The main players in these stories discover the threat from "paranoid" baldies thanks to a disabled woman. This connection between cognitive bodymind variance and the ultimate reunification of humans and baldies speaks to the ways in which mutant figures offer points of connection. In the section "Three Blind Mice," the then-narrator Barton marvels how strange it is that "it had taken a madwoman to give them their first warning. So that not even the mad were useless in the progress of the race. Strange that the threefold divisions of the mutants had so closely interwoven in the conflict just passed, Mad, sane, sane-paranoid. And typical that even in deadly combat the three lines wove together interdependently" (68). His marveling at the interrelationships of this mutant society is one step in the progression that *Mutant* as a whole offers–an interdependent network of various entities that work together despite variation. Each of the stories generally traces the interactions of potentially hostile humans, baldies trying to survive, and the threat of baldies who consider themselves to be a new Man– *homo superior*. What is particularly interesting in this example is that there is a resolution to the mutant / Man divide that is written into the final story (published in 1953)--an Inductor. The use of this technology restores connection between humans and baldies, a prosthetic form of telepathy that allows all of humanity to join in a single, massive hivemind. Rather than supplanting Man or

becoming the Man-after-Man, the stories of *Mutant* trace another possibility, a reconciliation of human variance through cooperation and mediating technology.

Before the mutagenic window closed on the pulps in the early 1960s, one final novel provides a thorough linkage of disability and mutant: Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*. This text traces the creation of the collective Man-after-Man in the form of *homo gestalt*, a collective of mutants working together as a singular being. Each element of the *homo* gestalt is disabled on their own, one is described as a "fabulous idiot" incapable of "[thinking] deductively" but who possesses psychic capabilities and can act as a link between individuals (Sturgeon 9). Others include twins capable of teleportation and a baby who is a "brainless but faultless computer" for the whole of the being (60). This final story continues the mutant trend of expansion and interdependence: breaking up the category of Man, with its rugged, individualist, white Western ideals. Instead the mutant has collided with Man and fragmented its ideals, its superiorities and located them in something which, uncomfortably, already exists. Moore, Kuttner, and Sturgeon point to the potential and power of collectives in answer to the question of Man, recognizing the value of variance and the potential that exists in finally moving through Man.

Born of Man and Woman

As this chapter opened with the stretching of Man to acknowledge and value the mutant in Poul Anderson's "Tomorrow's Children," it closes with an example of radical extension of care to a bodymind beyond what many of the pulp's imagined audience would consider to be Man. The 1950 short story "Born of Man and Woman" by Richard Matheson is introduced by the editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* as featuring a "protagonist who tells it with a mind such as you have never met, housed in a body you have never imagined" (Mills

108). This story, which is told in the first-person perspective of a mutant, ungendered child narrates the abuse visited upon them by their parents for not looking “like mother and father. Mother says all right people look like they do" (Matheson 109). Matheson’s story concludes with the mutant plotting retribution against their abusive parents: “I will screech and laugh loud. I will run on the walls. Last I will hang head down by all my legs and laugh and drip green all over until they are sorry” (Matheson 110). In this climax, the body “never imagined” by the editor, and assumed to have never been imagined by the audience, becomes a threatening spectacle. It is fearsome, it is grotesque, and it is far more complicated than is immediately apparent. In the concluding paragraphs, the reader is tasked to choose sides again given new information: should the reader embrace a gender-defying, multi-limbed, green-spewing mutant, or the horrific suburban parents who violently punish non-normativity? The story’s surprise ending becomes an affective shock and reversal: how might the reader ethically take the side of parents who would chain and beat their own offspring? how can the audience find kinship or connection with a mind like they have never met and a body that they have never imagined?

The excitement and thrill of experiencing the unimaged and unimaginable is a core element of the aesthetic experience of science fiction. The mutant insists and provides evidence that variation is not a new thing, but one that is inherent in human existence. It defies cognitive separation between the now and the new just as much as it challenges the boundaries that define Man. It insists that the audience is a responsible party (much like a parent) in shaping speculative futures. The mutant isn’t and cannot be an erotic alien other. It is the discomforting reminder to the audience of its connection to the mutant they push away because of discomfort with its variance alongside its immediate relationality. This responsibility is the driving force behind the

affective impact of the mutant. The mutant insists on an immediate, non-erotic, kinship with the audience.

As the reader engages with "Born of Man and Woman," they occupy a position to embrace the variation and connectivity that mutant media offer. To read the story as written generates discomfort along normative lines by extending care to a being who is fundamentally different. To read the story against the grain is to experience discomfort because of one's implicit position among those who read magazines about movie stars and keep their differences locked up in the basement. By recognizing the violence inherent in the attempts of Man to separate out variation, the reader is tasked with reconciling feelings of disgust and revulsion and for whom they feel kinship.

The child of Matheson's story is recognizable as some form of "human." They have language that they use with some proficiency, which removes them from the category of animal. They have relationships with their parents, evidence of human or even Man-ly lineage, who provide care and comfort in the form of a bed and a magazine. Their parents are also abusive and cruel. All of these traits make for an empathetic and caring connection between the imagined reader and the speaker of the story. In the conclusion of the story, this extension of care is troubled when it is revealed to the reader that they have offered Man-like care to a mutant with too many legs and that drips green goo. The reader has unwittingly traversed the boundary of the affect of disgust and welcomed something that could be dangerous into their practices of care. It is in this moment that the reader must reconcile their empathy and care with a mutant. The choice is either to accept the disgust of the story as written–aligning with abusive parents and violently conformist society–or to accept the feeling of kinship with the harmed mutant, and be disgusted by an abusive society. Reading mutant stories against the grain challenges who and

what can be cared about in figurations of humanity. They challenge the primacy of Man in hierarchies of care and being, creating an intersectional space wherein it is possible to forge connections beyond the limits imposed by Western ideals.

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Are We Not Men?

Carcinization: Threatening Man

Within the first five minutes of the hit 1957 film, *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (*AotCM*), the audience is treated to a haunting, classically scored, animated introduction of sea monsters, a boat full of white scientists and navy sailors, and a beheading cross-cut with underwater recordings of one of the titular crab monsters. For the remaining fifty-five minutes of run time, *AotCM* continues this barrage of tension, monstrosity, and sensorial stimulation. The narrative of the story is that crabs in the waters of the Pacific island have been mutated by exposure to radiation. They grew to massive size, are impervious to harm (except for electricity), and are capable of utilizing the intellect and voice of humans they consumed. The resulting mated pair are bent on sinking the island and scouring humanity from the surface of the earth.[49]

While on its own, the story stands up as a striking example of shock, thrill, and awe, the stylistic elements of the film–sound design, the threat of the mutant, and combination of surface and underwater shots–amplify the mutant elements of this sf film. Throughout the film, ambient noise is used to dis-ease the team of scientists as well as the audience. The scratching of cables echoes the click of crab legs, drawing unwitting victims outside and offering a moment's respite before their inevitable death. These uncertain audio cues are amplified by the musical compositions of Ron Stein. The mutant crabs shift from a limited threat–killers of Men in small groups–to an existential threat through their capacity and desire to reproduce more mind-stealing, invulnerable mutants. The transitions between open-air and underwater shots emphasize

[49] In a way, this film is a spiritual forebear to *Deep Blue Sea* (1999), whose plot focuses on mutated sharks bent on sinking a floating research facility so that they can exit and breed.

the perceived capacity of these creatures in comparison to their human targets while also amplifying the grotesque boundary-crossing of the mutant crabs themselves.

Figure III: A giant mutant crab that houses the brains of multiple white American scientists crests a stony outcrop. Its slanted eyes are intended to be menacing and its overlarge limbs terrifying.

The design of the crabs evokes the permeability of the category of Man, mapping human-like faces onto crab bodies and shells. The titular crab monsters have massive, puffy, slanted eyes and wispy, centrally-aligned antennae that evoke a thin mustache. Combined with their use of human voices, the creatures become a mésalliance of Man and mutant. In their mixed assemblage, the creatures are supposed to signal a host of images and symbols, layered into a single fearsome entity. At one level, they are meant to tap into the general fear humans have for sea creatures, whose bodily arrangements are fascinating in their difference. At another level, the way in which the crabs are racially coded–located in the Pacific and with eyes that evoke mid-century American bias against East Asians–is meant to tap into a particularly Western set of anxieties post World War II. In this way, the crabs become a stand in not only for the dangers of radiation, but the dangers of people where America used radioactive weapons. The subtlety of

the wispy antennae and eye shape are meant not to be an overt symbol, but a series of codifications that simplify the practice of making a world threatening by hearkening to race and threatening whiteness from the outside.

In *Racial Worldmaking*, Mark Jerng discusses the ways in which science fiction and fantasy worldmaking rely on readers who are already attuned to, and expecting, commentary on race to be imbricated in the new worlds in which they find themselves. The presence of these images in *AotCM* is part of what Jerng argues as "the *salience of race*: we are taught when, where, and how race is something to notice" (2). In this chapter, I use the salience of race to track how mutants become racialized through their deviation from the category of Man through visual, narrative, and auditory cues. Reading into the ways in which mutation and disability are stigmatized as a threat to human reproduction in popular film, it is possible to read into the implications of racialized discourses and to locate their anxieties in allegedly non-racial content. In his work, Jerng emphasizes the role of both consumers of popular culture as well as creators, in that "the coherence of the world as such, the coherence of a global perspective, is made to depend on certain built-in knowledges of race" (34) and that "we can see a longer history of instructing readers to notice race in ways that supplement the limitations of scientific racism's attention to the body or social Darwinism's attention to civilization" (41). Jerng argues specifically that anxieties around the 'yellow peril' of anti-Asian science fiction become legible as a genre, holding together a multiplicity of figures, metaphors, and images in ways that are not explicitly focused on race, but which are indexed by racial characteristics. Whereas Jerng addresses fictions of alternative histories of the Civil War, Russo-Japanese War, and World War II, this chapter focuses on US science fiction films and the ways in which racialized coding becomes part of the ways that stories of difference were told on the screen–moving away from

explicit eugenic discourse in the wake of World War II into more disembodied conversation about dangers to reproducing Western society.

The heavily weighted term "Man," with a capital M, is a site of social and cultural control in science fiction across media. Jamaican critic, philosopher and scholar Sylvia Wynter argues that one of the primary sites of cultural contestation is Western bourgeois masculinity: "Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" (Wynter 260). In her work thinking through "The Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," she describes the fraught nature of Man and how it has been and continues to be used. She notes that the way humanity is according to the primacy of this impossible ideal, a process "that defines us biocentrically on the model of a natural organism, with this a priori definition serving to orient and motivate the individual and collective behaviors by means of which our contemporary Western world-system or civilization, together with its nation-state units, are stably produced and reproduced" (296). This stable reproduction is precisely where mutants, both literal and figurative, intervene. In my work, I argue that mutants challenge the implied and assumed stability of the category of Man by existing beyond it while tracing their origins to within. I use mutants to intervene in the stable reproduction of Man as a concept and socially-constructed ideal and further rely on the form of it, both as metaphor and material, to point out the ways that humanity very much varies. Mutant film in particular offers aesthetic and affective means which disrupt practices of control for the image and sound of mutation. By constantly and repeatedly shifting their performance in ways that make the boundaries of Man porous, I use mutants to trouble the biopolitical divide of which variations of humanity to remove and which to retain in the interest of greater social diversity and potential. Because of a general interest in witnessing and comparing oneself to difference, I argue that mutants, both as whole entities and as series of symbols, create discomfort and interest

at the same time, making them compelling figures to pursue for both normative and nonnormative viewers.

At the affective level, Crab Monsters are disgusting–they are awkward, uncomfortable things that move with difficulty. At the same time, they are also fascinating, it's difficult to look away when they are on screen because of the disbelief that something this ill-designed could be threatening. In his work *On Disgust,* philosopher of sensation Auerl Kolnai addresses the long-standing and fraught connection between disgust and allure. He notes that "what is disgusting is in principle not threatening, but rather *disturbing*… There is without a doubt a certain invitation hidden in disgust as a partial element… a certain macabre allure" (42 emphasis in original). The bare visible elements of the crabs are difficult to take seriously. They're lumpy, slow, and blend human characteristics with Brachyura characteristics in improbable ways. If this were all they are, they would be much more uncomfortable beings than threats. There's a threshold of capacity that must be crossed for a film antagonist to move from something that disturbs to something that threatens, and in many cases this threshold is crossed through acts of violence, a superpower, or a threat to ideology.

The narrative of *AotCM* builds a more threatening and hateable image of the monsters by layering aspects of humanity atop the crustacean form of the titular monsters. Contrary to appearances, the crabs cannot be damaged by normal matter, and only come to harm when subjected to an electric field. They also possess the capacity to take on the knowledge and voices of humans they have eaten. The crabs kill scientists and, through an undescribed process, secure their memories and voices to communicate with humans. As such, they have above-average intelligence and a hive-mind of ways of understanding the world. It is through this dawning realization that the thrill of the film moves from disgust–the spectacle of macabre allure–to

hatred. In distinguishing disgust from hate, Kolnai argues that hate carries with it "destructive intent… presuppos[ing] dislike, condemnation, reprobation, or loathing" (Kolnai 104). The threat implied by the crab monsters towards the category of Man and its place in the world moves from a danger on a singular island to a danger that can become globally destabilizing. In mutant media, the boundaries of disgust, hatred, and horror are blurred because of the *uncertainty* of the object at its center. Specific to *AotCM*, this mystery leans into Jerng's formulations on racialization; he argues that the mysterious or unknown/unknowable elements of the "yellow peril" as genre rely on eugenic logics of difference and their failure to account for nonwhite communities that couldn't easily be discounted. He points out that, "unable to locate superiority along physical or anthropological lines, [authors] emphasize[d] unknowability. To be sure, this is an early example of the now-familiar discourse of Asian deceit and inscrutability" (35). I hold these uncertainties as a necessary means to understanding how mutants function in popular media as overburdened symbols: they are utilized to simultaneously

1. Threaten Man as a category through force, ideology, and reproduction
2. Recinforce Man as an ideal formulation of humanity through its triumph
3. Attract viewers through increasingly exaggerated size, capacity, strangeness, and threats
4. Navigate the self-policing ideological boundaries of film in the mid-twentieth century
5. Symbolize physical, racial, and reproductive difference

In film media, I argue that this overburdening leads to a cognitive dissonance around mutant aesthetics, making them fascinating, desirable objects to witness and experience, but whose very fascination inexorably leads to their containment through elimination, incarceration, or cure.[50]

I argue that mutants in film are utilized to heighten the stakes for viewers who have a vested interest in the reproduction of the status quo, and whose understanding of the status quo is

[50] For more on this fate of disabled characters in literature, see David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*.

anchored in shorthand that assumes the ideal of Man as able-bodied and white will recognize racialized symbols, however disembodied they may become from humans. Jerng notes the efficacy of such tactics when he notes that "these activities of constructing contexts, encoding preferences, and organizing information are all things that readers do quickly" (13) and that "the coherence of the world as such, the coherence of a global perspective, is made to depend on certain built-in knowledges of race" (34) which I extend in this chapter to also articulate built-in knowledges of dis/ability. The presence of these markers, especially racialized and disabled mutants, is used to press the bounds from objects of disgust into objects to be destroyed as threats to Man. In her work on disgust in *Disgust*: *The Gatekeeper Emotion*, Susan Miller distinguishes between disgust and hate that "Disgust is more likely to occur when an intrusion is limited… horror is the likely response when little can be done to resist the invasion of some powerful outsider" (171). Because mutants and mutations come from within and are by nature beyond control, they unify motivators for disgust, hatred, and horror. However, I use the mutant to argue that these affects are not instinctual responses, they are deeply enculturated manifestations of a sensation of division.[51] Mutants defy an easy split between the audience and the figures of discomfort. They are, to greater and lesser degrees, scientific fact. The fact of human and animal variation lends additional gravitas to their use as symbols in mutant media. In *That's Disgusting*, neurologist and psychologist Rachel Herz aptly summarizes that "disgust is sculpted by culture… disgust is the instinct that has to be learned" (233). She utilizes this framework to explicate how disgust is an emotion universally felt by humans but which is attuned uniquely to each through the combinations of social standing, geographic location, class,

[51] Kolnai, Miller, and Herz all write in detail about how, among affects, disgust is uniquely motivated as an isolating aspect, especially for the separation of self and other, self and the world, and self and culture. It is described alternatively as a gatekeeping emotion, as the divide between life and death, and as what it means to be human.

race, gender, and dietary preference. Disgust is the emotion tapped to distinguish between the self (physical and cognitive) and dangers to this self. Mutants evoke this emotion as a baseline, as mutants destabilize what it means to be a human biologically and destabilize the impossible social ideal of Man as an overrepresentation of humanity. This instability can be cognitively overwhelming, and to that end the mutant threat[52] must be resolved by the conclusion of the film. Indeed, *AotCM* ends with the killing of the pregnant crab and the reunion of a heteronormative pair of breeding Western scientists.

AotCM offers insight into the affective and philosophical structuring of mutant cinema. It relies on cognitive dissonance on the part of the audience when presented with simultaneous sensory, cognitive, or aesthetic elements that do not align. The crab monsters look disgusting– they're not only threatening, but gross and strange. Their narrative is that they're the greatest possible threat to humanity. This misalignment of experience is a critical element of sf as a genre, and especially for mutant films, where practices of signification and affect transfer run rampant. Mutant cinema exemplifies the ways in which audiences approach film sensuously, experiencing sensoria that are simultaneously informed by cultural understanding and aesthetic practices. While some sf figures have singular stock-and-trade images and sounds,[53] mutants and mutation cinema exist in the spaces where these conventions can't be resolved. This chapter, then, traces the laws, codes, stylistic practices, and paradoxes that shape filmic attempts at conveying mutation.

I use these sensory and narrative frameworks to argue that mutants in cinema at this time held open a necessary space for film viewers whose experiences were growing increasingly

[52] Within the mutagenic window this dissertation follows–later films offer alternatives to Man rather than restoration in the denouement.
[53] See exposed mechanical elements of cyborgs and automata or listen to the theremin that announces an alien.

homogenized through self-censorship and social panic around cinema as medium. Mutant humans became anathema to the rules which studios adhered out of social pressure, and as such they became disembodied experiences and symbols. In the years that followed the closing of the mutagenic window and an increase in grotesque, horrific, and mutable figures, these practices for creating extreme sensations had become shorthand. They no longer explicitly addressed eugenic concerns of race and disability, but still carried this signification within them. I offer this reading of mutants, then, as a way to understand how the symbols, sounds, and sights that create discomfort today have roots in racially- and disability-coded conversations.

Mutant Media and the Allure of Discomfort

This chapter focuses on the cinematic practice of putting mutation into films. This means tracking the irresolvable sounds, disgusting images, and aesthetic structures that make mutant cinema a grotesque experience. Mutant media are texts, films, sounds, and performative experiences that destabilize the reproduction of Man as a cultural ideal. In making this argument, I thread a narrow slice of representations of difference that existed on film during the period of this dissertation. Mutant films overwhelmingly rely on containing and destroying the mutant other by its conclusion, re-insisting on the primacy of Man as ideal figure.[54] Despite this, over time mutant cinema moved from structures that reify Man as ideal into speculating on the possibility of a world or worlds after man. This chapter, then, moves from early fears of difference to the first of many later examples that offer mutation as an alternative to Man. Marshall McCluhan, in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, argues that "in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium…result from the new scale that is introduced into our

[54] With some notable exceptions, as described in this chapter.

affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (1). Perhaps over-simply put, McCluhan argues that the message precedes the content–the specific medium utilized to convey alters the ideas being carried. To this end, this chapter focuses on the ways science fiction broadly, and the mutant specifically, is conveyed through the medium of film.

The move from the disgusting object of mutant to the hated concept of mutants as threat to Man is reinforced by and reinforces social and cultural stigmatization of bodymind variance from the ideal of Man. To fully assemble this series of sensations and emotions requires an understanding of the ways that the concept "mutant" is disassembled and conveyed across multiple transformations[55] and sensoria. Science fiction as it is made manifest in the medium of the pulps is indebted to legacies of high-emotion writing paired with popular science and the trappings of scientific legitimacy… or at least possibility. From gaudy covers meant to catch eyes on the newsstand to "gee-whiz" adventure[56], the sf pulps of the first half of the twentieth century built flash-in-the-pan narratives that challenged hierarchies of humanity just enough to thrill most readers without ostracizing audiences. The grotesque in literature is conveyed through language[57]: linguistic symbols, cultural context, and allusion.[58] This language then becomes the reader's experience of the author's encoded images, concepts, and embodied sensations.

The medium of film utilizes different sensory processes to convey similar concepts to the audience. Image, sound,[59] and language come together to shape the experience of film, with each sensorium conveying something to the audience. The work of film philosopher Daniel Yacavone

[55] e.g. a short story into a screenplay, a screenplay into a recorded performance, a recorded performance into a scored and edited film.
[56] Which in turn traces its lineage to the dime novels of the end of the nineteenth century.
[57] With some assistance from the occasional cover-image or sketch.
[58] See the dozens of nested references to biologists, philosophers, and others in *The Hampdenshire Wonder* (1911).
[59] While sound is a significant element of contemporary cinema, its absence in early cinema remains a consideration of the sensation of silence.

discusses the ways in which participation in filmic worlds becomes a phenomenological process, relying on the coming together of bodily, cognitive, and artistic understanding simultaneously. Mutant cinema offers a space to consider the experience of what happens when these sensoria work to conflicting ends rather than harmoniously. This philosophical and aesthetic discussion addresses the inherent dissonance of allure in disgust that mutant fiction films rely on while offering a framework to understand the ways in which physiological response, narrative construction, and aesthetic values work simultaneously to shape audience experience.

This is not to say that mutant cinema in any way eschew a cinema of attraction. In point of fact, their history and medium rely on it. In "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," film theorist Tom Gunning notes the highly affective history of cinema that pulp science fiction shares: that of the carnival. Describing the memoirs of Vitagraph co-founder Albert Smith, Gunning notes that "Like a fairground barker, [J. Stuart Blackton] builds an atmosphere of expectation, a pronounced curiosity leavened with anxiety as he stresses the novelty and astonishing properties which the attraction about to be revealed will possess" (Gunning "Astonishment" 120). The cinematic experience is predicated on a promise of shock, thrill, and astonishment. As he continues to build the history of the aesthetics of shock and attraction, Gunning notes that "cinema's value lay in exposing a fundamental loss of coherence and authenticity" ("Astonishment" 128). The value of cinema is not solely in representation of the real, nor solely of sensation, but the loss of the distinction between these forms of engagement. In "The Cinema of Attraction[s]" Gunning goes on to argue that "it is possible that this earlier carnival of the cinema, and the methods of popular entertainment, still provide an unexhausted resource" for the cinematic world (Gunning "Attractions" 387). The experience of disgust, a socially-informed sensation, combined with the simultaneous presentation of narrative conditions audiences to

respond to images, sounds, and stories. In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro argues for just such a reunification of perception and reality, noting that "cinema is at once a form of perception and a material perceived, a new way of encountering reality and a part of the reality thereby discovered for the first time" (Shaviro 40). Combining reality and its representation, Shaviro draws focus to the ways in which the cinematic experience has physical, emotional, and social impacts on audiences that inform their experience of cinema as well as their existence pre- and post-viewing. In this wide ranging articulation of the embodied impact of cinema, Shaviro exhorts that "we need to abandon the notions of representation, identification, lack, and so on, if we are to be able to map out the political lines of force, the plays of power and resistance, that inhabit and animate the cinematic image" (Shaviro 64). I use mutant cinema, historical context, and film philosophy to open up the ways that cinema shapes and has been shaped by the limitations imposed around humanity and the category of Man. In watching mutant cinema, I recognize and emphasize the social and cultural forces at play, which are historically invested in de-valuing varieties of humanity at the individual story level. As these stories accumulate and dissociate from embodied representation, however, I use them to articulate the ways that fear around the boundaries of Man belie its purported repeated victories. In addressing the role of cinema as both social construct and social force, Shaviro notes that "every idealization is a violent imposition of power, and cinema is *the* idealizing mechanism *par excellence*" (author's emphasis, 161). I look to the mutagenic window between 1904 and 1964 as a time in which film participated first in the propagandistic idealization of Man as paragon of body, mind, and spirit and in its later easing of restrictions around representing difference. I look–and listen–to mutant cinema, however, which offers a counterreading to this idealization, noting the affective weight afforded to mutants as threats.

Building from this affective approach to film, I map the ways that sensory cues, narrative, and aesthetic work together to shape exaggerated experiences in cinema and which impact lived experiences beyond the theater. The experience of disgust in film both compels interaction with the sights, sounds, and concepts presented while obfuscating the implicit discomfort, hatred, and social stigma in the broader world connected to social and cultural stigmatization of human variety. Building on the work of Vivan Sobchak in *Screening Space*, this chapter looks to the history of sf film and intervenes in the conversation of "The Creature vs. The Monster" by introducing the uncomfortably intimate figure of "The Mutant." Sobchak argues that one distinguishing feature of sf and horror films are Others, categorizable by their relatability: the Creature is a thing, a surface without depth and the Monster is the threat to humanity and its place in nature / as a moral being. The Mutant is a thing from and of humanity, taking upon itself both the trappings of creaturehood and the moral dilemma of monstrousness. While Sobchak argues that both creatures and monsters are on a separate order of being from the viewer, I argue that the discomfiting relationship between the viewer and mutant is more personal than the isolated and separate relationship with The Creature and The Monster. This intervention is shaped through the treatment of various mutant and alien figures that arise in sf cinema between 1932 and 1964, especially as connected to visual effects, sound design, and dialogue. Quoting Science fiction historian Peter Nicholls, Adam Roberts notes that "The boom [in radioactive monster films] climaxed with a veritable eruption of monster movies in 1957 … the cascade continued in 1958 with variations on the theme becoming more knowing … but generic rigidity soon degenerated into decline and fall. More monster movies were made 1959–62 than in the whole of 1951–8, but almost without exception they were low-budget exploitationers of no real quality aimed at the teenage drive-in market (Nichols qtd. Roberts 322). Beginning with mutant

elements in classic Hollywood horror films, I follow mutation through the decline of mutant potency and the acceptance of non-human futures in the resolution of 1964's *The Last Man on Earth*.

Central to a reading of mutation and its discomforts is the recognition of human variation which flies in the face of Man. Human variation is a fact much obfuscated by the creation of an ideal Man which then stigmatizes the wide variety of colors, shapes, and behaviors that exist across humanity. I use mutant media to rebuff the limitations put on humanity by the category of Man through its disruption of simplistic media experience. Prominent film aesthetic and disability aesthetic theory articulates the relationship between disability representation and lived disabled experience. This discussion particularly intertwines the relationship between the impact of the Hays Code on filmmaking and the concurrent "ugly laws" of the US. I argue that mutant cinema offers a series of symbols and signals that brought viewers into theaters and drive-ins by promising them variation, and sent them away with a complex experience of wanting to see and feel more variety while feeling self-assured in their position in relation to Man.

Between 1932 and 1964, there are a plethora of films that address mutants, mutation, and genetics directly. This field is further broadened by the recognition that films utilized sounds, images, and stories of mutants to evoke particularly negative emotions, often nervousness, disgust, and hatred. I use these sights and sounds, reading through a film philosophy and disability aesthetics lens, to demonstrate the ways that mutants and their grotesque methodologies offer a heretofore unarticulated understanding of cinematic discomfort and its connection to human variation. In this chapter, I emphasize the ways that mutants operate as figures of simultaneous allure and disgust in order to hold together contemporary sociological trends with transformations of science fiction film.

The Body and the Cinematic World

In his work, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" film theorist Tom Gunning argues that "the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle–a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself" (Gunning 384). This definition of the cinematic world holds that while narrative is an element of cinema, it is not the whole of the experience of moving images and/or accompanying sound. In this way, Gunning addresses the complex relationship between cinema for the sake of experience and the presence of a narrative story, linked experiences with an implied conclusion. Rather than pit them against one another, Gunning argues that "the cinema of attraction[s] does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films" (Gunning "Attractions" 382). Mutant cinema exists perpetually in a liminal space, where the figure of the mutant is always already spectacle for its own sake and a charged narrative symbol that insists on a place in ongoing narratives of disabled existence. Thinking alongside Ato Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness,* I recognize the ways in which disability in media exists as both a social structure for shaping disabled people's existence while also being overburdened by symbolic meaning. Because disability is inherently coded as *meaning* more than *being*, disability aesthetics scholars like Quayson argue that "the implicit assumption [is] that disability is an 'excessive' sign that invites interpretation" (14). Within a film studies approach, this framework around aesthetic nervousness is particularly helpful, as the filmic realm operates on multiple sensorium and practices of cognition simultaneously. This spectacle is further complicated in the generic conventions of sf, where flawed, unbelievable, and gaudy para-spectacles define an aesthetic that finds variation and

imperfection particularly endearing. In order to discuss the multiple registers on which disability acts concurrently, I turn to film philosopher David Yacavone to offer distinction between concurrent attractions of the senses and narrative processing.

Engaging with cinema relies on a great deal of overlapping and often dissonant sensory information. The process of sitting in a movie theater[60] engages at least one's visual and auditory input, if not the olfactory and gustatory cues of popcorn and soda and the tactile experience of easy-to-clean and not-the-most comfortable arena seating. These concurrent but distinct paths of input all work to shape the experience of viewing mutant media. In *Film Worlds,* Daniel Yacavone offers a framework for comprehending how sensory inputs work alongside cognition in order to experience a film and its world in three distinct but mutually reinforcing pathways.

When addressing the concept of world-making, Yacavone argues that audiences are affected in three identifiable ways, which address sensoria, cognition, and reflection. Yacavone states

> local cinematic expression may be seen to comprise three general forms: (1) the sensory-affective, which tends toward the immediate, visceral, and 'natural' (i.e., likely biologically 'hardwired' in contemporary parlance); (2) the emotive-cognitive, or what I will refer to as cognitive-diegetic, working through fictional representation and imaginative participation or identification of some sort; and (3) the formal-artistic, involving responses to features of a film that center on their evincing aesthetic properties of form, design, and artistic intentionality and significance. (170)

In this description of cinema, Yacavone structures the affective engagement of film through the sensory-affective (biological reception of light and sound), representational (cognitive/diegetic), and constructed (formal-artistic). The short version of this is that cinema activates physical senses that depend on ways people think, and that this thinking is informed by culture and artistic

[60] Or on a couch, or in the grass by a botanical garden, or huddled over a desk in an isolated corner of a library, for that matter.

knowledge.The audience's experience of film is mediated through these channels, each relying on a complex interplay of already existing embodied knowledge and reaction. The reception of sensory information activates biological responses (instinct, cultivated pathways, etc.), these biological responses are in turn informed by cognitive associations with the story (through one's personal experiences and education), and alongside this cognitive understanding of the diegetic world, the audience formulates reactions and understandings of the film as an artistic object capable of evaluation according to its internal logics and external criteria.

For Yacavone, engaging film is an all-encompassing bodymind experience informed by sensory information, narrative continuity, and aesthetic structure.[61] In his theories on embodied knowledge, Shogo Tanaka notes that "embodied knowledge is a type of knowledge where the body knows how to act... There is no need to verbalize or represent in the mind all the procedures required. The knowledge seems to be imprinted in one's body. The knowing-subject here is the body itself, not the mind. Or more precisely, it is the mind-body" (Tanaka 149). Taking this phenomenological approach to film viewing and experience, I argue that one's pre-existing cultural assumptions impact the physical responses to film, and vice-versa. This approach to the phenomenological interpretation of film aligns with Vivian Sobchak's argument that "we see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and knowledge of our sensorium" (Sobchak "What My Fingers Knew" 6). Here, the sensory-affective engagement of film relies on activating embodied knowledge that is not cognitive process, but responses that do not need to be internally visualized or evaluated.

Recognition of embodied knowledge and its engagement with film is necessary for a disability aesthetics informed engagement with filmic use of the mutant. Such embodied

[61] This dissertation discusses bodymind as an enmeshed entity, drawing on the work of Sami Schalk in *Bodyminds Reimagined* and on the work and presentations of Margaret Price.

knowledges are often activated in connection to socially-constructed fears, such as that of bodymind variance. I use disability aesthetics and disability theory to advance the recognition of how these conditioned responses point to (often) unconscious social biases. Filmmakers have recognized the value of such conditioned responses as ways to impart immediate physical responses to the audience through visual and auditory processes at a remove from their complex racial and disability undertones. For such films as sf and horror, these are often material and narrative practices that discomfort the intended audience and draw attention to something that is out-of-place or grotesque in some manner (blood outside of the body, the absence of limb, the presence of a mutant in a Man-made setting).

Mutant cinema activates discomfort by disrupting the simplicity of having sensory, cognitive, and aesthetic experience aligned. Instead, mutant cinema rely on the discomfort generated when what one knows–culturally, socially, or factually–is undermined by story, sense, and aesthetic. These cues towards discomfort rely on an interaction of meaning and especially upon a grotesque collapse of what had once been the assumed-to-be-distinct categories of Man and mutant. Mikhail Bakhtin's writing on the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World* grounds the long-standing conversation of the ways that bodily variation, social meaning, and the grotesque interact. In its simplest form, Bakhtin's argument is that the grotesque body becomes a site in which ideals, ideas, and concepts[62] of appropriate and inappropriate public existence (behaviors, identities, and bodies) are made evident and given physical form. For Bakhtain, the grotesque body exists as exaggeration, as a series of symbols that function not only to represent themselves, but to carry further meaning. The body is the bottom line, and it fundamentally resists being controlled.

[62] In our conversion, the cognitive-diegetic and formal-artistic.

This use of the grotesque is further complicated by the existence of non-metaphorical bodies–disabled people whose behaviors and images have been co-opted to inherently 'mean' something.[63] Quayson argues that one of the fundamental sources of nervousness in engaging with disability in literature is that it must always already mean something 'more' than just being disabled–historically, disability has been conflated with divine blessing, divine wrath, social and civil criticism, and other meanings beyond being human and deviating from ideals of Man. Bakhtin's insistence on the resistant potential of the unruly body as a way to defy categorization aligns with later writing by scholars of disability studies who seek a less rigidly encoded set of negative association with disability: especially the often-encountered assumption that disabled existence is inherently undesirable.

In describing the grotesque body, Bakhtin notes it is able to reverse, destroy, or defy assumptions about hierarchical relationships, especially ones that mutually inform metaphor and physicality. As a carrier of meaning, Bakhtin emphasizes that "this body [the grotesque] can merge with various natural phenomena, with mountains, rivers, seas, islands, and continents. It can fill the entire universe" (Bakhtin 318). Bodily variation and bodily processes break down and disrupt the ways that humanity has organized the world conceptually. The introduction of this grotesque, boundary-defying corporeality destabilizes order and the rule of law. I use this unruly corporeality as a way to question the implied positive and negative connotations that arise simultaneously in the cinematic experience of mutant cinema. The sights, sounds, and stories of

[63] In their work *Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor*, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder outline the ongoing process by which disabled people are used in literature as props to narrative structure. Mitchell and Snyder argue that disability is used as a prop to elevate able-bodied protagonists through the narrative process and ignore the potentiality of a lived disabled existence (Mitchell & Snyder 205). What arises from this utilization of narrative prosthesis is that the lived experience of disability is excised: either through cure or death. Instead, disability is a quick convenience, used for its overabundance of symbolism and then removed. Mitchell, David T. and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan UP. 2001.

human variation that are encoded across cinema create an affective and aesthetic bulge for audiences, where they feel distinct allure for mutation–while still being disgusted by it. Other forms of cinema cut away from human variation to reinstitute a bodily canon of Man through a process that Bakhtin describes as an ideological cut: "that which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated" (320). I use mutant cinema to address how these bulges, coming from the inside, are sites of interest and fascination, and that their eventual cut is part of an ongoing process that increasingly reinforces Man, even beyond mutant films. To that end, I argue that mutant cinema is always already in conversation with a world that anticipates the grotesque object–the mutant, the human that doesn't live up to the ideal of Man–will be eliminated, hidden, or moderated, and therefore attempts to complicate this process, offering subversive care for that which is outside of Man.

Hearing the Mutant[64]

Mutant cinema in the first half of the twentieth century relies on the recognition of stops and starts in representation–in fragments of images, in snippets of sound, and in flashes of story. What is particularly interesting, then, is the lack of connection between mutants and the theremin–the mainstay of science fiction sound. Instead of an audible connection to the beeps and hums of the theremin, the introduction of mutants is heralded instead by a much older sound–the heavy brass stab of classic hollywood monsters. In a world of organic, oscillating sound that can be generated by the theremin, the mutant exists in a secondary set of sounds more evocative of the arrival of Nosferatu or through a composite of sounds. The ants from the film *Them!* (1954), for example, are an edited composite of multiple animals, artificially sped up in

[64] This section is best read while listening to Laurie Anderson's album *Big Science.*

post-production. Because of the discomforting intimate and inherent connections between mutants and Man, this era of mutant cinema develops a series of shorthand symbols for addressing bodymind variation, establishing visual and auditory cues for discomfort, revulsion, and fascination. Where aliens and spaceships can be quickly and efficiently summed up with the sound of the theremin, mutants are heralded by a plurality of tones that are not easily turned into a singular queue.

One auditory cue for mutation and bodymind variation often comes in the form of sensory-affective input that is incongruous with everyday soundscapes and which put the listener on edge. In *Sound Design & Science Fiction*, William Whittington describes the ways in which early science fiction soundscapes became part of the genetic and generic coding of sf film and horror from the time of *Alien* (1979) and beyond. He argues that "like coding from a genetic sequence, the traits… were passed along, slipping easily between the genres of horror and science fiction" (Whittington 132). In reflecting on this film from after the closing of the mutagenic window, he offers insight into how these practices of making sense and sensoria have deep roots in the practices which came before. In his case study of *Alien*, he argues that it borrows heavily from sf cinema of the 1950s,[65] emphasizing that already "traditional science fiction sound effects for spacecraft engines, computers, and androids became infused with horrific emotions—dis-ease, shock, and terror" (130). The technological sounds of science fiction–clicking computers and the hums of light-speed-defying engines–are stock and trade creations that change everyday auditory experience into a novum for imagination. I argue that these sounds, already iconic by the 50s, were built during the early science fiction cinema of the 30s, where they became shorthand for sounds connected to machines, bodies, and the sense of

[65] "*The Thing* (1951), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Blob* (1958), and *It! Terror from beyond Space* (1958)" (Whittington 130).

the strange that sf is invested in creating. Turning to this era of sound design offers the opportunity to consider the ways in which the theremin becomes a grotesque manifestation of boundary defiance between technology and biology.

In *The Sound of Things to Come: An Audible History of the Science Fiction Film,* Trace Reddell offers a history of the rise and fall of the theremin as an iconic sf sound. The book opens with the argument that sf "provides a site of avant-popular hybridity that facilitates forces of newness and difference on its own terms, while part of the appeal of such films is the unusual sonic experiences they provide" (Reddell 18). Sound in particular offers a necessary site to address auditory discomfort and difference. Reddell argues that the theremin's unique playing style (fighting its wide range, vibration, and fluidity) and status as a gadget prevented it from becoming more than a novelty.[66] The sound of the theremin is a unique blend of electronic tones and the vagaries and variance of the human player. Because of the oddity of the instrument, it became associated with strange and weird cinema, especially due to how "divisions between 'real music' and 'sound effects' surface repeatedly throughout the history of SF cinema, prompted in part by the ability of electronic tone generation to mimic familiar sounds and to create new ones, and to play the weird space in between" (88-9). The weird space between is precisely the auditory location of the mutant–the changing and shifting location that penetrates and moves beyond the boundaries of Man.

The theremin became the very sound of science fiction and space travel because of its immediate recognition as a non-standard instrument and sound. Reddell notes that "Bernard Herrmann and Dimitri Tiomkin… feature the instrument so prominently in their main title themes to *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing from Another World*, both… capitalize on

[66] "[The theremin's] gradual acculturation and depletion as a sonic novum is a by-product of the historicity of science fiction and the line of innovation that the very newness of the sonic novum seems to necessitate" (144)

the theremin's immediate connotations of extraterrestrial mystery and menace" (Reddell 110). Reddell argues that sf cinema recognized the potential of the theremin to be an immediate sensory-affective cue towards the presence of future technology and aliens. While Reddell argues that the theremin fell away as an auditory novum,[67] its vacillating tones and seemingly organic imperfection in play and execution linger on within other sound cues for bodymind variation that he also discusses in *The Sound of Things to Come*.

As Reddell turns to the discussion of twelve-tone music, similar language to that of the theremin arises to describe particularly affective beats. Reddell argues that in later sf soundscapes, "twelve-tone music brought the charge of the unfamiliar to a particularly earthbound science fiction of the mutants among us" (247). This use of sound became increasingly associated with cognitive and psychological discomfort, emphasizing the exaggerated discomfort of the mind with the unknown or previous unrecognized. As a sonic technique, the use of twelve-tone registers created "rapid beats produced by semitones [that] were thought to be particularly distressing" (247). These uses of sound that defies category–in the case of the theremin, that of organic or electronic sound origin and in twelve tone music the distressing association of peaks and valleys that don't align–models a material sensory-affective engagement that models Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's work on the science-fictional grotesque. These sensory cues inspire a crisis of sound that necessitates some form of resolution.

The mutant as an auditory figure defies just such a resolution. They are articulated by the use of sounds that are tangentially related to the categories they defy. In *The island of Lost Souls* (1932) the mutant creatures are announced by bestial sounds, and the iconic "Are we not men?"

[67] "At once iconic and ironic, the theremin is now science fiction's quintessential sonic motif, a stock cliché of the Other sound, and its normalizing tonalities can only reinforce our expectations of the conventions of 1950s science fiction films" (144)

scene is compounded with the sound of a training whip. In *The Fly* (1958), the reveal that the scientist has mutated into a part-fly is announced with a brazen horn section reminiscent of Universal Studios' iconic horn blats introducing the monster of Frankenstein or Dracula. In *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), as Robert Scott Carey melts into the subatomic universe, he is heralded by church bells–a distinct contrast to the radioactive scientism of the film.

For Csicsery-Ronay, this is described as the crises of category, that "such category confusions inspire disavowal, but they produce evidence that the senses cannot deny... the mind is troubled, trying to find a solution to the problem posed by perceiving what it should not be possible to perceive" (186). The sonic novum of mutant sound is met by a physiological response of disavowal and discomfort while the conscious mind tries to resolve the sensory dissonance. The sounds of the mutant are borrowed from other genres in the midst of a generic category that is supposed to be well-defined in its sound. It's in this auditory and cognitive shuffle that discomfort and allure are brought together–an alluring novum paired with a recognized threat to the static nature of categorization. It is here that monster films and mutants align–both in sound in category crisis. What's particularly interesting in terms of mutants-as-monsters is their origin from *within* humanity, rather than as a threat from the outside.

It is within the repetition of sounds such as these that sf audiences are steadily inured to the experience of discomfort in their engagement with the grotesque. The soundscape of sf film continues to demand new and varying play with discomfort–when the sound of the theremin collapses into "science fiction's quintessential sonic motif, a stock cliché of the Other sound" (Reddell 144), new forms of auditory discomfort and difference are sought out. This pressure for novel experience of the grotesque–in this case of sound–folds what was once strange and discomforting into the expected and drives an appetite for greater and greater difference. While

auditory cues for the mutant rely on the creation of a grotesque experience, visual cues and representations of the mutant relied on specific practices of makeup, prosthetics, and social coding of what forms of humanity–Man and Man-adjacent–were permitted on the screen.

"What is the Law!?"–the Hays Code and the Visibility of the Mutant

What is the law!?
"Not to lower the moral standards of those who see films!"
What is the law!?
"Not to belittle, ridicule, nor create a sentiment against Law, natural or divine"
What is the law!?
"Not to misrepresent life in such a way as to place in the minds of youth false values"[68]
Are we Not Men!?

The above is a simplification of the first tenets of The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, also known as the Hays Code, set to the refrain from *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932), "Are we not men?" (Kenton 27:38). The question, its practice of creating a cohesive and coherent social unit, and the fluidity of its response as hyphenated or not, guides this dissertation as a critical inquiry into the figure of the mutant in science fiction and its lasting connection to disability and affect.

There's ongoing discussion as to whether or not the code itself impacted the types of films that were created and what forms of representation were permitted in popular culture during the tenure of its enforcement.[69] The dramatic framing of events is that the code came into being in 1930 and was briefly resisted during the first half of the 1930s before it was ultimately enforced in earnest from 1934-1968 following involvement with the Legion of Decency. While the chronology of events is agreed upon, scholars such as Richard Maltby and Gregory Black

[68] Adapted from "The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930" as it appears in Appendix I of Thomas Doherty's *Pre-Code Hollywood.* Columbia UP. 1999.
[69] For a detailed back and forth, consider Maltby and Jacob's "Rethinking the production code," Thomas Doherty's *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema*, Mark Wheeler's *Hollywood: Politics and Society,* and Tom Pollard's *Sex and Violence: The Hollywood Censorship Wars*.

argue that both the code and the practices it encouraged were less the result of a governing body cracking down on film than an expression arising from general consensus of popular filmmakers. In "The Production Code and the Mythologies Of 'Pre-Code' Hollywood," Maltby argues that the application of the Hays Code did indeed shape the films being produced, but it did so as an expression of guiding principle rather than as a proximate cause. He states that "The Code contributed significantly to Hollywood's avoidance of contentious subject matter (which included miscegenation as well as other forms of sexual behaviour; revolutionary political beliefs as well as defamatory representations of domestic and foreign governments), but it did so as the instrument of an agreed industry-wide policy, not as the originating source of that policy." ("Production Code" 237). This framing of the use of the Code, then, puts forward that it was a sentiment generally shared by filmmakers than as a constraining and binding practice.

As a result, the language of the Code had to be sufficiently vague that its interpretation and implementation could be a matter of reasonable doubt and shared sentiment rather than a checklist of particulars that could be identified absent any form of interpretation. Maltby argues that "The cultural anxieties that brought the Code into being addressed more fundamental social issues… they concerned the cultural function of entertainment, and possession of cultural power and the policing of the ideological apparatus of representation that was Hollywood" (238). As a mechanism of shaping the imagination and instilling particular sensations among viewers (and arousing ire from non-viewers[70] interested in curtailing the experience), Hollywood found itself in need of a practice that granted protection from external censorship while also shaping the narratives, images, and sounds permissible in film. What this resulted in is a reliance on "textual

[70] "There is little evidence that there was any widespread concern *among moviegoers* about the moral quality of the entertainment they consumed in the early 1930s. There is, however, a good deal of evidence of concern about *moviegoing* in the period" (Maltby, 243 emphasis in original).

indeterminacy" (245) to allow for a broad range of representations of sex, sexuality, and variance of human experience on screen. While the enforcement of the code prevented the representation of mutants as whole entities, fragments and elements of them were permitted to exist as signifiers in the presence of Man–often as flaws or as signifiers of something 'off.' This meant that aliens could be mutated, or animals, or that humans could experience some small change, but fully mutated, once-from-human-mutants were kept off-screen.

Among the films that are ambiguously "pre-code," released between the writing of the code in 1930 and its more rigorous enforcement in 1934, is *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (1931), which offers a host of signals based on race, ability, and masculinity to represent and villainize the de-evolution mutant Hyde. Based on the gothic novel and spruced up with additional scientific accoutrements, the 1931 film adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* functions as a multitemporal thoroughfare across which racialized and racist imagery and the aesthetic move towards dehumanization can be made legible. The text upon which the story is based was written in 1886, and features distinct Gothic literary trends, including an interest in degeneration (moving away from the ideals of whiteness, ability, and Western masculinity), human behavior, and the distinction of the natural/unnatural.[71] Within the film, however, sf aesthetic formations use scientific language and imagery to emphasize that Jekyll's experiments produce a mutant figure in Hyde, hierarchizing the logical, white Jekyll as Man, with inherent flaws he emphasizes through the release of the mutant aspects of Hyde.

The story of Jekyll and Hyde follows a white, abstinent scientist who chemically induces another state of self which is driven by appetite, and is thus violent, debaucherous, and murderous. The film aesthetically encourages the audience to relate to the former form of the

[71] Adam Roberts draws extensive connections between the Gothic genre and science fiction in *The History of Science Fiction.* Roberts, Adam. *The History of Science Fiction*. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2016.

doctor through its use of first-person perspective and a circular matte in an opening sequence that introduces and focuses on Jekyll, his reputable profession as a scientist, and his well-tempered masculinity (figure IV). This establishing shot builds through the sensory-affective, presenting images of temperance, affluence, and ability to assemble a cognitive-diegetic image of Jekyll as an ideal Man for the audience to identify with.

Figure IV: reflected in the mirror,
Dr. Jekyll straightens his tie,
affirms his coiffed hair, assures
his posture, and adopts his
scholarly, normative appearance.

In contrast to this multi-minute sequence of Jekyll strolling peaceably through his palatial house, playing an organ, and daintily preparing himself for a lecture, the last time a first-person shot using this circle matte occurs is immediately after his first transformation into Hyde. In this shot, the audience hears ragged breathing, and then witnesses in the mirror a dark-skinned person who has an extended cranium, and a mouth full of ape-like teeth (figure V). The prosthetic makeup used for Mr. Hyde (the extended hairpiece, the teeth insert, the use of skin-darkening cosmetics,

and the prosthetic enhancements to the nose) emphasize the historic disqualification of an individual based on a series of measurements that was classified (for a time) as the science of physiognomy/phrenology.[72] While these practices were not accepted within scientific communities by the 1930s, they had staying power within the realms of science fiction and popular culture. Writing in *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*, Elizabeth and Stuart Ewen point out that "middle-class film audiences that flocked to movie theaters from the mid-1910s onward carried a historically cultivated 'repertory of stereotypes' that would become emblematic of Hollywood filmmaking. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, visits to natural history museums and world's fairs, mass instruction in physiognomy and phrenology, and familiarity with photographic archives of good and evil became mainstays of popular culture" (Ewen and Ewen 407). It is just this legacy of popular science imagery that has become codified in representations of disability and difference, and which is emphasized in mutant cinema.

In "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor" David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder articulate the ways that pseudoscientific practices were used to collapse bodily variation into stigmatized states of mind and soul, arguing that "physiognomy proves a deadly practice to a population already existing on the fringes of social interaction and 'humanity.' While the 'authorized' physiognomist was officially sanctioned to interpret the symbology of the bodily surface, the disabled person became every person's Rorschach test" (212). This argument articulates the ways that difference in form became shorthand for difference in moral and capacity. The argument that these practices made and which lingers in contemporary popular

[72] It's worth lingering with this classification as a "science," as it was treated popularly as fact, while contemporary conversation recognizes the failures of these practices as an enculturation of racism and ableism operating under the auspices of science.

culture is that difference is always already a marker of evil. Ewen and Ewen point out that "by the early twentieth century, the budding field of eugenics helped to popularize a worldview in which people were regularly characterized by a simple, effortlessly digestible cultural shorthand… Civilization and barbarism, moral strength and weakness, intelligence and stupidity, and a range of other dualities, were a legacy that people brought to the movies and that the movies gave back to them in spades" (Ewen and Ewen 407). To this end, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (1931) offers audiences a racially-coded, disability-emphasized set of symbols by which to interpret the two aspects of the main character. There is an intentionally stark contrast in appearance between the two characters, implying that white-skinned, Western-European Jekyll is the model of civilization and health and that Hyde, with darkened skin, heavier brow, and prominent teeth is the model of uncivilization and disease.

Figure V: reflected in the mirror, Mr. Hyde stares gleefully at his dark skin, broad nose, fraying hair, and prominent, wide teeth. His stained shirt is partially unbuttoned, and his shoulders slouch.

Seconds after the reveal of Hyde, the camera pulls away as if in disgust or shock, and for the rest of the film refuses to adopt the perspective of the character in either form. The behavior of the camera establishes a physical distance from which the audience then views the abuses perpetrated by Mr. Hyde throughout the rest of the film. Rouben Mamoulian has aestheticized the mutation of Jekyll into Hyde utilizing racial imagery that establishes Jekyll's Man-liness through whiteness, ability, and temperance in stark contrast to Hyde's mutant state as nonwhite, physically and cognitively disabled, and indulgent. By the time that this film was created and released, a lengthy history of mapping cultural assumptions of mutation onto the body was established through popular media and within scientific doctrine.

The eugenic ideals present behind the construction of the Hyde prosthetics relies on an intuitive understanding of social assumptions about those cut from the category of Man that date back centuries. In his text *White,* Richard Dyer emphasizes this trend as part of a discourse on embodiment, noting that "all concepts of race, emerging out of eighteenth century materialism, are concepts of bodies, but all along they have had to be reconciled with notions of embodiment and incarnation" (14). In this passage, Dyer addresses the ways that racially-coded knowledges began from an assumption of racial difference and sought out or otherwise reified these concepts as connected to the immediate truth of the physical body. It is in this way that socially constructed concepts such as race are recognized within biological structures. These interpretations were made possible through application of racial symbols to biological markers and thus codified rationally as invisible and internal through genetics.

In "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," Douglas C. Baynton follows the ways in which racial signifiers became conflated with disability in

American narratives regarding health, wellness, and eugenics. Baynton notes that "Arguments for racial inequality and immigration restrictions invoked supposed tendencies to feeble-mindedness, mental illness, deafness, blindness, and other disabilities in particular races and ethnic groups" (17). The fundamental assumptions on which racial difference were argued were assumed to be biological, natural and immutable–embodied facts–resulting in proclivities for criminality, disability, and undesirability. These assumptions became codified in medical documents of the eugenic movement. In *Medical Apartheid*, Harriet Washington follows the ways in which "eugenicists invoked the term *racial hygiene* as frequently as they did the word *eugenics*, and even a cursory glance at the charts, photographs, and diagrams used to popularize eugenic ideals reveals that the unfit were 'swarthy,' 'black,' and ugly by Anglo-Saxon standards" (191). Conceptualizations of which people were fit to reproduce in American society were medically essentialized as embodied facts and socially coded using racial imagery and values.

As a piece of science fiction history, Adam Roberts remarks that "American Blacks in particular have borne the oppressive weight of White symbolisation, whereby they are made to 'stand for' a series of negative human characteristics, especially a bestial sexuality, violence and inferiority. It is for instance impossible… to read the 1931 *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* except in a racial context—Fredric March's Hyde made-up has a discernable negroid look—as a tacit libel on Black manhood, a film tapping into White American anxieties about race, and more specifically about the proximity and danger of Black America." (Roberts 281). The cosmetic enfreakment of Hyde in the film utilizes freak show style makeup in the context of sf scientific materialized conceptualizations of race in order to conflate Blackness, animality, and violence and to position it on a sliding scale which positions whiteness as its objective.

While Mr. Hyde is created through a chemical reaction and not genetic variation, his codification as a freak and his hypersexuality imply a certain genetic threat that brings him within the realm of the mutant. Jekyll's attempts to oust his perceived flaws maintains the inherent connection between Man and those considered less-than inherent in the disgust and discomfort that the mutant evokes. The potential to mutate into something not achieving the category of Man is an inherent element of this threat. The primary driving affect within the film is that, in even such an exemplar of Man as Jekyll, the elements of Hyde exist, and therefore the mutant other also always already exists. This fear of variation that exists within Man–that Man is an inherently unstable and unreliable ideal–is the nervousness evoked by the mutant. In the first act of the film, this instability is made manifest through the twinning of dialogue and double-exposure (figure VI).

Figure VI: Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Lanyon descend a staircase, preparing to talk about the unspeakable act of being kissed and seeking an exposed leg. In a dual-exposure, the leg of Ivy, a bar singer swings bare and alluring over the men.

In this scene, Jekyll addresses the unspeakable fact that sexual desire exists and that his mission is to separate it out from himself. Meanwhile, the film superimposes a swinging, bare leg over the two conversing doctors. At the level of the image, this leg is meant to allure and attract the audience while simultaneously existing as a disgusting signifier: one of appetite and impropriety. The desire for such a limb is condemned through its presence in the monologue. This twinning of dialogue and image offers a conflicting and grotesque collapse of meaning, drawing in the gaze of those attracted to a woman's leg while espousing the impropriety of such looks and desires. It's in this collapse that the mutant sentiment lingers and is emphasized, the what-if of variation around Man. While it condemns the utter mutant aspects of Hyde, it cannot affirm the ideal Man-liness that Jekyll aspires to. Reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) in this way makes space for some permeable middle ground of Man, where the variations and appetites that have long been condemned are not just recognized as part of Man, but necessary to its continuation. The film acts as a cautionary tale to find some ambiguous, mutating space that permeates the category of Man that is Jekyll and the mutant that is Hyde. At the formal-artistic level, then, the audience is left with a grotesque collapse of the assumed binary between Man and mutant, following the simultaneous death of both Jekyll and Hyde.

While *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) was invested in re-telling a story of scientific intervention into the moral body in pursuit of an ideal Man, other films were more active cautionary tales for preventing the violation of the category of Man as the pinnacle of humanity. In his work, "Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940" Gregory Black argues that the Code itself was utilized precisely to create and circulate values that were not only profitable, but which had a particular political bent

as well. He notes that censors "shared a common objective with Protestant film reformers: They all wanted entertainment films to emphasize that the church, the government, and the family were the corner- stones of an orderly society and that success and happiness resulted from respecting and working in this system" (Black 171). This establishment of principals frames a similar figure as the previous discussed capital-M Man, a normative, heterosexual (and reproductively healthy) figure that abides by Western conventions of interaction. These practices, rooted in a 'normal'-izing discourse, were then used to curtail the representation of physical, mental, and societal variation. Instead, "the purpose of the code and the PCA was to use popular entertainment films to reinforce conservative moral and political values" (Black 187). Through rhetorical repetition of the question "are we not men?" Hollywood films of the era insisted on privileging the category of Man, with all of its societal baggage, much in the way that queer, crip scholar Robert McRuer discusses the enactment of compulsory able-bodiedness. In describing compulsory able-bodiedness, McRuer likens it to repeatedly being asked "'deep down inside, wouldn't you rather be like me?' (which is to say: able-bodied)" and that the socially acceptable answer is only ever "'yes'" (McRuer 306). Through the Hays code and its enactment, films bombarded the audience[73] with the question, "are we not men!?" and the implicit expectation that the answer would always be "yes!" McRuer argues that such a system "assumes in advance that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable" (McRuer 303). This system of policing is an odd amalgam of what mutant films were made for– to reify Man–and their subversive capacity–the more fascinating figures to follow are those coded as different. In this way, I argue that mutants became a pastime in cinema between 1932

[73] Figuratively, unless they were specifically watching *Island of Lost Souls* (1932)

and 1964 for the shocking hints of human variation, and the sense of satisfaction for identifying and rectifying just such differences.

RKO Picture's *Cat People* (1942) offers one such framework of distrust and policing through it read of women's sexuality. In the film, Irena Dubrovna portrays a woman of Serbian descent who can arguably be claimed as a mutant or claiming lineage with a people that mutated from Man long ago. The story of the film describes an offshoot of humanity that is part-magical, a group of cat-people that can become panthers when they are emotionally or sexually aroused. The film follows Irena's relationship with Oliver Reed, their unconsummated marriage, and Reed's divorce to pursue his secretary.

Dubrovna's state as a woman of eastern European descent and part-animal categorizes her as a threat, much like the panther-woman from *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932). She becomes an alluring figure that is, for similarly eugenic ideals, an object of disgust. Throughout the film, the audience is presented with clues as to her origin and secret, threatening genetics. The audience is led to believe that either she is truly a mutant or not belonging to the category of Man because she is mad. While there are no special effect transformations into a full cat-person, there are off-screen hints. From shredded robes to a spectacular shadow-battle (figure VII), the implication is that Dubrovna is either an animal through genetic/magical transformation or through dehumanizing symbols of feminized madness, sometimes referred to in gendered terms as hysteria.

Figure VII: A panther room divider is covered by the shadows of a psychologist fighting with either a panther woman or a woman who believes herself to be a panther. The superposition implies that the distinction between being mad and being an actual panther-human-mutant is moot.

The film ends with an affirmation to the audience that the death of Dubrovna is a necessary and positive outcome, superimposing over the corpse of Dubrovna the lines of John Dunne, “But Black sin hath betrayed to endless night / my world, both parts, and both must die” (1:12:33). The moral / holy edict being issued is that either and both the mutated mind and/or the mutated body of Dubrovna warrant destruction before they can be allowed to procreate. By combining the image of Dubrovna with an escaped panther, the film animalizes her difference as both mentally aberrant and as less-than human. By superimposing the text over her corpse, the film sides with Reed and his secretary Alice: it is indeed better to be Man than to be mutant, and mutation must be destroyed as a “black sin.”.

As discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, these sentiments had by this time already been codified into particular laws against the public viewing of disability and disfigurement. The so-called "ugly laws" operated in similar ways to the Hays Code, preventing the visibility of the variety of forms that humanity can take. The Hays Code itself uses language similar to the ugly laws and is framed around visible allure–in its primary working principles the code states that viewer's moral standards are lowered "When evil is made to appear *attractive*, and good is made to appear *unattractive*" (Doherty 351 emphasis in original). Framing the conversation particularly around attractiveness and unattractiveness puts emphasis on the assumption that good and evil are aspects of humanity that are accessible via sensoria through visible and auditory cues. This assumption aligns with a long history of the treatment of disability as a sign of metaphysical or moral weakness.[74] A brief read of this history is available in the first fifteen pages of Ato Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness*, where he outlines the ways in which disability moved from a signifier of social pity and charity to one where disabled people were "subjected to taxonomies of scientific measurement and ordering" (9) which were used to connect them to "sexually questionable behavior and moral deficiency" (9), and later with colonized and racialized groups (11). Within the Hays Code is the implicit bias that visible and audible difference were inherently evil, and that good itself could not be in any way disabled so as to appear unattractive. Because disability is inherently coded as meaning more than is embodied, disability aesthetics scholars like Ato Quayson argue that "the implicit assumption [is] that disability is an 'excessive' sign that invites interpretation" (14). Within a film studies approach, this framework around aesthetic nervousness is particularly helpful, as the filmic realm operates on multiple sensorium and practices of cognition simultaneously. In the framework of Yacavone,

[74] See *Narrative Prosthesis* by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Disability Aesthetics* by Tobin Siebers, and *Aesthetic Nervousness* by Ato Quayson.

disability representation causes a short-circuit between the sensory-affective and cognitive-diegetic experience of film. Whereas Quayson discusses interaction with the narrative and acts of thinking, filmic reads of disability aesthetics can be separated out into multiple levels to address the ways each bears sensation alongside information. This dissertation will separate out practices of audio distortion, visual effects, and narrative structures that bear out disgust with variation along all three axes of sensory-affective, cognitive-diegetic, and formal-artistic experience of filmic worlds.

When discussing a narrative approach to aesthetic nervousness, Quayson describes it as a kind of cognitive "short circuit," where "the interaction [between between the nondisabled person and a disabled person] is usually strained because the nondisabled person may feel fear, pity, fascination, repulsion, or merely surprise, none of which is expressible according to social protocol" (Quayson 16). This short-circuiting is what Quayson uses to address the ways in which experience with disability becomes a space not only to better understand one's own prejudice, but to better consider the material existence of disabled people. He argues that representations of disability tend to "oscillate" between abstraction and embodiment, never becoming only symbol or only existence. As such, "it is disability's rapid oscillation between a pure process of abstraction and a set of material conditions that ensures that the ethical core of its representation is never allowed to be completely assimilated into the literary-aesthetic domain" (24). Because of the embodied nature of disability, its representation cannot be entirely removed from the body, indeed disability presented on the screen becomes so tangible a site of discomfort that its use is predominantly in pictures meant to evoke some of the greatest embodied reactions: melodrama and horror. As a place of such intense physical sensation, disability, particularly in film, is

utilized in ways that are considered to be too much for more "refined" forms of film, instead falling into what the Hays Code refers to as "vulgar."

The Hays Code aligns with ugly laws to curtail the representation of such bodymind variation that could cause shock and scandal. In the Code, it states that "Vulgarity is the treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant subjects which decent society considers outlawed from normal conversation" (Doherty 358). Such a passage dually positions disability within a set of figures to be limited in conversation, except when it is absolutely necessary to address "low, disgusting, unpleasant" subjects that are thereby associated with "evil."

In this way, both Black's and Maltby's arguments about the Hays Code become evident when discussing disability in so-called pre-code films: that the code itself does not so much *create* a hostile sentiment towards disabled figures on the screen so much as *state* explicitly existing and widespread coded nervousness with the presentation of bodymind variance that existed at the time and which lingers in popular culture. In this way, it makes evident what it finds disgusting and bars it, specifically because these forms of disgust are alluring *and* create nervousness. As Maltby states, "In its new guise, 'Pre-Code cinema' has been re-invented as a critics' genre, much like 'film noir' or 'melodrama', with no roots in industry practice" (242). Instead, comparing pre-code and during-code allows me to follow industry practices for creating and circulating assumptions about disability and bodymind variance according to their fragmentation across sensoria. Such variants are socially stratified mutants in juxtaposition to the assumed-to-be good, white, able-bodied, masculine Western Man.

Using this understanding of the Code as a statement of sentiment, rather than as a document curtailing representation, one can better understand the aesthetic discomforts and desires within *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932) as a drama around the instability of Man along the

axes of race, sexuality, and ability. This film is another adaptation, this time of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Like early science fiction pulps, early science fiction cinema is similarly indebted to adaptations of scientific romances. Similar to the pulps, these films relied on stirring the audience's sensibilities and disgust, using existing eugenic discourse of the distinction between Man and others as a means to evoke sensation. At the core of *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932) is the sexual tension that exists between the protagonist and Lota–a panther-woman who is disguised as a Polynesian woman. This tension consumes that audience while the main Man Edward Parker is abandoned on the titular island following a shipwreck.

In *Hideous Progeny*, Angela Smith develops and codifies a series of discomforting symbols around reproduction and viewership in relation to the disabled bodymind on screen. Introducing the shock of eugenics and its codifications, Smith notes that "classic horrors catered to continuing voyeuristic desires to see disabled and unusual bodies while making the subject matter 'safer,' encasing it in overtly fictional and sometimes supernatural narratives" (21). This enabling of voyeuristic tendencies was invested in repeating the existing experience of bodily variation as at once both alluring and off-putting, the grotesque collapse of desirability and disgust that is the hallmark of the mutant. Such narratives of disability were frequently coded simultaneously with images of racial difference. Smith emphasizes these comparisons specifically when hearkening to how "images of a better human species represented by white, attractive, and able bodies were irrevocably tied to visions of the lesser bodies that supposedly threatened racial advance" (13). In *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932), this narrative of advance is emphasized, placing Man at the pinnacle of progress, with other forms of humanity, mutants, and animals progressively lower. At the core of the thrill of the horror films Smith discusses is the exposure to mutants and others that pose a risk to Man as a category–or to one particular Man–

and to then witness the risk resolved. The Man is continuously juxtaposed with others who threaten him, resulting in the triumph of the Man and his future.

The 1932 film *Island of Lost Souls* marks a transition between overtly racialized conversation on reproduction and its subsumption into an ambiguously threatening mutant offspring. This is to say that, instead of explicitly stating the dangers of miscegenation on screen, it hints at it through its use of a mutant and through the introduction of eugenic discourse. At an ideological level, the film is invested in maintaining Man as the apex of progress and thereby separate from animal life. The film adaptation, whose script was consulted on by both a pulp fiction writer (Philip Wylie) and a eugenicist (Julian Huxley), takes this story and incorporates disgust around the implication of reproduction between Lota, a mutant panther-woman (in the film, animals have been mutated into human/animal hybrids through vivisection) and the visiting Man, Edward Parker. This interest is meant to arouse viewers through sensory-affective representation of Lota, her 'exotic' beauty, and her revealing outfit while disgusting them at a cognitive-diegetic level through its implication of her mutant status as animal-hybrid.

When Lota is introduced, racial hierarchies that position whiteness as an ideal of Man are evoked both through sensory-affective and cognitive-diegetic cues. The movie upholds colonial values and historical formations that rely on Enlightenment-era perceptions of a single progressive history that moves from disorder (savagery) to order (civilization) as a manifestation of Eurocentric ideals.[75] Using these colonial logics, Moreau tries to pass Lota off as a "pure Polynesian" (22:31) in her introduction to Edward. This fraught categorization implies a closeness to phenotypical classifications of race that were espoused as scientific, anthropological knowledge at the time the film was created. Anthropologist Louis Sullivan argued for the

[75] An excellent overview of this rationalist framework of human progress is present in the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith.

inclusion of some Polynesians within his hierarchy of Alpine/Caucasian,[76] in his notes. This positioning puts Lota in the midst of an ongoing debate–for those outside of this scientific debate (which is to say, the majority of moviegoers), Lota was an Other–a Polynesian. For those in the midst of the eugenic/anthropological debate, she was arguably closer to Man. Certain that Lota could not perform as Man, Moreau shifts Edward's assumptions of Lota to a safer, racially ambiguous in-between figure. This presentation lowers Edward's expectations of Lota from Man (white, educated, able, but a woman) to something less, ambivalently Polynesian. This positioning relies on colonialist and eugenic conceptions of racial identity markers being easily recognized as firm categories, nearby to but not fully Man. The audience is expected to accept that this ruse would be believable to an educated man, that an animal-turned-human would be cognitively equivalent to a Pacific Islander.

Lota's seductive performance and costuming emphasize this outsider position while charging the narrative with nervousness around bestiality and miscegenation. Lota's outfit consists of a twining, tight brassiere, a heavy beaded necklace, and short silk skirt (indicative of a sarong, but not tied as such). This sexualizing outfit shows a great deal of skin and outwardly demonstrates eugenic and racialized assumptions of nonwhite peoples as hypersexual.[77] Throughout her interactions with Edward, she grows more intimate, titillating and off-putting the audience who are aware of her animal origins. This seduction climaxes at the end of the second act with a forbidden kiss (Edward is engaged) and the reveal that she is even less human than he originally believed (Figures VIII & IX).

[76] Sullivan, Louis R. "Race Types in Polynesia" *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 26, No. 1. 1924.
[77] Richard Dyer's *White* offers a thorough discussion of the ways in which whiteness codifies itself as in control of the body while nonwhiteness is codified as more embodied/less controlled. (23)

Figure VIII: Edward (a white man) and Lota (a panther-woman passing as a Polynesian woman) passionately embrace.

Figure IX: Edward seizes Lota's clawed hands in disgust and fear.

Undergirding this embrace and its immediate reveal is the grotesque conceptualization that Man is not as immediately apparent nor rigid as so-called scientific knowledge would make it appear. In discussing the affective power of the grotesque in science fiction, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay notes that "by far the most frequently developed nodes of the sf grotesque are interstitial beings: creatures in whom two distinct, sometimes even contradictory, conditions of existence overlap" (195). In *Island of Lost Souls*, Lota's contradictory embodiment of animal and human form the nexus of terror and discomfort. This blurring of categories presents viewers with the rhetorical

question: If it is not possible to distinguish between nonhuman animals and humans separate from Man, what intimacies are not bestiality? The implied answer to this being that the only safe relationships are between those fully recognized as Man–a eugenic form of racial purity espoused by contemporary advocates for what they termed "racial health."

The scientific logics that rendered race as a biological essence to be controlled, contained, and steadily eradicated were ramping up and ongoing at the time that *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932) was created and released. While Lota is essentially not a human, her vivisection and present seductive form imply that, whether or not it has been explicitly stated, she is close enough to human to couple with Edward. If such a union should happen, there is at least the threat for the audience that this coupling would create some form of offspring. It's this threat and the implication of both sex and reproduction that aligns Lota with mutants in this context. As such, I read *Island of Lost Souls* (1932) as firmly within mutant cinema and its argument against the pairing of Edward and Lota as an extension of eugenic control of reproducing Man. Eugenic practices and sterilizations were being implemented as a way to curtail the population of humans that had been deemed "feeble-minded." In her article "'Reform' eugenics and the decline of Mendelism," Pauline M. H. Mazumdar articulates that "Most eugenic sterilizations in the USA were carried out between 1930 and 1960. The statutes rarely required sterilization for medical conditions definitely known to be genetic entities. Feeble-mindedness, whose genetic basis was unclear to say the least, was the usual indication" (49). These eugenic sterilizations were based upon and relied upon ideas that "feeble-minded" individuals were a threat to the health of the nation through their reproductive capability and failure to adhere to normality.

The category of "feebleminded" and its close rhetorical title "the moron" are cultural and legal creations utilized for containing and pathologizing particular groups of people. In addition to Baynton's work on the collapse of Blackness (and non-whiteness more broadly) into the category of feeblemindedness, Owen Barden's chapter of *A Cultural History of Disability in the Modern Age* discusses the invention of the term "moron" and its rhetorical connection to the socially unfit individual. Barden notes that "the moron was not simply a discovery… but rather a new strategic possibility, an object that emerges from a discursive field comprising medicine, education, Social Darwinism and social work, scientism… [and] meritocratic success (as represented by the American Dream)" (Barden 118). The language of the feeble-minded individual was not an established category, nor one that had a genetic precursor. Rather, this categorization followed from "scientific, social, and cultural discourses [which] fused to shape a new image of a dangerous urban idiot, threatening racial decline as well as social order: an economic burden, a petty criminal and an innocent tool for the more ambitious criminals, and, perhaps, worst of all, a progenitor of more of the same, promising ever-accelerating social decay" (McDonagh 144). The eugenic category of the feeble-minded individual's rise was the result of institutional drive to locate a means by which an individual could be categorized based on their ability to perform "normality" along a series of axes which privilege whiteness, wealth, and ability; this simultaneously criminalized failure to adhere to this script. As explicitly racially organized eugenics became less politically feasible (and to a degree, less internationally legal),[78] eugenic narratives regarding ability, intelligence, and productivity continued.

Alongside the racially-charged discomfort produced by Lota, *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932) emphasizes the heterosexuality of Man through the queer-coded, anti-god, not-a-man that

[78] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 260 (III) 1948.

is Dr. Moreau. Overseeing the vivisection of animals into mutants, Moreau runs the island compound with his assistant, Montgomery. During the initial sit-down between Dr. Moreau and Edward, the doctor introduces Montgomery as "a man you can trust… especially in the selection and ordering of your liquors" (18:39-18:45). During this line delivery, the slightly rotund, perfectly clean, and effeminate Dr. Moreau looks lovingly at the stone-faced assistant and offers a tremoring laugh. Throughout the film, Dr. Moreau is presented as uncannily close to Man through his affluence, whiteness, and education. This closeness to the category of Man is disrupted through his presentation as a 'mad scientist,' disrupting the supposedly natural order of things. The uncanny position is emphasized as a particular villainy through queer coding. In their film adaptation of Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet*, Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman argue that there was an inherent association between these traits when they state that "the production code didn't erase homosexuals from the screen, it just made them harder to find… and now they had a new identity as cold-blooded villains" (Epstein and Friedman 16:45). Both Dr. Moreau and Montgomery are rendered as cold-blooded villains through their work and implied relationship with one another. Dr. Moreau embodies this relationship in counterpoint to Edward, marking as well the anti-intellectual bent of the film. Edward is never described as particularly educated or affluent, but as a run-of-the-mill Man, with Man-like sensibilities.

In "Censoring Science in 1930s and 1940s Hollywood Cinema" Divid Kirby addresses how later versions of *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932) were edited in ways that cut out both its overtly sexual overtones and scientific discourse of evolution. In this article, he addresses the overarching conflict between censorship, religion, and film, where "censors viewed science from a moral standpoint including the theological implications of scientific research, the blasphemy of scientism, and science's usurping of religion's role" (Kirby 232). In both the initial creation and

later edits of *The Island of Lost Souls*, Moreau was required to be made unattractive and unappealing–this was accomplished through his being coded as queer and in charge of an island of mutant beast-people. When the film was later revisited, Kirby notes that it was the combination of scientific discourse and sexuality that impacted its re-release: "In addition to the usual censorship concerns over the revealing costumes of Lota the Panther Woman and the film's allusions to vivisection, many censor boards found the plot's overt reliance on evolutionary theory to be unacceptable" (236). The film's reliance on key mutant themes–the relationship to reproduction–became a foundational sticking point for censors.

In the wake of the Hays code's increased enforcement–which is to say, with the aegis of some documentation for self-censorship–there was significantly narrower space through which mutant cinema, queerness, and other forms that defied the hegemony of Man could squeeze onto the screen. Because of the limitations imposed on the representation of bodymind variation, mutant aesthetics became fragmented and rendered rhetorically as a series of symbols, narrative practices, and auditory cues. As such, these fragments became encoded within film sensoria as ways to tap lingering nervousness around reproduction and bodymind difference.

A Queer Relationship to Science

A key element of disgust for the figure of the mutant is in its radical potential to destabilize reproduction. As such, mutant aesthetics in film arise frequently in one of two ways: fear around reproduction with the mutant or through explicit curtailing reproduction to prevent the creation of mutants. In these ways, mutant cinema displays a fascination and disgust with the twinned intimacy and fear of reproduction that is not heterosexual and that does not generate Man as offspring. The earlier discussion of Dr. Moreau's queer-coding and relationship to reproducing mutants is one especially salient example of the intersections of villainizing

queerness in mutant films in order to re-emphasize the heterosexual family unit. Figures such as queer-coded scientists pushing the bounds of reproduction are recurring within the archive of sf/horror films.

Fear of re/producing the mutant is central to mutant aesthetics. *The Thing from Another World* (1951) is premised on dual crises of masculinity and reproduction through the policing of just who can reproduce and how. As an adaptation of John Campbell's "Who Goes There?" *The Thing From Another World* (1951) exemplifies the methodologies of both its pulp fiction origin and that of the midcentury sf horror film. As an antecedent of the pulp, it holds onto the values system by which it was crafted. In Brian Aldiss' words, this means "to remain simple in vocabulary, ideas, and structure" (218). The plot of the film follows a fairly predictable arc--characters are established in act one, a spaceship and mysterious frozen figure are found in act two, and in act three the big bad alien runs loose and is ultimately destroyed.

While in form the threat presented in the film is alien in origin, I argue that at the core of the film is a mutant subject matter: that of reproduction. What makes this adaptation of "Who Goes There?" unique[79] is that instead of taking on the form of its victims, the titular thing uses blood to reproduce itself. This focus on reproduction, and the willingness of the camp's scientist to facilitate it, allow for a mutant reading of the film. Indeed, the film is less about a scientific engagement with an alien so much as fear around the crisis of sex and reproduction. In *Screening Space*, Vivan Sobchak notes that "*The Thing* (Christian Nyby/Howard Hawks, 1951) is 'pro-fear' and 'anti-science.' Its heroes are the 'regular guys' in the U.S. Air Force and its villain a professor/scientist whose desire for knowledge approaches madness" (Sobchak 23). This

[79] Aside from its complete change in location and the vegetable- rather than meat-based alien.

description aptly categorizes the film as one preoccupied with discomfort connected to the representation and reproduction of the Man and mutant.

There is the implication of queer procreation between the so-called ‘mad’ scientist of the film, Dr. Arthur Carrington, and the titular thing. Dr. Carrington stands out from the other regular soldiers of the camp through his costuming, hair, and behavior. While the rest of the men in attendance are dressed in uniforms, Dr. Carrington wears a coiffed navy jacket over a spotless turtleneck sweater, all emphasizing his clean-cut blonde goatee. In his experimentation, Dr. Carrington provides the seeds of the Thing with blood plasma, cultivating pulsating plants that appear as hybrids of animal and vegetable (Figure X). These silently screaming plants declare a breakage from heteronormative reproduction and implicate the doctor as failing to uphold masculine ideals through his willingness to become mother to a nursery of things.

Figure X: A cluster of white men and a woman stand around saplings fed from blood vials. The doctor who cultivated them stands isolated on the left side of

Figure X (cont'd)
the frame. The saplings pulse with life
in the foreground.

Dr. Carrington's fascination with the Thing and their joint offspring comes from his apparent obsession with its difference from humanity, and particularly its hyper-Man-ly traits. In describing the Thing, he offers the following soliloquy: "on the planet from which our visitor came, vegetable life underwent an evolution similar to that of our own animal life, which would account for the superiority of its brain: its development was not handicapped by emotional or sexual factors" (Nyby 46:02-46:17). This description creates a divide between this "intellectual carrot" and Man, placing it in an elevated position despite its vast biological differences. Here, Dr. Carrington uses eugenic arguments that have historically been used to cut people of color and women away from Man. In describing the relationship between the spirit and the soul between white people and people of color, Richard Dyer notes that in the creation of white identity that "The white spirit could both master and transcend the white body, while the non-white soul was prey to the promptings and fallibilities of the body" (23). In this film, the Thing is elevated to a state of hyper-Man through its absence of the 'handicaps' of emotion and sex.

Discomfort around sex is at the forefront of the film's concerns, between Dr. Carrington's queer relationship with the Thing and the relationship between the film's protagonist Captain Patrick Hendry and Nikki Nicholson. The 1950s were a time of particular strife for the question of masculinity according to James Gilbert in *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s*. In this text, he argues that "the 1950s were unusual… for their relentless and self-conscious preoccupation with masculinity" which he goes on to conflate with heteronormativity when he states that "publicly held assumptions about masculinity probably intensified the 'lavender scare' that resulted in firing hundreds of suspected homosexuals in

government service after 1950" (Gilbert 2-3). Throughout the film, Hendry is portrayed as a perpetual bachelor, driven by sexual desire and proudly recalling sexual escapades. This desire is rendered visible when he allows himself to be subdued and bound to a chair (figure XI).

Figure XI: Captain Patrick Hendry sits with his hands bound behind him, being fed a drink of alcohol by Nikki Nicholson.

Much of the discomfort in the film is arranged around non-normative sexual dynamics such as the visual implications of bondage used above. The connection between sex and reproduction is central to the sensory-affective cues the film offers in its worlding. This immediate presentation of variations in sexual and reproductive positioning lays an affective undertone on which the cognitive-diegetic worry about alien invasion and exceptionalism of Man is built.

The conclusion of the film resolves all of these sexual tensions with a forced proposal and a beating for Dr. Carrington. Dr. Carrington attempts to connect to, communicate with, and save the life of the Thing, but he is thrown to the ground and disappears from the films. The saplings are burned and the Thing is fried in an arc of electricity. Meanwhile, Captain Hendry's compatriots pressure him into pursuing a marriage with Nikki and settling into the house with two kids and a two car garage life. With the threat to American masculinity settled, viewers are given a final ultimatum: "Keep watching the skies!" (1:26:11). This entreaty is meant to encapsulate the constant vigilance necessary to contain the mutant and prevent it from corrupting the captains and doctors of the world. The return to expected, socially acceptable values is an expected answer to the rhetorical question that the mutant is used to ask–do you really want to be different? In this study of mutant media, however, it is this very question that, through repetition, begins to break down by repeatedly offering alternatives to Man. While it assumes of its viewers/readers/listeners that the answer will be "no," the frequency with which it is asked offers gaps and fragments for some to unabashedly say "yes."

This question and the radical possibilities of its answer also arise in the Mutant-oriented film *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957). Similar to *The Thing From Another World* (1951), this film continues to explore the crisis of masculinity and reproduction, beginning with near-copulation on a boat between a married couple-interrupted by a cloud of glitter and radiation–and witnessing the shrinking of the main Man, Robert Scott Carey, to an insignificant figure in the domestic space until he finally dissolves into the universe. As he shrinks, his primary concerns are in his state as Man and in preventing his newly acquired mutation from being passed on. Early during his narrative of shrinking, he tries to push his partner away, telling her that she should only have to tolerate him so much.

As he continues to shrink, Carey offers commentary on the sliding scale from Man to mutant in connection to his height. The journey of Carey is a continuous re-evaluation of connection and position. In this way, the mutant sentiment of finding connection, especially discomforting forms of already-existing intimacy, arises and is re-instituted. As Carey shrinks from his height of six-foot-one to three feet, he bemoans his ejection from the boundaries of Man. In voiceover, he recalls "I felt puny and absurd. A ludicrous midget. Easy enough to talk of soul and spirit and essential worth. But not when you're three feet tall. I loathed myself." (24:58-25:04). In his use of a pejorative for disabled people, he traces the boundaries of Man from the outside, slighting himself and others. In a brooding nighttime walk, he happens upon a sideshow and later makes friends with a dwarf performer[80] who briefly cheers him up and offers comfort. Over a two-week series of visits (and the realization that he is still taller than one woman), Carey's conception of Man is realigned to allow him to once again fit within it, he proclaims " All l know is I can wake up in the morning and want to live again. Actually want to live. It's a funny thing. Sometimes I begin to think it's the world that's changed–I'm the normal one" (30:03-30:13). This newfound realignment of the boundaries of Man is shattered moments later when he realizes he is once again shrinking.

As Carey shrinks away to nothingness, his costuming and demeanor follow previously observed slides down an assumption of progress and civilization. From being a wealthy Man on a boat, Carey's decline moves him from a standard house to a doll house and from the doll house to an unfinished basement floor. In the basement of the home where he once ruled as Man, he becomes a tiny mutant clinging to the barest associations with Man-liness: tool use (Figure XII).

[80] While the film casts two people with dwarfism for bit appearances, the main actor that Carey engages with is the nondisabled actor April Kent.

Figure XII: Hunched over the ground in front of a giant mousetrap, Carey sharpens a needle on the rough basement floor prior to his titanic confrontation with a spider.

Even as a miniscule, irradiated mutant, Carey uses tools like a sharpened needle and threads as rope. In this last moment, Carey insists once again on this connection to Man: “I still had my weapons. With these bits of metal I was a man again” (1:08:59). In this sliding hierarchy, Carey steadily cuts away his masculinity, ability, and size until his last performance of Man is through an act that has since been witnessed in nonhuman animals, the use of objects in the environment to accomplish objectives. The final conflict of the film is a battle featuring these tools–Carey must defeat a spider to escape the basement. Following this testament to his ability and mental acuity, he moves out into the yard. Still shrinking, he knows that soon he will disappear from anything resembling a physical form and will soon dissolve into the universe. In this moment, Carey thinks along the same lines as the rhetorical question that McRuer asks. In his final

moments, Carey refuses to answer "yes," instead recognizing the limitations of the category of Man, "I had thought in terms of Man's own limited dimension. I had presumed upon Nature. That existence begins and ends is Man's conception, not Nature" (1:19:26-31). In this moment, Carey exits the world of man ideologically, and physically dissolves into a nothingness smaller than matter. Through his embrace of a world beyond the category of Man, Carey moves into an infinite realm of mutants–beyond and around, unbounded by Man–an existence beyond the limits of infinity.

The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) and its ending are particularly important to Vivian Sobchak's thoughts on the 'dehumanization of the human' in *Screening Space*, where she notes the particular horror of the loss of humanity the film puts forward. In discussing the practice of stripping humanity away from humans,[81] Sobchak notes that the particular horror of loss of humanity comes in the form of making the Man alien. For *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), she notes that "visually the whole film moves us pessimistically and existentially away from the supposed security of human relationships, the comforts and connotations of 'home,' into a totally vast, unstable, and non-anthropomorphic universe" (Sobchak 134-6). While Sobchak reads this ending as pessimistic and isolating, recognizing the film as mutant media introduces the possibility of uncomfortable intimacy, that Man is already connected to the vast world outside of Man, with responsibility and care due to the relationships that already exist and that are made evident through the recognition of the porous boundary of Man.

In my work, *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) becomes a harbinger of the mutant worlds to come: science fiction which turns from the anthropocentric to the ecological. It is a watershed moment in cinema that begins to open outwards to a world that privileges

[81] The protagonists of each of the films she addresses are clearly Man.

relationships with the universe rather than an idealization of Man. Following this transformation through the perspective of disability aesthetics, one can recognize the limitations that Man puts on the possibility of humans.

Intimate Mutation and Creature Kinship

The mutant in science fiction is an uncomfortable reminder of the impossibility of a static boundary of Man and its relationship to the world beyond. The precise potential and valuation of mutant aesthetics is the recognition of preexisting potential and connection in and between Man and mutants. In *Screening Space,* Vivian Sobchak offers an extensive catalog of insight into the boundaries of what defines sf film. This catalog wrestles with the ongoing distinction between horror and science fiction, and is particularly fascinated with the films which exist in a hybrid space, a superposition of the two in a way that infuriates those attempting to establish clear boundaries between these genres. Sobchak's reflections offer a helpful way to consider primary features of sf and horror–Creatures and Monsters–and how mutant cinema and mutant aesthetics refuse such a distinction.

Sobchak's initial discussion of horror's Monster and sf's Creature addresses the separation of how these figures are treated affectively. Sobchak argues that the driving factors of horror are moral, internal ones: "Because of this somehow organic link between man and Monster in horror films, it seems absolutely dramatically necessary for the Monster to have an anthropomorphic form" (30). Sobchak argues that the central aspect of horror's Monster is the internal moral conflict with Man (in relationship to nature/God), while sf's relationship is the surface conflict. Rather than a deeply Man-oriented horror at the natural order of things, "the SF creature is less personalized, has less of an interior presence than does the Monster…our sympathy is never evoked by an SF creature; it remains, always, a thing" (32). This boundary

offers a compelling distinction between the Monster and Creature as a boundary across which to reflect on the orientation of terror/discomfort. The Creature, in Sobchak's reasoning, "threatens men rather than Man…" and therefore "is never so horrible as the Monster in the horror film" (37). This distinction points directly at the unresolvable disgust of the mutant, as both individual image of disgust and harbinger of hatred. The mutant operates on both levels–as a threat to men and Man simultaneously.

Sobchak herself recognizes[82] the problematic interstitial space that is the hybrid SF Monster and uses it as a site to seek something beyond that can offer a unifying definition of sf film. She notes that "hybrid films which combine elements of both [sf and horror]--and there are quite a large number of them, as we shall see–are generally found to be 'aesthetically' dissatisfying, one of the reasons, perhaps, that they present problems of classification and create a gray area–a no-man's-land–linking the genres more than purists in either camp would like" (27). Rather than remaining pure, these sites of transformation mutate Monsters and Creatures into hybrids capable of threatening Man on both a material and existential level. It is in this no-Man's-land that this dissertation locates the mutagenic window[83] within the medium of cinema. This 'aesthetically dissatisfying' moment within film offers an understanding of how mutant aesthetics of the grotesque, particularly as it relates to the social body, charged the features of the 1950s and early 1960s with a transformative understanding of social interaction and bodymind variation.

Recognizing the auditory and visual cues of the mutant that feature prominently in "creature features" encourages audiences to occupy a space of reflection about this central aspect

[82] "It is only recently that they [hybrid Monster/Creature features] are beginning to be considered as something other than either SF or horror films–and as having a fascination and aesthetic value of their own" (44-5)
[83] See chapter 1: "Tomorrow's Children"

of sf cinema. It creates a pause to meditate both on the viewer's fascination with difference and the social impacts of this fascination. Addressing the problematic hybrid films, Sobchak emphasizes that "Creature films of the fifties (and the early sixties as well) are less about horror and science than they are about the preservation of social order" (45). One such creature feature that Sobchak turns to is *Them!* (1954). This film features ants that have been mutated by exposure to radioactive fallout following the use of nuclear weapons. The mutant ants pose a threat to humanity directly[84] through their willingness to eviscerate anyone within their path and to Man generally as the dominant form of life on Earth. These mutant creatures are introduced at the sensory-affective level as visibly tremendous in comparison to humans and with sound cues recognizably connected to mutants. In her brief section on sf soundscapes, Sobchak notes that "The giant ants in *Them!* (1954) are biological monsters (mutations caused by atomic testing) yet their attacks are heralded by 'the accompaniment of a shrill, ear-splitting whine curiously reminiscent of air-raid warnings" (Sobchak 218). This folding together of the dissonant aspects of biology and technology is the hallmark auditory grotesqueness of the mutant soundscape. The film complicates the usual anti-science bent of such films by forging connections between scientists and everyday soldiers–everyone is packed into the tunnel, working together, to ensure that the next generation of mutant ants can be contained (Figure XIII).

[84] For another story of earth domination by ants, read Frederik Pohl's "Let the Ants Try."

Figure XIII: Soldiers, scientists, men and women look down on freshly hatched but not-yet-circulating ant queens.

The ants' threat to social order in *Them!* (1954) is resolved through the destruction of their reproductive capability, ensuring the future success of Man as dominant species and through the elimination of the mutant. A recognition of the aesthetics at play arise through the intersection of the film's narrative fascination with reproduction (and its threat to Man categorically), its visual cues of bodily variation (made manifest in an animal other juxtaposed with the bodyminds of Men), and its auditorily grotesque transgression of biological and technological sound cues.

These same practices of defamiliarization and focus on mutant aesthetics arise in the final act of *This Island Earth* (1955), a film ostensibly about the recruitment of exceptional humans by a desperate alien species. The story follows superstar American scientist Cal Meacham as he receives a mysterious intelligence test,[85] through which he is recruited to a cadre of elite

[85] In the form of an instruction manual for alien technology and its parts.

scientists (comprised largely of white men, one woman, and one Asian man[86]) working on a mysterious project. This cadre has been secretly gathered by aliens[87] who have used all of the fissile material on their planet defending themselves in an interplanetary war. This faction, Metaluna, is ultimately doomed. In an abduction that spans the final act, Cal and Ruth (the woman scientist and romantic interest) are shown the war-torn Metaluna by Exeter, the only alien from Metaluna who appreciates Man as a unique and valuable being. On Metaluna, Cal and Ruth are threatened with a loss of what connects them to Man–their free will (and by extension intellect).

The scene in which these characters' Man-ly aspects are threatened are heightened at a sensory-affective level by the introduction of a physical mutant threat. This creature is referred to as a mutant, but the way it is pronounced by Exeter takes on additional connotations: he pauses in the middle of the phonemes, hailing the creature as "Mute-Ant" (Figure XIV). This naming of disability within the creature's identity is further compounded through racializing and eugenic language when Exeter explains that it has been bred on Metaluna "to do menial work," making it representative of a slave caste on the planet (1:12:34). Alongside these cognitive-diegetic cues towards discomfort at the creature's existence, the Mute-Ant's presence is announced with a dissonant stab of music that fades nearly as quickly as it appears on screen.

[86] Who has no spoken lines and is only present for a single dinner scene.
[87] Marked by stark white hair, extended foreheads, and near-orange tan skin.

Figure XIV: an insectoid mutant with prominent brain lobes, multiple layered mouths, and nice trousers advances on the heroic white couple Cal and Ruth from *This Island Earth*.

In a film already weighed down with alien others, the insertion of the Mute-Ant is an amplification of discomfort, specifically through the accompanying mutant aesthetics. The Mute-Ant becomes representative of the change that the protagonists have been threatened with: loss of free will and reduction to labor. The particular grotesqueries of the Mute-Ant are multiplied through an unintentional wardrobe choice. At the time of shooting, the leg-portions of the costume were not functional, and so the Mute-Ant became more complexly coded as something between human and animal than originally intended. This grotesque interplay works in favor of

the discomfort of the audience. Not only does it collapse the otherness of the Mute-Ant into a partly human being, it complicates the way such a figure can be read.

In *Screening Space*, Sobchak uses the Mute-Ant as an example of reducing the alien. Sobchak argues that the awesomeness of the alien as something else must be tempered to "[bring] the alien image… into an *active mis en scene*… so as to integrate that image back into human connection" (104). This reduction is levied particularly at the Mute-Ant, who has been folded more into Man-liness through its adoption of trousers as opposed to intricate insect limbs. While Sobchak argues that in this way the Mute-Ant "loses in imaginative power… and its shuffling activity defines it reductively in human terms as merely a movie 'heavy'" (91), I argue that the aesthetic discomfort with this grotesque being is precisely the value of the mutant. Because of an incidental transformation of the costume, the alien heavy becomes coded as an accidental, interstitial entity–one connected to both mutants and Man through its unintentional symbolism. Satisfying neither creator nor audience, the Mute-Ant exists somewhere in-between, intersecting, and beyond Monster, Creature, and Man. Touching and defying these categories is the mutant, discomforting and deviating at the sensory-affective, cognitive-diegetic, and formal-artistic levels.

The ants and Mute-Ants within this section point to a particular intimacy that exists beyond the binary of Monster/Creature. Each of these beings stands in for the ongoing negotiation of the body in society. While they present as surface-level creatures, the nuanced social structures they activate rely on recognition and–to a greater or lesser degree–an acceptance of intimacy with the ills they represent. Be it the fragmentation of community in an increasingly isolated and individual society or the loss of will in service to a eugenic ideal of efficiency, the

mutant aesthetics rely on the discomforting connection that is evident across the porous and unstable boundary of Man.

The Last Man on Earth

In the preceding films, mutant aesthetics are used as signals of discomfort at the faults of the category of Man, emphasizing disgust at the possibility of something of value beyond this narrowly imagined Man. In this collection, I read *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) as making a first step towards something different by reading its ending as a capacious embrace of a world that is more-than-Man, despite the densely packed narrative preceding it. The closing of the cinematic mutagenic window comes with an unabashed aesthetic embrace of mutants by offering the same treatment to another film. This chapter closes with an analysis of *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), which, when viewed against the grain, lays Man to rest and embraces one of many possible futures that belong to mutants.

The Last Man on Earth (1964) centers on the story of Dr. Robert Morgan and his attempts to cure or kill the vampiric mutants that have overtaken the earth. His singular focus makes him a legend[88] of the mutants that populate the world in the wake of a pandemic that causes people to go blind before they become (Morgan believes) mindless, violent creatures somewhere between vampires and zombies. These creatures have the bodies of humans and demonstrate some intellect–Dr. Morgan has a rivalry with one that goes by the name of Cortman. The process of the illness uses disability in ways similar to that experienced by Scott Carey in *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), first destabilizing once-Men (or Man-adjacent women and children) by disabling them; the first symptom of the illness is the onset of blindness. After

[88] *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) is one among a series of adaptations of Robert Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend*. *Omega Man* (1971) and *I Am Legend* (2007) also share this lineage.

becoming blind, people transform into something else. This mutated group of humanity at times resembles zombies because of their reduced intellect, and is capable of reproducing, making them a marked deviation from the course of Man. This story is told through a series of flashbacks, where Dr. Morgan works with a dwindling cadre of scientists looking for a cure.

The first cue that this film might end in something other than a miraculous cure comes from the last of Dr. Morgan's compatriots, Dr. Mercer. In an intimate conversation where they share an otherwise empty laboratory, Dr. Mercer remarks, "I don't deny that there's some strange evolutionary process going on. But mankind won't be destroyed" (44:00). While this remark can be read as cautious optimism, it also registers on the level that there could be something other than Man, a form of mutant kin that may still populate the world after the death of the last Man. I use this perhaps ironic statement as one way into a reparative reading of the mutant. While the film itself, through Morgan, rails against the dying of Man, I find that it also holds space open to consider the worlds beyond this limiting ideal, where variation not just of humanity but life broadly is possible. This openness to something else would later become the focus of such features as *The Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Frogs* (1972), and later come to fruition in films such as *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2015) where mutants come to control the earth as a new, utopic space. These later films signal a turn in mutant cinema where aesthetics of difference become signifiers of unabashed interest and embracing the "no!" of wanting to be more like Man.

The Last Man on Earth (1964) ends with a final condemnation of mutants and freaks as Morgan dies at their hands. "Freaks! All of you. All of you, freaks. Mutations… You're freaks. I am a man. The last man" (1:25:05-1:25:41). This final monologue articulates a clear division between the future of the Man and the mutant. While Morgan possesses a way to 'cure' the mutant population of the earth, it is not permitted to circulate. This dissonant moment allows

those watching a certain expected ‘cure’ for mutants and mutation while preventing it from being used. It’s this turn in the story that makes space to imagine a happy world outside of that of Man. Instead of saving the world of Man, Morgan dies upon an altar, and the one mutant he has cured– Ruth– hides the cure, her status as cured, and that Morgan was anything other than the deadly legend that preyed upon their community. Instead, Ruth turns to a crying infant mutant and tells him “There's nothing to cry about. We're all safe now” (1:26:31, Figure XV)

Figure XV: Ruth comforts an infant mutant and his mother, assuring them that the last Man, the greatest threat to their existence, is gone.

The safety of the mutant community in *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) is only through the elimination of the violent policing force that was Dr. Morgan. The refusal to accept another form of being, one between Man and zombie/vampire, made it impossible for him as man to survive in

a transformed world. It's in this radical mutant space that affirmation and recognition of various ways of being a human, of the valuation of mutant aesthetics, is possible.

In the time between the adoption of the Hays Code as a formalized declaration of social expectations for film and its eventual dissolution in 1968, mutant cinema continued on through a series of fragmented narratives, visual cues, and auditory practices. With the possibility of direct mutant and disability representation in the late 1960s, the mutant aesthetics which existed as subtext in the interim became subsumed in other cinematic practices. On one hand, practices of evoking discomfort and disgust continued on as shorthand, separated from the disabled and racialized figures that were present in their initial creation. On another hand, the escalation of difference and weirdness that mutant fragments and wholes instilled an audience a desire to seek out and amplify difference and variance. On still a third, mutant hand gesturing towards the future, these practices allow reading against their policing and limiting practices of Man–to desire difference and embrace variance in revisiting mutant films opens a practice of cinematic viewing that values disability, race, and mutants. Reflecting on the end of the Hays Code, Richard Maltby notes that bodily variation, the bread and butter of the mutant in sf cinema, became less significant. Instead, "with the loss of influence… the PCA became less worried about depictions of science in movies and more focused on retaining some influence over their primary concerns with sex and violence. The theological implications of human-gorilla brain transplants seemed far less significant" (238-9). The creative application of mutant aesthetics became one strategy among many for presenting a science fictional "other" on the screen.

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Uncanny Ex-men

> "Mutant! One who undergoes a hypothetical unexpected change in heredity, producing a new individual who is basically unlike the parent. Or, to put it more succinctly, a freak, an aberration of nature–one who has been changed for the better, or the worse. The minute it hit me I knew the concept was basically sound. Mutation is a scientific fact of life; it's plausible, possible, practical, and provable." ~Stan Lee[89]

Thanks to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, it is impossible to discuss mutants and comics without addressing the *Uncanny X-Men*. In the early 1960s, following the success of Spider Man (amazing!), the Hulk (incredible!), and the Fantastic Four (fantastic!), Marvel sought another profitable 'team' comic book to add to the bubble that was the so-called Silver Age of comic books. It was in this space that Lee and Kirby came up with the idea of a school for mutants that would continue to succeed as a comic book decade after decade and which would later become an animated series, film series, and likely will appear via Neuralink,[90] should the technology survive long enough to become a staple form of media consumption. To begin with *Uncanny X-Men*, however, is to begin at the end of the comic mutant saga. *The Uncanny X-Men* is a closing of the mutagenic window for comics. The mutagenic window is a period of time that becomes noticeable around 1904 with the introduction of stories focused on reproduction and the ways in which reproduction is unstable. While reproduction of humanity–especially in terms of culture, race and ability–has been a fascination in popular culture for hundreds of years, the scientific understanding of mutation and capricious change, biologically, was only just coming into being at the turn of the twentieth century. With the advent of genetics, and the socially-driven pseudoscientific practice of eugenics, the recognition of inherent human variation was argued

[89] Lee, Stan. *Son of Origins Of Marvel Comics*. Simon and Schuster. 1975.
[90] Neuralink, at the time of writing, is an experimental brain chip that does not yet beam media directly to the human brain.

and made more legible in popular culture. With the opening of this window, popular culture became fascinated with the inherent instability and variation of humanity, connected to scientific advancements such as radiation, this fascination resulted in proliferating narratives about mutants. This window closes with the saturation of the market and the ossification of mutants as stock figures of Others in the mid-1960s. In order to address the ways in which *The Uncanny X-Men* acts as a hinge of representation between disability, race, and gender in comics, I offer this in-depth analysis of the mutants that preceded *The Uncanny X-Men.* I begin with the understanding that, after 1963, there can be little conversation about mutant without bringing in brand-name *X-Men* mutants. Prior to this, however, there were a plethora of modified humans, weirdly reproductive genetic offshoots, and radioactively-bombarded people who shaped conversations not only about mutants, but the very practices governing comics broadly. I begin, then, a quarter of a century before *The Uncanny X-Men* with a character who would later be explicitly named as mutant: Namor, the Sub-Mariner.

There is a lack of scholarship that focuses on the mutants which predate *The Uncanny X-Men*, despite the burgeoning amount of interest from disability and comics scholars in earlier comics. I seek to redress this absence by bridging the gaps between some of the earliest mutant appearances and the establishment of the *X-Men* monopoly on the term. Extant texts address baseline representation and the presence of disability in superhero comics.[91] Scholarship on the mutants of comics books pre- the monolithic X-Men however, is lacking. I argue that mutants were part of two distinct aesthetic and affective conversations in comics prior to *The Uncanny X-Men*: one of the horrific other, and one of optimistic potential. In the sections that follow, I trace the twinned affects of the mutants that came before *The Uncanny X-Men*.

[91] *Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability* and *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives* to name a few.

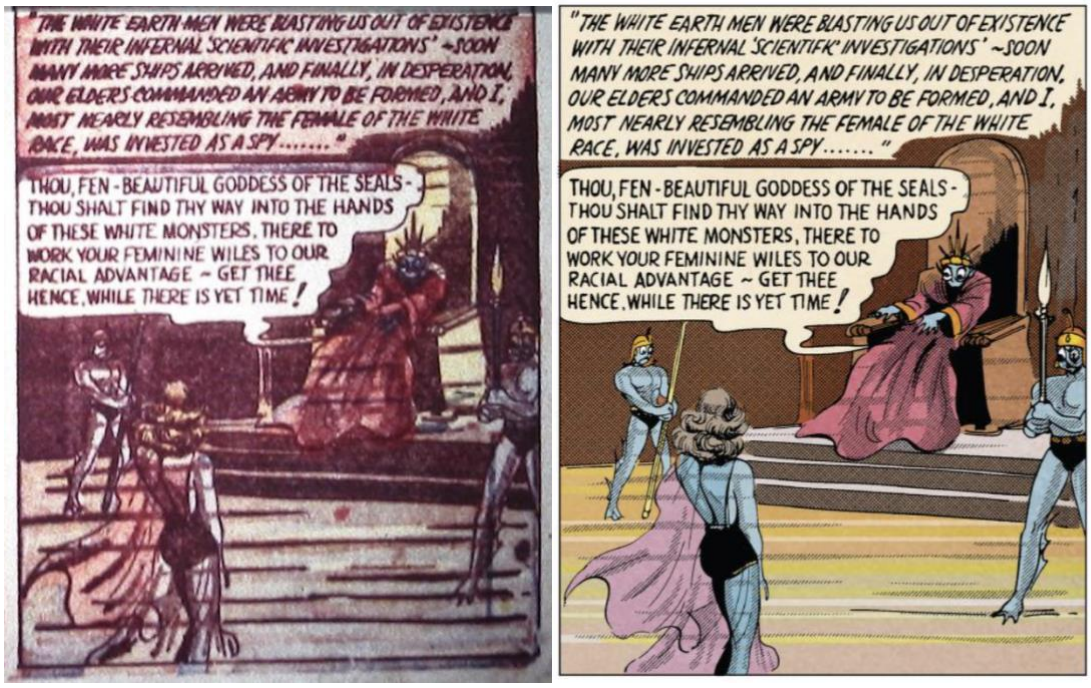
By separating out these two strands, I argue that mutants of horror, who came first, were meant to be read as dangerous, unruly figures that threatened the primacy of Man. These comic mutants claimed to be *homo-superior* and were often represented as seeking out mates in order to unthrone Men as the alpha figures on the planet Earth. The visual cues readers were presented to understand this varied, but primarily signaled femininity, skin colors other than white, and disabled, twisting limbs. This affective strain established, for readers, a baseline assumption that difference was as dangerous as it was thrilling. The stories told about mutants ended in their destruction, often at the hands of Men–and in the diegetic worlds of the individual stories, this was presented as a moral action. The later, hopeful strands of mutants rose up in the wake of the Comics Code of 1954. With the limits of representation permitted by the code, disguised-as-sexy mutants trying to reproduce were no longer acceptable subject matter, and the only mutant figures that could circumnavigate the censors were latent and unrealized super-Men. These mutants of the late 50s were white men who feared being treated like mutants from horror comics–destroyed for being too powerful and a threat to others. This move, which I refer to as the transition into a state of Man-after-Man. In one form, these mutant figures give voice to the unreasoning prejudice that slaughtered the ranks of mutants who came before, albeit through the mouthpiece of white men. This rhetorical move complicates the mutants of this last half decade as articulating a need for holding on to human variation in the interest of a brighter future while, once again, only presenting that future as one of white men. It's this collapsed rhetoric that *The Uncanny X-Men* takes up, using previous binaries of ugly/evil/mutant and pretty/good/Man to establish lines of mutant conflict. Where it becomes uncollapsed is in the many mutants who don't immediately align with Magneto (the Brotherhood of Evil) or Professor X (the X-men and ostensibly the side of good). Turning to characters like The Blob and more especially Namor,

The Sub-Mariner, I argue that the variation of characters introduced in *The Uncanny X-Men* intermingle the horrific and the hopeful. To that end, this chapter complicates and enriches the understanding of what mutants came before, how they worked, and the ways in which they impacted audiences and the trajectory of the medium of comics broadly.

Sub-Marine, Super… Man?

Marvel Mystery Comics #1, published October 1939 established key figures in superhero comics of the Marvel universe. Alongside the Human Torch, the character Namor, the Sub-Mariner was introduced. In this first iteration, Namor, the Sub-Mariner is a vengeful half-human, half-Atlantean, half-avian humanoid[92] who has been raised and trained to wage war upon the world of men, especially shaped as a war against Whiteness and America. In *Marvel Mystery Comics #1*, Namor, the Sub-Mariner kills several American sailors believing them to be robots. As he brings their diving suits back to the undersea capital of his nation, he uncovers their organic nature and is reminded of his origins by his mother (Figures XVI and XVII). In this lengthy exposition, Namor, the Sub-Mariner is given a backstory that positions him in two genres (science fiction and weird fiction), explicitly outside the category of Man, and implies a blended state of being that implies radioactive mutation. This radioactive transformation, later attributed to the presence of the X-gene, marks Namor, the Sub-Mariner as an amalgam of human, other terrestrial humanoid, and disabled due to radiation, mutation, or both.

[92] The particular name of Atlantis is not introduced in the 1939 run on Namor, the Sub-Mariner. Instead the kingdom from which he hails is only referred to internally. For the scope of this writing, however, I will be relying on a fluid understanding of time and canon to discuss Namor, the Sub-Mariner. For context, see *Marvel Mystery Comics* #3 pg. 26. This aspect of the Sub-Mariner, alongside the "strength of a thousand Earth men," does not receive attribution to either his surface-lineage or Atlantean-lineage and is arguably the result of his mutation, which is explicitly done in later comics.



Figures XVI and XVII: Excerpts of *Marvel Mystery Comics* #1. Figure #1 is scanned from a paper edition.[93] Figure II is an enhanced digital copy.[94] Both offer history and context for Namor, the Sub-Mariner.

Namor, the Sub-Mariner's origin in the waters of the Antarctic is significant, as polar locations have a long history of being connected to mutability/the unknown/the horrific and to global threats. When he is introduced, his mother says that his father was a human who came to the south pole in 1920. She tells Namor, the Sub-Mariner "a great ship, the Oracle, came from America on a scientific expedition–your father, commander Leonard McKenzie, was the captain" (Everett *Marvel #1* 65). The scientific journey to the poles was a much-storied endeavor, and is often a space in which humanity was made to confront shapeless or shape-changing otherness. Among the titles circulating at the time that could have influenced the polar

[93] Available on *Archive.org*: https://archive.org/details/marvel-mystery-comics-vol-1/Marvel%20Comics%20vol%201%20001%20%28scans%29%20%28c2c%29/page/n27/mode/2up
[94] Available on *Archive.org*: https://archive.org/details/marvel-comics-001-1939-digital-shadowcat-empire/page/n31/mode/2up

location include Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, Edgar Allen Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Jules Verne's continuation of this narrative in *An Antarctic Mystery*, M.P Shiel's *The Purple Cloud*, H.P Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*, John Campbell's "Who Goes There?" and others. These texts are all sites of contesting humanity and its place on Earth, especially in connection to advancements in science and technology and intersect with the edges of weird fiction, a space somewhere between horror and science fiction that focuses on the limits of humanity and often brushes up against the supernatural. Polar regions are associated with Eldritch horrors and that-which-Man-was-not-meant-to-know. That Namor, the Sub-Mariner comes from this lineage situates him as a protean, changeable human beyond the category of Man. This lineage outside of the category of Man is emphasized along racial lines in the first appearances of Namor, the Sub-Mariner. In the introduction of the character, he has been raised to fight back against the White men that bombarded Atlantis.

In the extensive monologue wherein Namor, the Submariner's mother reminds him of his half-human, half-Atlantian[95] origins, she also emphasizes the skin color of those who destroyed Atlantis.[96] Throughout the first appearance of Namor, the Sub-Mariner, his described enemies are "White Earth Men," the "White Race," "White Monsters" and "White People" (Everett *Marvel #1* 63-5). In this role, he goes to the surface to learn more about the world and to wreak havoc. In these escapades, he must navigate his existence at the fringe of humanity, and encounters not only superhuman violence, but the violences of Man. In *Marvel Mystery Comics #2*, Namor, the Sub-Mariner travels to New York and is greeted, not as passing-white in the way that his mother was when she encountered White Men, but as a nonwhite human (Figure XVIII).

[95] And later, half-mutant.
[96] See footnote 3.

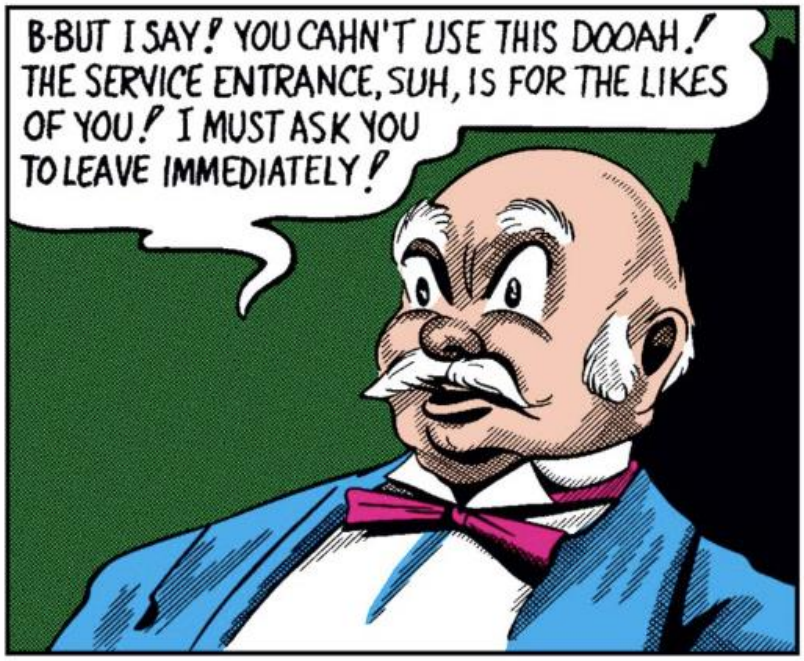


Figure XVIII: A doorman at a home in New York refuses to let Namor, the Sub-Mariner through based on his appearance.[97]

That Namor, the Sub-Mariner is coded as nonwhite is largely un- or under-discussed in the realm of the early comics. It has been a significant part of Namor, the Sub-Mariner's presentation in current films and a crucial element of decolonial discourse in comics and comic-based movies. In "Postcolonial Superheroes: Unmasking *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* and Namor, Its Mesoamerican Antihero" Cesar Albarran-Torres and Liam Burke note the plurality of ways that Namor, the Sub-Mariner is framed as a nonwhite threat to White America. They emphasize that "Namor's earliest appearances also relied on the 'yellow peril' stereotypes that were commonplace across printed materials up to and during the Second World War to mark Namor as both villainous and racially 'Other'" (Albarran-Torres and Burke 5).[98] The threat that Namor, the Sub-Mariner poses is not solely due to his myriad abilities such as super-strength, water

[97] Scan accessed via Marvel Unlimited: https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/16725/marvel_mystery_comics_1939_2

[98] I also discuss this practice in terms of Mark Jerng's *Racial Worldmaking* in the chapter "Are We Not Men!?"

breathing, and flight, but due to his position outside of the category of Man, and especially as a threatening figure. As was the case in comics of the 1930s and 1940s, however, this threat was transformed by the threat of Nazi Germany and Namor, the Sub-Mariner became one of many popular US figures to join in World War II (see the cover of *The Sub-Mariner* #1, wherein Namor, the Sub-Mariner is flipping a boat bedecked with a swastika that is full of Nazis). The cultural necessity of the mutant as thrilling threat, bullied other, and reluctant ally describes not only Namor, the Sub-Mariner's experience in *Marvel Mystery Comics*, *The Sub-Mariner*, *Fantastic Four*, and his ultimate return in *The Uncanny X-Men*, but follows the shifting arcs of mutation as either horrific freakery or latent superhero potential within American comics during this time.

This chapter takes up the legacy of mutant comics that Namor, the Sub-Mariner moves through between his introduction in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #1 in 1939 and his refusal to align himself with Magneto in *The Uncanny X-Men* #6 in 1963. From origins wherein mutation is assumed but unspoken, to the thrill of mutation as an element of horror, to the quizzical possibilities that Man might not be all it is cracked up to be, this chapter addresses the way that bodymind variation transformed from solely grotesque horror to intriguing encounters with the uncanny in American comics between 1939 and 1963. I read Namor, the Sub-Mariner as a mutant prior to this time not because he is explicitly framed as such, but because of the implication of radioactive mutation alongside the later retcon that *The Uncanny X-Men* #6 makes to explicitly name him as such. In the era prior to adoption of the Comics Code of 1954, mutants largely populated horror comics as nonwhite, disabled, men and women who threatened the stable reproduction of white, Western society. This spectacle of powerful threats to Man became too great a risk in the eyes of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, who cite

"mutants" and "freaks" among the threats to the morals of young readers. With the enforcement of the Comics Code of 1954 (a set of self-regulations that policed crime, sexual behavior, and representation of disability and injury in comics), mutants had to, for a time be represented primarily as white men. Reading this transformation as a complex inversion, I discuss how the mutant-Men of the late 50s voice the unjust persecution of earlier forms of mutants (primarily not Men) while presenting the image of those who did the persecuting. What this act permits, however, is the establishment of a set of conventions around mutants that *The Uncanny X-Men* later leverages to great effect–that not all mutants are evil, that evil mutants can look like–pretty, muscular, white–men, and that good mutants can be disabled. I argue that while much of *The Uncanny X-Men* and its initial good-versus-evil lineup rely on stereotypes of otherness, the boundary mutants–Namor, the Sub-Mariner in particular–offer complications to this simplicity by weaving together the affects of early horror mutants with the latent language of persecution used by mutant-Men.

Disability and Mutation in Comics

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, critical attention to disability across media has grown significantly. From David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's emphatic arguments that disability is and has been everywhere, despite the lack of critical discussion around it[99] through the affective and aesthetic work of Tobin Siebers and Ato Quayson, into contemporary conversations that have sprung up around the resurgence of disabled comic heroes like *Daredevil*. Western[100] conversations about disability in comic books begins with the two texts

[99] See: *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2001), *The Biopolitics of Disability* (2015), and *The Matter of Disability* (2019).

[100] There is work on autism in detective stories and manga forthcoming from scholar Soohyun Cho, which will stand alongside the text *Reframing Disability in Manga* by Yoshiko Okuyama as addressing disability in other forms of graphic narrative.

Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives and *Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability*. These texts establish some of the foundational understandings of how disability has historically been read in comics, including pitfalls of representation and complications of reader response to the presence of disability in stories about ostensibly "super" humans.

In the forward to *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives,* Rosemarie Garland-Thompson articulates why comics in particular are a rich field for the conversation of disability representation, she argues that

> comics, in the broadest sense, provide expressive possibilities for vivid meaning-making through multimodal forms of representation. Comics offer much more than pictures and words. They combine textual, graphic, and sequential narrative. We get textual dialogue, thought bubbles, pictured embodiments, graphic design, successive cinematographic narrative, animation. All of these conventions work against the modern dominant media modes of prose text and photographic images, both often understood as the unmediated representation of truth. (xi)

Garland-Thompson reasons that comics as media are not a facsimile of the world or an unmediated engagement with truth. Strands of film theory argue that experiencing film is meant to be akin to theater practices–suspending disbelief to relate to or otherwise inhabit a story. Similarly, the reading of a novel or a pulp is meant to be conveyed as inhabiting a story, moving into a literary and figurative world. Comics, blatantly, are a medium that works along multiple paths of cognition to create meaning. Rather than representing, unmediated, a world, comics insist on being an interface, and maintaining legibility on the page as such. The use of different fonts, white space, images, and language create an experience that insists on the primacy of the comic as mediator. I posit then that comics in particular *have eschewed a representational form of truth,* instead articulating ideas and concepts through complex interrelation of thought, feeling, and representation. In that way, I read mutants in comics as a practice that interrupts and changes representation and reproduction of how human variation can appear. Mutants in comics resist

stigmatization because they transform the very images and languages they use. Instead of proclaiming solely what disability is or mutation is, comics offer a multiplicity of arrangements that can be read or disregarded as being connected. Consider Namor, the Sub-Mariner's retcon to becoming mutant–this process of change and transformation works backwards and forwards across the comic not because Bill Everett planned for it, but because of how comics and comic fandom create worlds that are mutable. Comics, fundamentally, are highly structured tangles of potential, where image and text simultaneously support and undermine one another.

Beyond establishing the bounds of comics as media, Garland-Thompson offers a brief history of why comics as media were so successful in gaining wide readership. She points out that, "departures from expected human embodiment made… comic characters novelties that engaged us but were distinct enough from us that they did not fall into the uncanny valley of the repellently too-close-to-but-not-quite human. Their ancestors are freaks and monsters who drew our interest and invoked our wonder from antiquity through the nineteenth century." (Garland-Thompson xi). She points out that, as drawings, a majority of comic characters are not human, nor even analogously human. Instead, they become exaggerated characteristics that operate as figures of wonder, terror, and meaning-making.

Because comic characters in this period are idealized or otherwise altered representations of humanity, they exist in a space where they fundamentally destabilize the possibility of embodying Man. While in one aspect this liberatory separation of idea and representation offers distance to reflect, a corollary aspect is that comics similarly can exaggerate and aggrandize, visibility and viscerally, the ideals of the Category of Man. By engaging with mutant comics, this project articulates the ways that the media offer not only offer toxic images of super-ability,[101]

[101] In *Disability Aesthetics*, Tobin Siebers points out the "unreal" representations of health that arose in eugenic art of Arno Breker and other German artists in Nazi Germany.

but that a great deal of the experience comes from the inherent variation of forms presented on the page. Garland Thompson emphasizes that "The pleasure of comics is that they are an occasion to explore the generative elasticity of human embodied experience… In this way, comics are always graphic, freakshows filled with spectacles and thrills" (Garland-Thompson xii-xiii). The spectacle and thrill of comics is derived especially from the variety of bodies and minds on display on the page; comics as media rely on an unstable balance of transformation and internal consistency.[102] It's this variety at the heart of the affective experience of the mutant.

In their introduction of *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives*, editors Chris Foss, Jonathan Gray, and Zach Walen speak to the inherent contradictions of comics in the first two thirds of the twentieth century. In tracing the representation of disability in comics through time, they point out that "it is no coincidence that the politics of representation within the medium-specific framework of comics is at its most visible, and most oppressive in the same era, which saw the phenomenon of the medical sideshow flourishing" (3). Comics as media rely on images of visible difference as spectacle much in the same way that pulp fiction relies on the scientific language and trappings of scholarly information to establish similar conversations. Whereas the pulps claim that they discuss "things too shocking to be seen!" comics put forth the image of difference and, through "panels, balloons, gutters, and emotive iconography" claim "wait, we can explain!"[103]

In *Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability*, the other primary text on disability in comics, Scott Smith and José Alaniz articulate why disability studies and disability aesthetics are universally necessary across superhero comics in particular. Smith and Alaniz

[102] Not that characters and stories must stay the same, but that there must be reason and precedent within the canon that permits or otherwise explains the wild variation that generates pleasure.
[103] To greater and lesser degrees. As Foss, Gray, and Walen write: " it is notable that EC, the comic company singled out for censure, was also the one which most enthusiastically depicted non-normative bodies." p. 5

argue that "The figure of the superhero itself has become a trope for considering issues of ability and disability in the culture at large (e.g., 'the supercrip')" (1). The supercrip is generally[104] used as a dismissal of often harmful representations of disability in which a disabled person overcomes physical or social barriers in order to engage 'normally' with their environment. Superheroes go a step further, becoming something more-than-human.[105] To this end, comic characters amplify social understandings and opinions of disability in ways that materially impact disabled people. It's the interaction of representation and public opinion around disability that mutate and are mutated by mutants in the comics between 1939 and 1963. Smith and Alaniz offer a simplified but cogent timeline of disability representation during this time. They note that "Disability as a facet of human corporeal/cognitive existence entered the genre as a blatant and simplistic marker of evil" (2). To emphasize this, they point to the dichotomy between Superman and the first supervillain, a wheelchair-using "paralyzed cripple" with "sinister intelligence" (Siegel and Schuster 10). In a later panel from the page they point to, The Ultra-Humanite monologues about his supercrip origins (figure XIX).

[104] To better understand the nuances of supercrip and the way it appears in disability studies discourse, see Sami Schalk's "Reevaluating the Supercrip" in the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 10.1 2016.
[105] For example, consider the bat-like Daredevil who is blinded by radioactive chemicals that also give him radar-capabilities.

Figure XIX: a white, balding man monologues about how becoming disabled by science made him smart and bent on world domination.[106]

The Ultra-Humanite, as an older man who uses a wheelchair, is juxtaposed with Superman, a young white man with the physique of a bodybuilder in a dichotomy of good/able bad/disabled.[107] This positioning is one that readers were expected to understand without it being explicitly laid out. As Smith and Alaniz argue, "Before and during World War II, readers took it as basic 'common sense' that good guys were handsome and bad guys ugly, disabled, maimed, insane, or otherwise defective" (4). This legacy can be traced back to the detective comics of Dick Tracey, where visibly disabled villains like "Doc Hump" and "The Blank" were central figures in the early 30s.

With all of the steam behind the villainization of disability, it would take a (second) world war and social upheaval in the US to change the trajectory of representation. Smith and

[106] Scan accessed via *Luminist* archive. https://drive.google.com/file/d/11UJtQoO2rrA5YcENHypKT3hWugI5DS9Z/view

[107] As Zarena Aslami, one of my dissertation advisors points out, there's a poignant connection between this figure and Christopher Reeve (who portrayed Superman in early adaptations).

Alaniz name precisely this change as how disability in comics became more nuanced; they point out that "The advent of the so-called Silver Age in the late 1950s/early 1960s…reflect[s] new postwar attitudes toward the disabled and minorities of various sorts" (8). In the wake of World War II, where Nazi Germany imported American eugenics and put it into practice, the US set out to distance itself from the violence of the holocaust and more explicit forms of population control.[108] It became less acceptable (though by no means forbidden) to discuss explicitly the removal of populations because of their race or state as disabled. It was during this time that the spectacle of human variation moved from freak shows and traveling museums more firmly into American media. As discussed in the other chapters of this dissertation, representations of disabled characters, meant to create thrills in the audience through a balance of disgust and desire, became more complex. During the social transformations of the 50s and 60s, comics followed suit and put forth a greater variety of characters and figures including *The Uncanny X-Men*. In the time between the villainous and brilliant Ultra-Humanite and the heroic wheelchair-using Charles Xavier (Professor X)–both super-intelligent, white, bald wheelchair users–, two dominant aesthetics of the mutant existed in comics. The release of the *Uncanny X-Men* in 1963 forever twinned these previously disparate conversations.

Consummation of Freakery: The Reproductive Mutant in Horror Comics

The first and most visible position of mutants was in the realm of detective and horror comics. As previously mentioned, there was an overwhelming bent towards signaling internal characteristic flaws via external visible difference, not only in comics, but in all literary media

[108] Though the US continued to be part of forced sterilization until 1981, and there is a resurgence in violent advocation for population control presently.

broadly. This combination of moral and visible difference was used to great extent to evoke eugenic terror at the concept of mutants taking over or destroying so-called 'normal' humanity.

In mutant comics before *The Uncanny X-Men*, especially in the genre of horror, mutants signaled an impending threat to the stable reproduction of Man. Mutant characters heralded a particular threat in the form of the grotesque, their capacity to collapse or otherwise disturb assumed-to be stable boundaries. Because mutants arise unexpectedly from within a stable category but exist beyond it, they inherently threaten the category from which they come. In his work on the science-fictional grotesque, Istvan Csicery-Ronay argues that it is precisely this uncertainty and lingering threat that makes the science fictional grotesque fascinating. He posits that "one cannot know whether a grotesque phenomenon is an isolated freak, or the symptom of a systemic perversion yet to unfold full-scale. The first response to the grotesque is fascination and resistance, as if to explore and test where the surprising hybrid will lead" (Csisery-Ronay 198). In this system of knowledge, the so-called freak is the singular instance of some form of difference that can, in turn, be resolved. However, to understand the degree of threat, the grotesque phenomenon–here, the mutant–must first be observed, tested, and understood. In horror comics, this process of heralding, luring, and terrifying comes from the movement from isolated incident to 'systemic perversion.' The mutant of the horror comic is most always connected to a story of its surprising birth (and the resulting grotesque collapse of love and loathing) or of its implied procreation, thereby (in eugenic terms) perverting the systems of Man.

One of the earliest examples of a mutant, explicitly named as such, in comics is Gloria, from "The Weird Woman!" in *Amazing Detective Cases* Volume 1 Issue 11 published in 1952. In the story, Gloria is an older, conventionally attractive woman with dark hair and an intense gaze. The story is told in a flashback by George Timmins, who is in an asylum trying to insist

that he is indeed able-minded. In his flashback, he reveals that his lover was not, in fact, a human. The 'horrific' reveal in the comic is that she is, in fact, a super-powerful mutant that can control minds and vanish at will. As she destroys the mind of George Timmins, her everyman lover, she confesses her dark intent is to supplant Men in the world (Figure XX). This monologue utilizes the multifaceted aspect of the comic genre to fold together a multiplicity of assumptions about mutants within the space of the panel.

Figure XX: A white mutant wearing a purple dress contorts her face, emphasizing wrinkles as she verbally berates her frail human lover.

In the paratext of the voiceover (provided after the fact by Timmins), he doubles down on her threat as a demonic mutant, emphasizing that as a mutant she is "a living, awful reincarnation of

all things evil" (Sinnot 12).[109] At the same time, in the flashback, Timmins is insisting on his desirability as all that is Man: white, able-bodyminded, employed, and Western. That he is not the pinnacle of desire is borderline maddening to him and so anathema that, in recalling the story, he argues that the only thing that could refuse him is the pinnacle of evil itself. At the same time, the dialogue provided by Gloria relies entirely on the conversation of procreation–she emphasizes that she's "looking for my mate… **a being like myself"**[110] (12, emphasis in original). That her language is solely reproductive is of note–rather than seeking a partner, a community, etc. she seeks solely to reproduce. This reproductive threat is the central focus of mutants in horror comics between 1939 and 1963. That paragons of difference and variation would destabilize so-called 'normal' reproduction is one of the driving elements of mutant horror in the comics. Indeed the conclusion of the comic is meant to offer precisely this discomfort, as the doctor that Timmins has been recalling his experience to is actually… another mutant! (Figure XXI).

[109] Penciler Joe Sinnot is cited here, as the name of the author of the story is unavailable.
[110] Defined in-diegesis as: "mutant… a creature that is different from others of its kind, having special characteristics or powers"

Figure XXI: A white mutant wearing a purple suit reveals himself to the unfortunate Timmins, letting him know that he is the other half of the dreaded reproductive mutant duo.

This (in)conclusion emphasizes a certain exciting uncertainty in the realm of the horror comic, as it allows for a certain ambiguity[111] in the conclusion, neither of which is meant to comfort the reader. Either Timmins is indeed cognitively disabled and removed from reality, meaning for the pages the reader has been empathic to one who is not of the category of Man, or there are indeed secret mutants out in the world trying to make more difference and destabilize the safe reproduction of Man.

[111] In her work, "Atypical Bodies" from *A Cultural History of Disability: In the Long Nineteenth Century*, Nadja Durbach emphasizes that ambiguity is precisely the work that the freak show trades in.

This aspect of reproductive horror is echoed in "Head of the Family" from *Black Magic* #30's cover story. While the Fesker family are not explicitly names as mutants, the discourse around the family as "vicious, freakish monsters" positions the family well within the realm of mutants (Simon and Kirby *#1* 8[112]). In the course of "Head of the Family," visiting (implied) lover Francie Beeker tries to understand the family of Hugan, her romantic interest, being told initially that Uncle Hugo is an "invalid" and prefers not to be seen (Simon and Kirby *#1* 1[113]). As she continues to investigate, she learns that Hugan is one part of a five-entity being that is Uncle Hugo (Figures XXII and XXIII). First, the compound entity gathers to assert that they fit within the definition of a mutant, emphasizing that "nature makes some things on earth… **differently**" (Simon and Kirby *#30* 6[114], emphasis in original). This articulation of difference insists on mutation within the creation of the Fesker family.

[112] Page number from reprinted edition of the story accessed in *Black Magic* #1 (1973) reprint series).
[113] Page number from reprinted edition of the story accessed in *Black Magic* #1 (1973) reprint series).
[114] Page number from original edition of the story accessed in *Black Magic* #30 (1953) series).

Figure XXII: The reader is positioned along the cheek of Francie as she looks on the Fesker family in growing horror. The Fesker Family (alternatively, the multiply embodied Hugo) consists of a large, bald white man in a sweater, a withered older woman with red or blonde hair (depending on edition), a tongue white man with dark hair in a vibrant green suit, and a small boy with exaggerated eyes in a blue suit.[115]

This gathering of the Fesker family echoes (without attribution) the *homo gestalt* from Theodore Sturgeon's mutant novel *More Than Human* published in the same year and the short story "Baby is Three" published in *Galaxy Magazine* in October of the previous year.[116] Key differences arise between the comic unofficial adaptation and the pulp/novel origins. The first is the matter of "family." In "Baby is Three," the family is not a single

[115] Paper scan of original *Black Magic #30* accessed via Luminist Archive. https://s3.us-west-1.wasabisys.com/luminist/CB/BM_1954_05.pdf

[116] One can trace this temporal relationship in the other direction to locate the B horror film *Head of the Family* in 1996, directed by Charles Band.

genetic connection, but differ greatly in age, race, and state of ability.[117] The other is the focus of the collected entity–in "Baby is Three" the organism is focused on survival, and in "Head of the Family" the entity is focused on reproduction.

Figure XXIII: The Fesker family is presented in a line, with each aspect narrating what it does for the collective: strong hands, a means to feed, a guise capable of (emphasis in the original) **marriage**, and senses, all gathered around a massive head with withered limbs and no apparent body.[118]

In the ultimate reveal of Uncle Hugo's multiple entities, Hugan (who brought Francie to the home) articulates that his role is to pass as "normal." His guise is that of presenting normality, which includes marriage. The dangling implication of this marriage, left in the ellipses, is that Hugan would consummate this marriage as well, possibly creating another mutant multi-body entity.

[117] Two of the *homo gestalt* figures in the original story are Black, and the titular "baby" is described as being disabled.
[118] Accessed via DC Universe Infinite scan from *Black Magic* #1 (reprint series) 1973.

In “Head of the Family” both the term mutant and the act of reproduction are left in the white space of the gutter. However, in “The Greatest Horror of Them All” from *Black Magic* #29 both the term “mutant” and the act of reproduction are central to the story. The primary figure the reader is introduced through and whose monologue the reader follows is Johnny Parker, a self-proclaimed normal person working on a sanctuary island for mutants.[119] His narrative overlay frames the island’s occupants as “making [men] physically ill” (Simon and Kirby *#29* 1) and is matched in his dialogue when he says that they make him sick to his stomach when speaking to Elena, a beautiful secretary who helps the doctor running the island. Elena is Parker’s love interest, and it is their passionate embrace that changes the drama of the story from a spectacle of difference (showing conjoined twins, a legless man, and an armless man) into an alleged horror story showing “The Greatest Horror of Them All” (Figure XXIV).

[119] Islands are habitual enclosures of difference, either as a sanctuary, an isolated place of horror, or a utopian mutant otherworld (see: “The Murgatroyd Experiment,” *Odd John,* and the like).

Figure XXIV: Two white men, nearly indistinguishable except for variation in their hair color and clothing. The man on the left in a purple, buttoned-up laborer's shirt yells to the other that who he wants to make love to is no one else's concern. The white man on the right wearing a labcoat chides him and says that he once hoped to trust Johnny with the sanctuary.[120]

When Parker announces his intent to sweep Elena away from the island, the doctor has him subdued. Still pursuing his passionate elopement, Parker steals into Elena's room only to find that he fell in love with a facade: a foam-rubber suit with a blonde wig. His steady realization that Elena may not be the blonde-haired, blue-eyed human woman he so desperately wanted to make love with is interrupted by a scream. He sees the mutant body that is Elena and begins to grope for a weapon. What ultimately sets off Parker's violence is the profession of love that comes from Elena (Figure XXV).

[120] Accessed via DC Universe Infinite scan from *Black Magic* #1 (reprint series) 1973.

Figure XXV: The voiceover, provided by Parker, names sensations of disgust in response to what he sees: fear and nausea. On the right side of the comic panel, a white man in jeans and a button up shirt loses his purple hat. On the left side, Elena moves across the room on six limbs, leaving a trail of liquid that comes from her purple, bumpy flesh.[121]

It is this profession of ongoing love that pushes Parker over the edge; overcome by the simultaneous experience of witnessing his love for a mutant and that love's return, he shoots until her face "disintegrate[s] into a red ruin" all while crying louder than the gunshots (Figure XXVI). In his final moments of woe, he allegedly cries for the woman he has just shot. However, the monologue that follows emphasizes not her loss, but his own failing to understand that Elena was to other mutants what mutants were to him. That he could be affectionate with a being so far beneath his perceived status as Man was anathema to his being.

[121] Accessed via DC Universe Infinite scan from *Black Magic* #1 (reprint series) 1973.

Figure XXVI: A white man with brown hair cries because he couldn't identify a mutant and nearly procreated with her. He is surrounded by the vapor of gunshots.[122]

The course of the story implies that the reader should agree with Herr Johnny Parker, whose revulsion for mutants disrupts the island of their sanctuary. The conclusion is laden with the overwhelming fear and disgust that he could not tell the difference between a partner that would stably reproduce Man and one who was a mutant. The mutant other, through a prosthetic facade, made it possible for him to find himself nearly intimately involved with a Mutant.

It was this very story that was the first introduced as evidence in the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in April 1954. This mutant story was selected as one representative of the threats to juvenile health, both for the message of the story and the visible difference of the mutants collected. During testimony, Richard Clendenen testifies that "the greatest horror of all the freaks in the sanctuary is the attractive-looking girl in the center of the

[122] Accessed via DC Universe Infinite scan from *Black Magic* #1 (reprint series) 1973.

picture, who disguises her grotesque body in a suit of foam rubber" (Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency 15:50-16:02). The implicit threat of reproductive mutants in the story is precisely the discomfort that the committee hopes to capitalize on during the hearing. Clendenen uses these examples to demonstrate a range of comics that the committee finds distasteful and potentially harmful to the well-being of children. In the case of "The Greatest Horror of Them All," the harm comes from the combination of sexual imagery as well as horror. The potential for a "freak" or "mutant" to be mistaken for someone who is fit to reproduce, according to the logics of the story and the committee, drive the experience of discomfort and moral panic.

This trend of mutant reproductive horror is the central concern of mutant comics in the genre of horror. Mutants represent the threat of another form of being destabilizing man, through better adaptation, through communal support, or through adaptive technology to mimic normalcy. Ultimately, the figures of physical difference from the norm are threatening to Man, and as each is discovered drive witnesses to madness and are usually destroyed. The corollary to this is another form of mutants circulating in pre-*X-Men* comics, the latent super-Men, whose apparent normal Manliness belies a super-powered mutant potential that can either be nurtured or bullied away.

Won't Someone *Please* Think of the Children!?

In 1954, the world of comics was transformed through a series of overlapping pressures. Efforts from the Catholic organization, the National Office of Decent Literature (NODL) were coming to a head, resulting in a Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency hearing in the spring of 1954. These pressures, alongside fervor whipped up against comics[123] as contributing to the delinquency of children, pressured comic book creators and publishers to self-regulate the

[123] See *Confidential File* "Horror Comic Books!" from KTTV.

content of their work. The Comics Code of 1954 was modeled after the Hays (Film) Code–both were self-enforced, ideologically driven practices to align the production of popular media with contemporary cultural ideals.[124] The specific wording of the Code, alongside its enforcement by Charles Murphy, pushed the reproductive threats of mutants underground, until such time as they could be rebranded and rendered as more acceptable.

Attempts at regulating and censoring comic books through the legal system were ultimately unsuccessful, meaning that comic book editors and publishers had to be pressured into censorship in other ways. Despite efforts to outlaw comics which featured crime, blood, or mutants, the Supreme Court case *Winters v. New York* upheld the presence of crime in comic books in 1948, noting that "While words such as *obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent,* or *disgusting* were 'well understood through long use in criminal law," the provisions against crime and bloodshed had no 'technical or common law meaning'" (*Winters v. New York* qtd. Nyberg 39). This meant that lawsuit brought to bear against comics in the interest of censorship did not have a way to be argued or enforced legally. Instead, NODL needed to find other ways to change the course that comics were headed prior to 1954–in pursuit of greater thrills. As such, American politicians and decency groups were forced to pursue censorship through the court of public opinion, focusing not on the content of the comics as legally impermissible, but on the media itself as having a negative impact on the health of children.

In *Seal of Approval,* Amy Nyberg offers a history of the relationship between comic book creators, critics, and the Comics Code Authority. She argues that

> An analysis of criticism suggests two reasons why many adults continued to attack the comics. First: adults believed that children's leisure time should be spent in constructive activities that would improve either their *moral or physical well-being*. Second: adults were generally puzzled over why children were

[124] For details on how much or little the Hays code impacted film production, see the work done in the chapter, "Are We Not Men!?"

> attracted to something adults perceived as crude, simplistic, and lacking any literary or artistic merit (11, my emphasis)

While it is not the focus of Nyberg's text, the phrasing around comic censorship and its application is frequently a question of individual and social health. In this passage, Nyberg notes that the main drives of censorship are twofold, that comics did not contribute to improving moral or physical well-being–therefore being read as impeding this well-being–and being crude elements of popular culture.[125] It was the question of public health and the mutation of social values, however, that captured American concerns. Nyberg points out that "In the early 1950s, one theory caught hold of the public imagination: mass culture, including comic books, film, and other consumer entertainment aimed at youth, had 'misshaped a generation of American boys and girls'" (James Gilbert qtd. Nyberg 19). This misshaping of Americans and American culture becomes the central concern of comic censors and the Senate Subcommittee. They argue that comic books are fundamentally mutating, twisting, and disabling the youth of America.

What is particularly interesting in the creation of the Comics Code Authority and its enforcement of the Comics Code of 1954 is that it is particularly encoded along the lines of healthy reproduction of social values. In the language of the code itself are two points that particularly stymie the presence of mutants on the page: General standards—Part B3: "All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated" and General standards—Part C2: "Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken" (CMAA). Heretofore, the mutants of the comic books have been very particularly 'gruesome,' 'afflicted,' or possessing of 'deformities.' Mutants in the aftermath of the Code had to carry their variation on the inside in ways that steadily became less shocking and more interesting.

[125] This second criticism connects comic books to criticism leveraged at pulps and dime novels as well, Nyberg notes that "Early comics[']... emphasis on vulgar humor… combined with the crude production values of the time offended the literary and artistic sensibilities of the middle class" (2)

Those tasked with enforcing the Code were especially framed in terms of reproduction, both of humans and social values. In creating a team of censors, Charles Murphy assembled a team of women. As Nyberg puts it, "Comic book censorship was judged to be a woman's task… an extension of the mother's role… the code could be seen as an effort to feminize and domesticate the unruly world populated by comic book characters" (115). The five women and Murphy would take on a mother's role–policing the reproduction of American bodies and American values as they could be presented on comic book pages.

In discussing the impact of the Comics Code of 1954, Nyberg addresses the fate of E.C. comics and its unique positioning in the post-code world. Originally founded as "Educational Comics" and later "Entertaining Comics," EC commissioned and published stories that were broadly categorized as horror, and directly addressed difficult topics, such as racism, prejudice, violence, drugs, and sex–often in ways that were more nuanced than solely as spectacle. It is this proclivity that brought multiple EC comics to the attention of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency.[126] In her detailed discussion of EC Comics, Nyberg argues that "Most fan-historians focus on the demise of E.C. Comics as an example of the impact of the code. But what happened to [William] Gaines was the exception rather than the rule" (xi). Many publishers found ways to work with the Code, work around the Code, and to survive without horror comics and with transformed crime comics. The fundamental irony of the association and the Code was not lost on Gaines, "'I was the guy who started the damn association and they turned around and the first thing they did was ban the words weird, horror, and terror from any comic magazine… those were my three big words" (Gaines qtd. Nyberg 109). The fate of E.C. comics and its last issue is, interestingly enough, entangled with mutant presence (and absence) in comic books.

[126] There's an extended section of Nyberg's book that chronicles these comics and owner Bill Gaine's interactions with the Senate Subcommittee.

The last comic that E.C. would ever publish is much talked about. The story "Judgement Day" has received regular and frequent attention because of the attempts to censor it.[127] The story discusses a world of orange robots that are denied entry into galactic federations because of their subjugation of blue robots. However, "Judgement Day" was a second choice for the final issue of *Incredible Science Fiction*. The original story that Judgement Day supplanted was "An Eye for an Eye"--a story of mutants and Man. In *The Ten-Cent Plague,* David Hadju discusses what happened: "That issue of *Incredible Science Fiction* included a story, written by Jack Oleck and illustrated by Angelo Torres, about mutants. [Charles] Murphy rejected it outright. 'You can't have mutants,' he said, as Feldstein remembered" (283). In the early days of the Code, mutants were utterly *mutantem non grata*.

Reprinted in 1995, the restored story "An Eye for an Eye" shares the woes of a being who claims to be one of the last Men as he survives in a world of monstrosities. The story that he tells is that humanity destroyed itself with atomic weapons, and that the resulting world was populated by mutants, offspring of those who "loved their young not wisely but too well" (Oleck and Torres 2). As the last Man loses his mate and his tribe, he is driven headlong to die at the hands of a village of fish-people that he has mistaken for non-mutants. It is in this moment that it's revealed that even the speaker of the comic is, himself, a mutant (Figure XXVII).

[127] Amy Nyberg, in *Seal of Approval* discusses both the religious and racial arguments circulated by censors, as well as three perspectives on exactly why the story was so controversial.

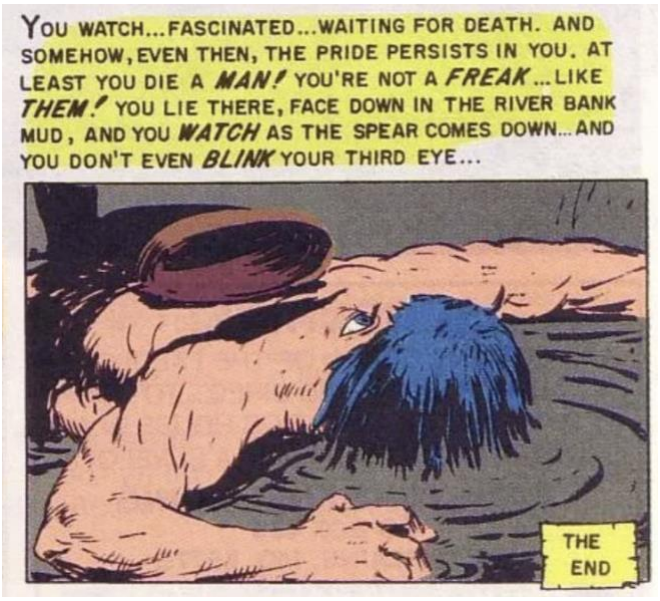


Figure XXVII: A white, muscular man lies face down in mud. A blue eye from the base of his neck looks up at the spear that is about to take his life[128]

I argue that the reasoning from the perspective of the censors to refuse "An Eye for an Eye" can be inferred from rhetorical moves the comic takes on. In terms of the censors, the subject matter of birth, killing babies, and then the violent overthrow of the world order would already be significantly concerning. The comics also very intentionally renders gruesome, afflicted, deformed figures throughout. However, operating from the alleged prohibition on mutants specifically, I turn to the way the story is shaped and told in the second person. Throughout the comic, the reader is invited in by the speaking Man: he addresses 'you' directly, even in his dying moment when he insists on his being a "Man" and "not a Freak" (8).[129] This uncomfortable intimacy between a mutant and the reader breaches the trust in the category of Man and questions the stability of who can claim to be human. Instead of maintaining some distance between the relatable and desperate speaker and the reader of the comic, there's an

[128]Accessed via scans available at mars will send no more: https://marswillsendnomore.wordpress.com/2011/12/17/ec-comics-an-eye-for-an-eye-by-angelo-torres/

[129] This dying monologue echoes the end of the film *The Last Man on Earth* (1964).

immanent connection that the interface of the comic builds. The reader is invited inside, is made a compatriot of the speaker, whose loss of family, love, and self is a compelling and heroic connection. To demonstrate at the end that the reader is emotionally and cognitively close to this heroic mutant, perhaps even on even footing with him, is an intimacy and reveal that is analogous to that of Elena and Parker in "The Greatest Horror of Them All."

With the Comics Code and its mothers of enforcement preventing visibly different mutants from comic book pages, another branch of mutant evolution had to survive in comics. To that end, mutants who appear like Man but have superhuman powers began to be the primary figures of mutants in comic books.

Latent Potentials: The Mutant Man Before *X-Men*

Concurrent with mutant horrors were the mutants of adventure, which ran the gamut from latent supermen to tragically bullied villains. Following in the legacy of The Ultrahumanite, these figures are powerful but misunderstood white men. Whereas the mutants of horror could largely be differentiated from Man–as women, as a multiple-bodied being, as a six-limbed woman–the mutants of action comics must be named as such, and the primary fascination is that such an experience could be accessible to these white men and boys. Without visible signals of mutation and difference, the narrative and affect change. Rather than a grotesque experience with a mutant other that questions the boundaries of Man, these stories use mutation as a shorthand for power that is not understood, and that such powerful (but different) Men need to pass as mere mortals. There's an implied gentleness to the treatment of Men that are mutants that does not extend into the horror of mutant women or disabled mutants, men and women alike.

Perhaps most suitably for this project, one of the earliest appearances of this strand of mutant is in *MAN Comics* #28, in the Bob Brant and the Troubleshooters story "The Crawling

Things." The Troubleshooters are four all-American boys (three white men and an Indigenous American) who appear in three issues of *MAN*. Their stories focus on fighting crime, communists, and a mutant. In this story, young Roger Carstairs is named as that "one boy in every group…in every class in school..who is different from the rest…who doesn't seem to fit in!" (Hubbell 1). His difference from the All-American Troubleshooters is one key topic of conversation, alongside which Troubleshooter is a "real man," and just what is causing a series of mass murders and heists in the city. Among the jocular ribbing about manliness, the Troubleshooters are invited by the elder Mr. Carstairs to be part of a birthday party for Roger, an indulgence they grant with only some regret.

As the story moves through its utterances of "Women! Phooey! Double phooey!" (Hubbell 4) towards a surprise for Roger, it is revealed that he has telekinetic powers and has been using them to assist the super criminal Falseface to build a fortune, one which Roger then intends to steal again to fund his plans for world domination (Figure XXVIII).

Figure XXVIII: shortly before being shot, a young white man outlines his plans for murder and a new world order.[130]

In his monologue, Roger reveals that he is a mutant, "a new step up in man's evolution," separate from humanity, and that his isolation is a chosen one (Hubbell 6). This revelation quickly escalates into a battle of psychic powers, cronies with guns, and the near-strangulation of Roger by his father. It's worth noting that the elder Carstairs is more than willing to strangle his son to death, but is saved from having to live with such an act by the final bullet of a hoodlum succumbing to illusory bugs.

In the aftermath of this conflict, the conversation that takes place between the Troubleshooters and Mr. Carstairs reveals much of where the reader's concern is expected to be.

[130] Accessed via scans on the blog *The Horrors of It All*. https://thehorrorsofitall.blogspot.com/2009/04/crawling-things.html

Rather than bemoaning the loss of his child or asking the Troubleshooters to help him cover up the crimes of his son, he has one request: not to tell the world about his being a mutant (Figure XXIX).

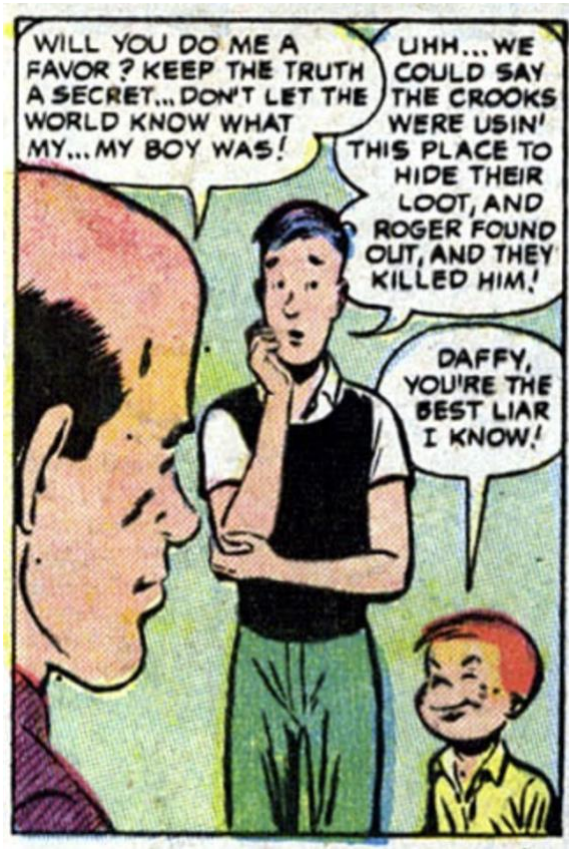


Figure XXIX: in the aftermath of his son's death, Mr. Carstairs asks a favor of the Troubleshooters… not to reveal to the world that he fathered a mutant. A compelling lie is quickly drafted by Daffy.[131]

Mr. Carstairs' primary focus is on the integrity of his lineage, and that the truth of his misunderstood son not be known. Rather than the horror storyline that there could be more mutants out in the world doing just the same, the story comes together to pass over the moment, the freak occurrence, and to re-institute the stability reproduction and the continuation of Man

[131] Accessed via scans on the blog *The Horrors of It All*. https://thehorrorsofitall.blogspot.com/2009/04/crawling-things.html

(and *MAN Comics*). Instead of connecting a bullied white boy with negatively impacting the reproduction of Man, the story sweeps this moment under the rug–instead of being horrific, it becomes tragic.

Mutation in a Man was still villainized in 1953, however, by the end of the 50s the advent and enforcement of the Comics Code of 1954 brought about a sanitized, more approachable Mutant Man. As I'll demonstrate, the practices of censorship reduced the amount of ways that mutation could directly enter and circulate in popular culture. Instead, what occurs is a cultural re-branding of the mutant, exchanging images of women, disability, and skin colors other than white for masculinity, hyper-ability, and whiteness, all while holding on to the fear of persecution. May 1959's *Journey into Mystery #52* introduced readers to Ted Lestron as "The Man with the Atomic Brain!" In this story, Lestron learns that his father's exposure to atomic radiation mutated his brain in ways that allowed him to, among other abilities, fly and communicate telepathically. As he comes into his power, he joins a utopian community on a small island in the Pacific.[132] Here, the mutants adhere to a surprisingly self-reflective and liberal agenda. They point out that Man is not ready to accept mutation or difference. Instead of becoming bitter, however, the leader of this community and the others there work to "help mankind with our great powers… for his own good…until **all** men become our equals" (Lieber and Lee 13; Figure XXX).

[132] For other mutant utopias set in the Pacific, see: *Odd John* by Olaf Stapledon, "Proteus Island" by Stanley G. Weinbaum, or *The New Adam* by Stanley Weinbaum.

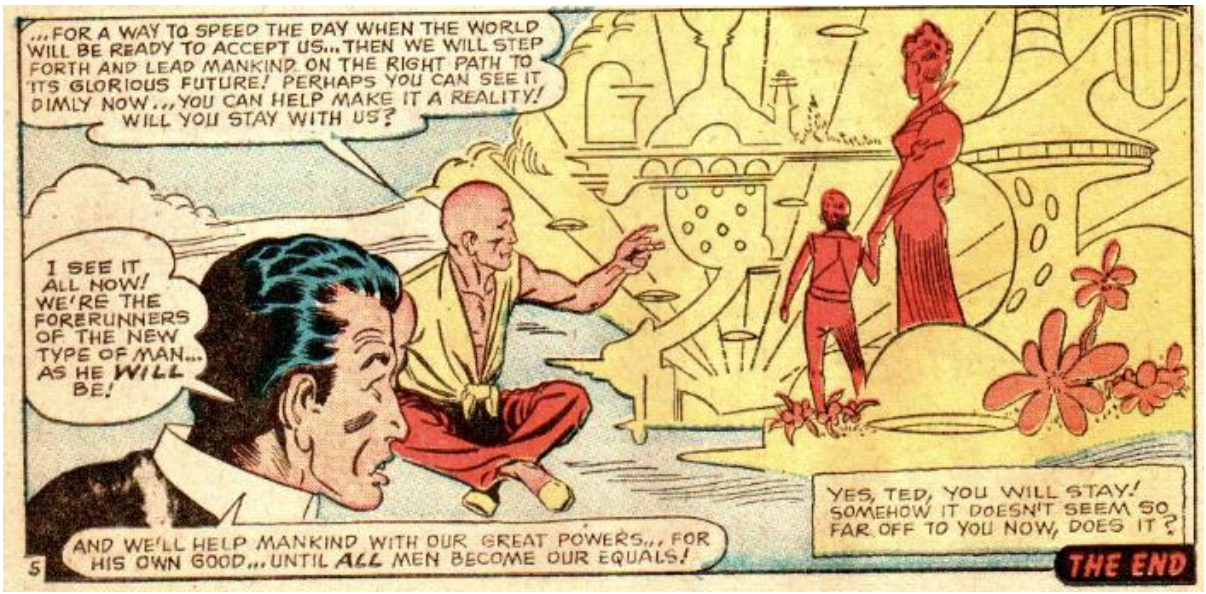


Figure XXX: on a remote island in the Pacific, a community of white mutants manifest a world where Man can accept mutants.

This vision of mutants–when they are white men–that they might be benevolent harbingers of a better tomorrow begins to take hold in comics at the turn from the late 50s into the early 60s. This time aligns with Smith and Alaniz's earlier discussion of the transformation of values in the so-called Silver age of Comics. In this framework, mutants become less symbols of horror, discomfort, or fear and have instead been folded into a narrative of progress. Mutants shift from the threat to Man to its secret, eventual re-institution as Man-after-Man.

Nestled within these hopeful narratives of a better tomorrow, however, is an ever-present criticism of the contemporary world's prejudice. Stories such as "The Mutants and Me!" and "The Man in the Sky!" tell similar stories of white men suddenly realizing they are bordering on omnipotence. In "The Mutants and Me!" from *Tales of Suspense #6*, mild-mannered (ultra wealthy owner of a safe company) Vincent Farnsworth walks away from a cocktail party where the topic of conversation about whether mutants exist to check on the most recent model of his safe. After accidentally being locked in, he discovers some untapped power within himself that

allows him to teleport out. As he walks away from the experience, he thinks to himself that he can now tell no one (Figure XXXI).

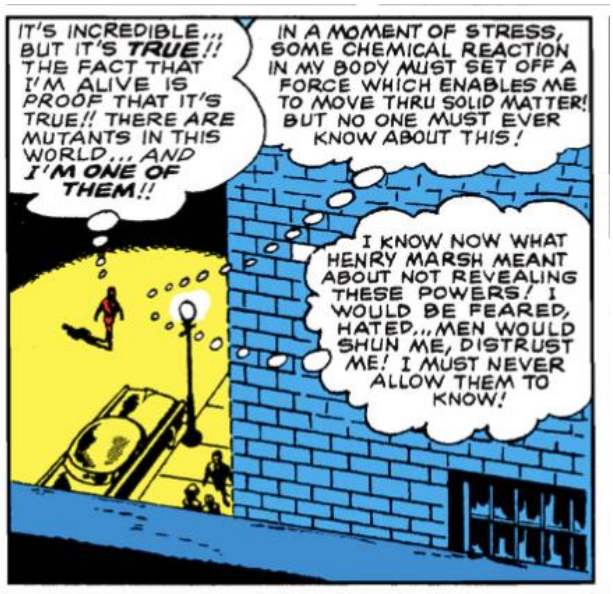


Figure XXXI: Farnworth has not-so-good news, everyone. He must now count himself among "them!!" the world of mutants.[133]

In his internal monologue, he realizes that he cannot tell anyone about his experience, because he "would be feared, hated… Men would shun [him], distrust [him]." Similarly, in "The Man in the Sky!" *from Amazing Adult Fantasy #14* Tad Carter, son of an atomic scientist, gains special powers by absorbing small amounts of radiation. While he tries to help humans, he becomes a source of fear, being persecuted as a freak and mutant. As he flies away, he bemoans the failing of humanity, that they cannot appreciate the implied benevolence of omnipotent and omniscient white mutant Men (Figure XXXII).

[133] Scan accessed via Marvel Unlimited: https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/11303/tales_of_suspense_1959_6

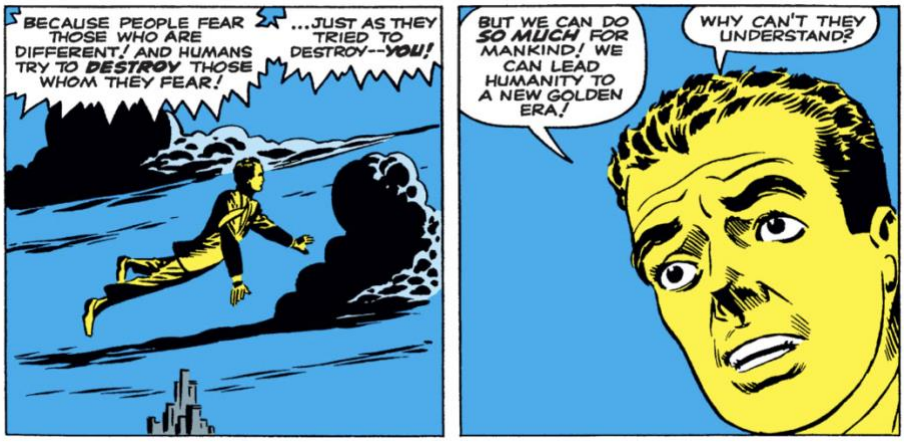


Figure XXXII: Tad Carter flies through the air towards an unknown and unrealized mutant utopia, where he can be among mutants who **can** understand.[134]

This distrust of difference defines the sphere of the Man-mutant. Whereas mutation in horror and crime comics was historically villainizing, mutation in Man-mutants becomes a transition into hyper-ability. The cognitive gymnastics of these characters bridge two seemingly contradictory narratives of difference and discrimination. On one hand, by virtue of mutation, these figures fear destruction precisely because of the long histories in crime and horror comics of killing off mutants for being different. At the same time, because there characters are white men, they physically embody the image of those who have historically policed human variation. The result is that what mutants have represented historically–marginalization, disability, and precarious living–is remarked upon explicitly. At the same time, the voicing of this fear is done by white Men who claim to be at risk because of the vast number of non-mutant others around them, convoluting the argument and reinstating these figures at the peak of an imagined hierarchy: it is the move from Man to Man-after-Man.

[134] Scan accessed via Marvel Unlimited: https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/17721/amazing_adult_fantasy_1961_14

In the adventure stories that predate *The Uncanny X-Men*, these stories utilize the affective discomfort of passing, but map it onto white Men. The premise that these Men, from wealthy, academic, or a mix of both backgrounds must have something superior about them to hide becomes a recurring theme. They fear persecution not because they are weak (quite the opposite), not because they have no support (they have a glut of it), but because they are outnumbered by lesser, jealous beings. In this way, mutant comics disrupt the previous chain of

Man→Mutant (persecuted[successfully])→Man (again)

by stepping briefly outside a focus on Man. Instead, through a liberal move towards humanity in the present, these comics present a new cognitive framework:

Humanity(prejudiced)→Mutant(persecuted)→Man-after-Man.

This practice re-institutes Man(-after-Man) as a privileged position that comes from (once again) assuming a place atop an imaginary hierarchy of being. These adventure stories of persecuted mutants draw on the imagery of fear and horror in concurrent storylines to equate the experience of Men with other persecuted groups. This is done to decentralize the eugenic ideals which affectively charged mutants in the first place. If 'everyone' is prejudiced against difference, then these white mutant Men can claim prejudice against them for being impossibly powerful. In this way, they are trying to put on layers of protection put in place for those who are outside the norm. From this place, they make the promise that once they are equal, they can share this equality with others.

It is this strand of mutant, seemingly less horrific on the page, that became the image of mutants to come. When paired with the horrific strand of mutants in comic books, there are implied battle lines drawn that sit firmly within the bounds of early comics–that mutant Men would be associated with the side of good and that mutants separate from Man would be assigned the role of villains. It is this premise that is present within early issues of *Uncanny X-Men*, but which over time would destabilize into the wildly complex universe of later runs of the comic. The lines drawn in the first run of the comic show Xavier's school, the home of the so-called 'good' mutants to be filled with white men and one woman who behave as though they all were in fact in boarding school. This unified image is juxtaposed against the so-called 'evil' mutants, who are represented in varying skin tones, with origins from around the world (but with a similar one-woman gender limitation).

All that Mutants Can Be: *The Uncanny X-Men*

The Uncanny X-Men holds together a plurality of mutants in an ongoing battle over the future of humanity. These battle lines, then, not only claim to represent the future of who can claim greatest proximity to Man, but also for articulating the striations of power that expand outward in defiance of Man's limitations. In this way, *The Uncanny X-Men* is able to re-introduce visibly different mutants nearly a decade after the institution of the Comics Code of 1954 by placing them in contrast to the X-Men. Under the guise of simply codifying this difference as evil, it brings back a variety of ways of being outside of the Man-mutant–and along with this reintroduces Namor, the Sub-mariner. By denying his association with Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil, Namor, the Sub-Mariner in particular defies binaries of good/evil or mutant/Man by returning as a mutant who is racialized, not evil, and whose values complicate the seeming binary at the heart of *The Uncanny X-Men*.

Co-Creator Stan Lee writes about the process of creating *The Uncanny X-Men* in his book *Son of Origins of Marvel Comics* and lays out the lines on which the original run of the series was aligned. In his description, Lee states that mankind was going to be the central focus of the series: "We decided to create two groups of mutants, one evil and the other good. One would be eternally striving to subjugate humankind, and the other would be ceaselessly battling to protect the human race" (Lee 14). This good versus evil arrangement opens up a critical space to consider what bodies and minds are positioned along these axes within the original run, how they align with previous representations of mutants, disability, and race in comics, and what transformations they signal.

In *Uncanny X-Men #1*, readers are introduced to Professor X's school for mutants through a training montage. The original cadre consists of four white Men who use the pseudonyms "Angel," "Cyclops," "Iceman," and "Beast." This crew is joined by Jean Gray (Later, "Marvel Girl") who, as an outsider, is given a whopping amount of exposition about X-men, mutants, and the state of the world. She is initiated into the school by its leader, the bald, white, super-intelligent, wheelchair-using Professor X (Figure XXXIII).

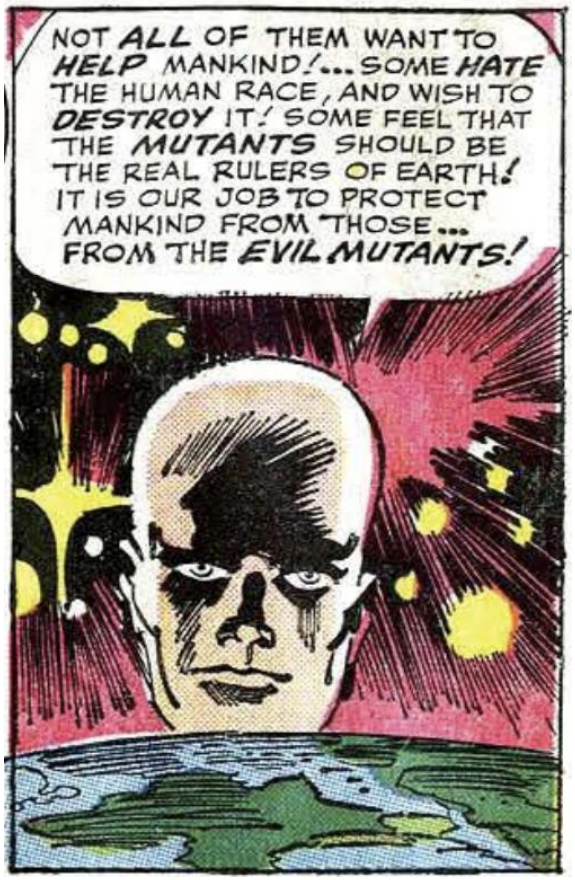


Figure XXXIII: The bald, white, benevolent head of Professor X looks down over the world, articulating his mission to protect the world from evil mutants.[135]

The villains of the first three *Uncanny X-Men* issues are, in order, an armored white man named Magneto who causes trouble on a US army base, a white bald Man who can teleport with his mind, and a fat white Man who abandons his freak show act to wage war on the X-Men. Rather than signaling villainy through overt images of race or gender, the first part of the run uses the language and imagery of flawed Men. Each of these antagonists is a mutant who is using their

[135] Scan accessed via Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/x-men-v1-the-silver-age/Uncanny%20X-Men%20-%20001%20%28c2c%29/page/n31/mode/2up

power to behave in ways the rupture general social contracts–to exert will over others (Magneto), to take the possessions of others (The Vanisher), and to be fat and impolite (The Blob).[136]

Magneto, the first villain that the X-Men face, is an ideological rebel. His mission to rid the earth of *homo sapiens* to clear the way for *homo superior* is an exaggeration of the eugenic ideals which first coded disability representation in comics. Magneto's mission is world domination, with a focus on the genocide of lesser beings–in this case, Men. This read of Magneto offers a look into the illogic that mutants as the primary focus introduce into the world of comics. He is simultaneously a picture of comic readers and writers from a previous generation while the picture of evil in his contemporary moment. By the advent of the 60s, popular opinion about eugenics and their practice had moved out of mainstream values and into the realm of an ignorant and violent past (albeit still eminently present in politics and social structures). The villain of the second issue, The Vanisher, is a telekinetic mutant who has turned to villainy in order to steal money and government plans. His eclectic nature and willingness to be nearly captured have police and bank officers referring to him as "mad." Echoing the language of *homo superior*, he closely mimics Magneto, albeit a less-powerful version (and thereby subdued). The villain of the third issue is "The Blob" a massive white Man who is impervious to bullets. When the X-Men try to recruit him, they find him to be too powerful and too impolite to fit within their organization; because he won't abide by their practices, they threaten to wipe his mind. In response, he gathers his compatriots from the circus to besiege the X-Men and ensure he is safe from repeated kidnapping attempts.[137] His story ends with the moral

[136] I discuss some of the complication of the experience of The Blob in my forthcoming chapter in *The Disability and Horror Handbook*, "Mid-Century Mutants and the Legacy of the Freak Show: Cultivating the Taste for Disability"

[137] The moral arc of this story in particular is deeply convoluted from a contemporary perspective. The Blob's behavior seems a rational act to protect himself.

that he could have been an X-man if "his honor had been a match for his power" (*Uncanny X-Men #3* 24). The moralizations of these figures each indicate a form of failure to be a proper Man. Instead of embodying threats to the reproduction of white people, it is the moral behavior of these antagonists that sets them apart. The Blob and the Vanisher both exist outside of the drawn lines of good (Professor X's team) and evil (Magneto's brotherhood), instead adding depth to what originally appears as a simple binary.

These "failed Men" as villains are enhanced by non-comic images within the issues. Alongside the thrilling stories of the *Uncanny X-Men* are advertisements targeted toward young adults to enhance a very particular image of Man (Figure XXXIV).

Figure XXXIV: A muscular white man flexes under the text "I'LL BUILD YOU INTO A NEW ATHLETIC MIGHTY-MUSCLED "ALL-MALE HE-MAN".[138]

[138] Scan accessed via Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/x-men-v1-the-silver-age/Uncanny%20X-Men%20-%20001%20%28c2c%29/page/n31/mode/2up

Whereas the villains of these stories present as Men but flawed by hunger for power, eugenic ideals, and greed, the advertisements signal that there are still elements of ability that are not just acceptable, but desirable. In these advertisements, the hyper-able body and the hyper-able mind are on sale for as little as $1.98. I compare these to the advertisements that peppered the back of the first issue of *Marvel Mystery Comics #1*, where Namor, the Sub-Mariner first appeared, which present a much different image of the expected reader (Figure XXXV).

Figure XXXV: A composite image shows a series of advertisements for innocuous pranks, skills for "boys," and promotes Ju-Jitsu as a way not to be bullied.[139]

Rather than being targeted at creating an image of "Man," the advertisements were aimed at a younger readership–"Boys! Boys! Boys!" one calls out to. Another advertisement offers pranks like a squirt rose or surprise soap. The closest call to the "magnificent modern Hercules" of before is an advertisement for Jiu-Jitsu as a way to respond to bullies. The advertisements of the comics from the 30s represent an imagined younger reader and shape conversations around skills

[139] Available on *Archive.org*: https://archive.org/details/marvel-mystery-comics-vol-1/Marvel%20Comics%20vol%201%20001%20%28scans%29%20%28c2c%29/page/n27/mode/2up

and knick-knacks. The later advertisements signal a pursuit much more driven towards exceptionalism. In the later advertisements and stories, it is evident that they are working together to (once again) sell the impossible ideal of Man. The stories present a wide variety of white Men, some good and some evil, with varying levels of superhuman capacity while selling the means to achieve super strength or hypnosis. The corollary of this, then, is that the editor (Stan Lee) imagined the reader of these comics as not proper Men, in need of exercise guides and books to train the mind.

In *Uncanny X-Men #2* and *#3*, this question of ability, its desire, and the way it is socially read is the central topic under consideration. These narratives put non-mutant observers in key positions to talk about mutants and how they fit into–or don't–the action of the comics themselves. Through ironic inversion, they complicate understandings of how various bodies, in this case the wheelchair use of Professor X, are expected to be read in the world. During the conclusion of the action of *Uncanny X-Men #2*, both The Vanisher (the issue's antagonist) and the US Military read Professor X as a "helpless human" and chide him for being so close to the action (20-2). The commentary is that 'the action' is for those whose bodies and minds move in expected ways. The presence of Professor X, regularly referred to as one of the most powerful mutants, in these situations offers readers an alternate image. They can simultaneously understand the ways that Xavier *could* be read, but knowing his status as mutant open a different way that he *should* be understood to be present at the climax of the story. Without the force lines that are made visible to comic readers, there is no indication to anyone that Charles Xavier is anything other than a disabled man. The repeated underestimation of Professor X signals to readers that popular understanding of disability representation would be that wheelchair users are helpless… without an X gene. Taken together with the paratext of the advertisements, there's a

series of rhetorical moves that reinforce the assumption that everyone, even those with incredible telekinetic powers, desire ability–or hyper-ability–and to be legible as such.

The conversation of desire, behavior, and ability comes to a head in *Uncanny X-Men #6*, where Namor, the Sub-Mariner is reintroduced and briefly considers becoming a part of Magneto's brotherhood of evil mutants. It is in this issue that visible physical difference is tapped by both sides of the good/evil divide within *Uncanny X-Men*. Early in the issue, Professor X astral projects[140] to locate Namor, the Sub-Mariner before he can be recruited by Magneto. As his consciousness wanders, Xavier himself leans into distress about his paralysis (Figure XXXVI).

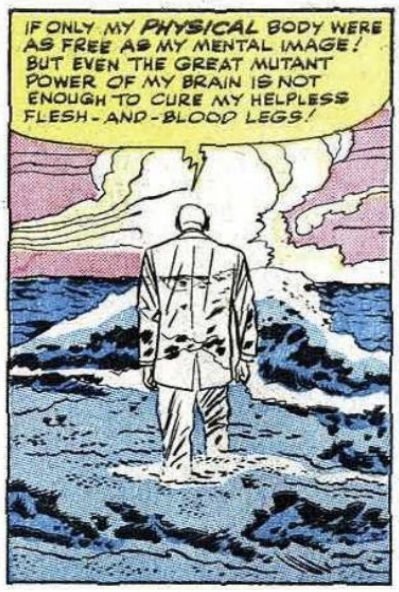


Figure XXXVI: While astral projecting around the earth and making telepathic connections with mutants the world over, Professor X wishes he could use his body to walk.[141]

[140] The comic itself calls it a projection of his mind–terms vary, but the basics of the action are that an essence of Professor X can move through the world psychically.
[141] Scan accessed via Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/x-men-v1-the-silver-age/Uncanny%20X-Men%20-%20006%20%28c2c%29/page/n5/mode/2up

Despite his incredible mental acuity, Xavier longs for normative ways of existing in the world, as though his powers only represent a prosthetic or mediated engagement with the world. This perception of paralysis as lack, however, does not cause Professor X to become a villain, unlike so many other disabled figures in comics. As a corollary to this, the issue similarly points out the flawed logic that physical ability is equated with goodness. As Scarlet Witch looks over Namor, the Sub-Mariner, she remarks simultaneously on his physical characteristics and moral capacity (Figure XXXVII).

Figure XXXVII: Scarlet Witch is fascinated by the slim, muscular body of Namor, the Sub-Mariner and wonders why his fine, masterful self would ally with "the evil Magneto" before her unruly hex powers cause a ruckus.[142]

The insight offered by Scarlet Witch's thoughts complicate the implied binary pair that disability is evil and that physical ability is good. She notes Namor, the Sub-Mariner's "slim, yet muscular" body and muses on why someone "so fine, so masterful [would] want to ally himself with the evil Magneto." It is in this issue, and with the introduction of the previous racialized character that is Namor, the Sub-Mariner, that X-Men finally achieves productive use of the uncanny as affect. In their work on *Uncanny Bodies,* Smith and Alvarez introduce the sensation

[142] Scan accessed via Archive.org: https://archive.org/details/x-men-v1-the-silver-age/Uncanny%20X-Men%20-%20006%20%28c2c%29/page/n13/mode/2up

of the uncanny as a way to understand the disabled body in superhero comics. They argue that "The disabled body is at the same time familiar and unfamiliar, and it is this uncanny state…that disturbs the spectator" (23). It is this uncanny that acts upon readers when they look into the mind of Professor X and recognize a familiar longing for greater ability–exaggerated by the advertisements for health and muscles on the same pages. However, what Namor, the Sub-Mariner brings to the page is an uncanny mirror to this socially-constructed fascination with ability. Namor, the Sub-Mariner is just as fascinating as a hyper-masculine character, coded as Asian,[143] at war with the white Man,[144] and being framed as desirable for his beauty and power alone. As Smith and Alvarez note, "The superheroic uncanny can also offer a productive counterpoint to constructs of normalcy, working as a mode of amplification that employs the fantastic to (re)consider the social constructions of the normal" (24). By challenging what is desirable about normal, or indeed questioning the desirability of the wildly exaggerated visible characteristics that shape the category of Man, Namor, the Sub-Mariner destabilizes the reproduction of Man-as-desired within the universe of *Uncanny X-Men*. This structure of the uncanny makes ability itself the source of discomfort, and the unresolved tension that arises in the uncertainty of who or what can be legible as hero/villain. In this way, the return of Namor, the Sub-Mariner in *Uncanny X-Men #6* heralds a new phase in mutant evolution.

Whereas previous mutant presence in comic media had signaled the grotesque collapse of categories, mutants after the advent of *Uncanny X-Men* signal contested realm of affect. While Stan Lee argues that mutants are a scientific reality that would be immediately accessible to readers between the ages of six and twenty five, prior to the *Uncanny X-Men* series, they had not

[143] In the original comic; in the time since he has mutated into a "Mesoamerican Antihero" with his appearance in *Wakanda Forever*.
[144] See pages two and three of this chapter, dear reader!

been sufficiently implanted into popular culture to be known as cultural figures. What *Uncanny X-Men* offers to mutants is a complication of the binary that disability is evil and ability is good, as later runs of the series continue to grow in complexity around the conversation of race, gender, and sexuality. While it begins from these lines, the comics and their later iterations instead cause such a simple differentiation to fracture and fragment. This is not to say that *Uncanny X-Men* has been the best with navigating race[145] or queerness[146] in the comics.

I argue, then, that mutant media encourage acts of transformation in popular culture. To lean into mutant practices is to embrace change–for good, for ill, for humor, for hegemony, for horror, for all that it can be. Mutants in comics offer the space to enact social harm through the circulation of harmful stereotypes while also offering the potential to change these representations–contemporarily or through retcons.The caprice of mutation offered multiple media in science fiction the tools to destabilize the reproduction of Man between 1904 and 1964 and to open space for other desirable forms: be that of astral-projecting from a wheelchair to do good for the world to wanting to ally even temporarily with the so-called Brotherhood of Evil to redress the genocide of Atlanteans.

Mutation media creates a protean space, encouraging conceptions of humanity that deviate from the limited boundaries of Man. Through the use of mutant media, I argue that the experience of comics shifts from the grotesque–a collapse of cognition and understanding, often the result of contact with the previously unknown–to the uncanny–an uncertainty born of both knowing and not knowing. The bubble of mutant media that burst in the 60s provided American popular culture not only with a lingering desire to seek out difference (to embrace or eradicate… but to seek nonetheless), but tools to bring it within the realm of the knowable.

[145] https://blacknerdproblems.com/the-curious-relationship-of-race-with-x-men-black-mutants/
[146] https://www.cbr.com/x-men-queer-awesome-mutants/

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Conclusion

Overview

Over the course of this dissertation, I have attempted to collect and circulate as many pre-1964 mutants and mutant sensations as possible. In the first chapter, "Tomorrow's Children," I follow the fraught ways that difference as a spectacle moved from the freak show into science fiction pulps and literature. By moving the midways of World's Fairs into text, it made mutants and variation more appealing for readers, who came to understand and appreciate the ways that difference could become power and want to seize it as their own. Through repetition over time, this practice of making mutants more varied and more imposing imbues the category of mutant with social capital and the possibility of becoming something more than human. In these acts, readers find themselves confronted with a grotesque experience: that of extending care and desire to mutants.

In the second chapter, "Are We Not Men?" I argue the cinematic experience of science fiction invites discomfort. Thinking alongside Daniel Yacavone's understanding of the filmic experience, I argue that the presence of variation on the screen creates more compelling cinematic experiences through the collapse of categorization. The mutant in cinema troubles and amplifies Vivan Sobchak's understanding of others in science fiction, messing with the titles of Creature and Monster and instead inserting a third perspective on relationships to humanity, the divine, and the stuff of the earth. Focusing on the mobilization of the Hays code, the chapter uses the ways that censors kept disabled characters and performers off-screen as a way to better understand the emotional and affective power of variation and the ways that mutation survived to make it out the other side of these practices in the 1960s.

In the final chapter, “Uncanny Ex-Men” I trace the bookend appearances of Namor, The Sub-Mariner as a meditation on the move of comic mutants from horrific not-white not-men to the all-powerful white men who guard the world. Looking at visual cues, advertisements, and narrative elements, the chapter argues that, prior to the 1954 Comic Book Code, mutants largely existed in the realm of detective and horror fiction as reproductive threats to humanity. In the later era of censorship, these mutants adopted new forms, that of persecuted white men trying to exercise their powers for good in a world that didn’t understand them.

Taken together, this transmedia dissertation follows the many ways that disability and human variation were historically leveraged to create discomfort and uncertainty in readers. Looking at the laws and practices that surrounded, shaped, and were in turn shaped by each form of media, it is possible to understand the homogenizing practices that were at play in social structures by reading for the ways that any form of variation was stigmatized, punished, and ultimately contained, cured, or destroyed. The fascinating potential of the mutant, however, arises in its capacity to skirt these practices and to become something else. Instead of succumbing to one set of signifiers, in each case mutants adapt to censorship, criticism, and stigmatization by continuing to change and grow until they become more desirable. These practices ultimately foster an appetite to seek out and consume media that present more and more wildly different minds, bodies, and cultures. While science fiction media attempted, repeatedly, to destroy the mutant, it in turn created a fertile space in which variety could flourish and fostered a being that had the capacity to hold humanity, Man, and the Man-after-Man at the same time.

The Disposability of Difference

In the previous pages of this dissertation, I have woven together the threads that hold together the history of the American freak show, the disembodiment of mutation into animal, sound, and image in film,[147] and repeated demonstrations of the permeability of the assumed-to-be stable boundary of the human. To emphasize some of the points touched upon in this dissertation, it helps to consider the ways in which difference beyond the mutant experienced similar stigmatization without the later resolution of being folded back into broader conceptions of humanity.

Central to understanding the impact that mutant media had between 1904 and 1964 is the recognition of the permeability of the category of human. Tod Browning's much-commented upon *Freaks* (1932), demonstrates how it is possible to witness the implied hierarchy of humanity, with white able-bodiedness as an always-threatened ideal. The central story follows Cleopatra as she infiltrates a circus freak show, attempting to marry (and shortly thereafter, kill) Hans the dwarf for his fortune. The film, originally packaged as horror, has been read and re-read as a symbol for changing opinions about the difference of disabled people. In *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* film critic Joan Hawkins notes that *Freaks* (1932) "started as a mainstream horror film that migrated into the exploitation arena before finally being recuperated as an avant-garde or art project" (167). In the film, able-bodied trapeze artist Cleopatra is repeatedly confronted with her relationship to the freakshow in ways that make evident her assumption that she is well-situated within the category of human, and the wide variation of people around her are not. This is emblematic during the celebration of her and

[147] "Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true, this soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd unto some brutish beast! all beasts are happy" *Doctor Faustus,* Christopher Marlowe.

Hans' marriage, when she recoils from a playful initiation into the show to the chant, "One of us! One of us! Gooba-gobble! We accept her!" (42:55). In the shot-reverse-shot below, it is evident that, despite the warm welcome into this community, Cleopatra believes herself to be above it [Figures XXXVIII and XXXIX].

Figure XXXVIII: Angeleno, played by Angelo Salvatore Rossitto, cheerfully presents a cup to Cleopatra, played by Olga Baclanova to welcome her as "one of us."

Figure XXXIX: Cleopatra looks on as she is presented with a chalice. With one hand on her hip, she looks disdainfully at Angeleno.

While the table of performers smile, cheer, and look on, Cleopatra holds herself rigidly. One hand on her hip, brow furrowed over an absence of smile, she conveys discomfort at the least at becoming "one of us" if not outright disgust. It is evident that, despite being extended an invitation into the community, Cleopatra instead finds the implication of becoming "one of us" something beneath her as an able-bodied, white woman. As the scene continues, she proceeds to vehemently reject this invitation and pour out the offering of community. This positioning in relation to difference that the freak show embodies[148] is emblematic of the concept, early in the

[148] As discussed in ch. 1 of this dissertation.

mutagenic window, that occupying the pinnacle of the category of man was the most desirable space, and that *any* deviation was to slide backwards on an implied linear form of progress.

As this dissertation has shown, in the years since, mutants have deformed this conception by creating several desirable layers of human variation, becoming not just a threat to humanity, but goals for the man-after-man. While *Freaks* (1932) was originally considered a flop and derailed Browning's career, its position as a cult classic in the 1960s demonstrated the growing interest and desire for variation. As the film grew a fanbase among the countercultural movement, it articulated increasing attention and care paid to mutation and variation at the boundaries of the category of the human. Contemporary disability scholarship and documentary work on the film[149] argues that its fraught history is one necessary component of holding onto disability representation and of transforming understanding of disability community.

In *Disability Aesthetics*, Tobin Siebers argues for the centrality of disability in understanding how aesthetics impacts all people, disabled and nondisabled alike; he notes that "disability… participates in a system of knowledge that provides materials for and increases critical consciousness about the way that some bodies make other bodies feel" (20). In this preliminary conversation, he describes the ways in which aesthetic values of the disabled body shape the experience of disabled individuals through cultural disqualification of disabled people from the category of human. He also addresses the ways in which historical understandings of aesthetics has shaped cultural behavior towards disabled people through stigmatization of disability and its conflation with moral or ethical failings. All of this is derived primarily via the transmission of affect from body to body. Siebers focuses the lens of aesthetics--"how bodies make other bodies feel" on practices of oppression, demonstrating ways in which multiple

[149] See *Hideous Progeny* by Angela Smith and *Code of the Freaks* (2020) directed by Salome Chasnoff.

oppressions, including sexism, racism, classism, and ableism stem from systems that "occult[] in each case the fact that the disqualified identity is socially constructed, a mere convention, representing signs of incompetence, weakness, or inferiority" (26-7). Read broadly, this understanding offers a framework through which disability aesthetics recognizes that oppression is rooted in the devaluation of difference and the simultaneous obfuscation of the means by which some bodies are devalued. It creates a system in which humans of various sizes, shapes, colors, cultures, and behaviors are dehumanized for not performing according to a singular perspective of the human experience. The practice of disqualification here is twofold: difference from an implied norm (whiteness, ability, masculinity, affluence) is made aesthetically uncomfortable while simultaneously being portrayed as uncomfortable because it is inherently devalued.

It was not only mutant stories, but the general timbre of science fiction between 1904 and 1964 to use difference as a disposable prop for main characters that were overwhelmingly white and nondisabled. *Amazing Stories* volume 1, issue 1 demonstrates dehumanizing apathy for variation through the conflation of Native Venusians and Mexican humans. Two stories in this issue feature expeditions[150] where white, nondisabled protagonists are accompanied by alienated others, in one case a group of literal alien guides, and in the other a group of Mexican men. In "Winged Death on Venus," blonde-haired, blue-eyed beachcomber Chet Fields leads a hunting expedition for wealthy patrons into the Venusian wilds. His mission is to take care of two people he assumes to be inexperienced tourists. Meanwhile, "The Stone Men"–part of the same issue–follows sandy-haired, blue-eyed explorer Stan Carlson into "the dense back country of Yucatan" to follow a meteorite ("The Stone Men" 1). The parallel structures of the stories follow white

[150] In the interest of science or sport or wealth.

men in the company of vulnerable white women as they pursue something that is likely to be dangerous. In their pursuit, they are accompanied by so-called "locals." In both cases, the support for these characters come to gim ends and die en-mass [combined figures XXXX & XXXXI].

Figure XXXX: Three white people stand around, one clutching a dead green "Native Venusian." The dead Venusian is unremarked upon, while a white woman cries that it could have been her that died.

Figure XXXXI: Two white people stand over several dead Mexican men, emphasizing that they are at risk because "there's a murderer loose in the expedition."

In this example, it is evident to see the much-remarked upon ways in which variation from white nondisability is regularly made alien. The aesthetics of both panels create an affective bond between the literal aliens (Native Venusians) and racially-codified and alienated people of color. In both instances, the expedition party members are treated as disposable and indicative only of the danger faced by the white protagonists, in the case of "Winged Death on Venus" even going so far as to state it outright. These representations place an emphasis on the disposability of lives that do not fully align with Wynters' hierarchy of humanity, earlier discussed. To use Tobin Siebers' terminology, these individuals have been disqualified from humanity. This trope of

difference is oft-remarked upon in disability studies and is the focus of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's 2000 book, *Narrative Prosthesis*.

This dissertation argues that, while many mutant stories follow similar arcs of stigmatization, their legacy of transformation and the implied responsibility of coming *from* humanity has a lasting impact. There is an inherent responsibility to mutants that readers, viewers, and listeners are prone to recognize, and have been conditioned to do so. In the chapter "Tomorrow's Children," I discussed the rising fascination with the health of the body public, and the implied and legal language that cut out many people from being imagined as healthy in the public space. Discussing the conflation of race, gender, and disability in the chapter "Are We Not Men?" I addressed the complex relationship between the mutant and the practice of eugenics, wherein those who have been stigmatized as existing outside of public health are deemed as disposable, event dangerous elements. In the chapter "Uncanny Ex-men," I modeled the ways that, culturally, the censors of comic books took on a eugenic role of withholding mutants from public view in a twisted act that was likened to "mothering." Mutants across media have had to struggle to survive, and do so continuously. What has permitted them to continue to surface and resurface is their compelling connectivity–not only do they have capacity enough to model human origin, they similarly draw connections across multiple communities–queer, disabled, racialized, feminized signals blend within the affective power of the mutant, whose unresolvable uncertainty makes space for most readers to find somewhere to connect. It's this radical extension and connection that makes mutant narratives especially powerful in their reveals.

In stories that were released shortly after the use of atomic weapons in Japan by the United States, sf authors filled pulps, comics, and the screens with meditations on what atomic

fallout could do. I discuss this in great detail in the film *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), and will take some time here to emphasize the atomic twist of the mutant story in the pulps and comics here. With the advent of atomic power and its use against Japan, sf pulps and film rapidly changed focus. In his history of sf, *Trillion Year Spree,* Brian Aldiss describes changes in the genre following the end of World War II

> writers and readers… were digesting the implications behind the nuclear bomb, its unlimited powers for greatness or destruction. It was a painful process: the old power fantasies were rising to the surface of reality. Many stories were of Earth destroyed, culture doomed, humanity dying, and of the horrific effects of radiation, which brought mutation or insidious death. (Aldiss 289)

The mutations described above were particular speculations on the danger posed to the "normal" human body by atomic energy. However, many of the cautionary stories were also framed as reproductive reveals–it's not until the very end of the story that readers are shown who or what a 'mutant' really is, or if the child of tomorrow is, in fact, a human at all. Through the introduction of nuclear radiation, a wide variety of unpredictable changes to the essence of normality could occur. The focus on these mutations, while recognizable as anxieties about the possibility of future generations to perform a "normal," ablenationalist[151] identity, continue to carry the anxieties and coding of eugenics.

Shortly after the end of World War II, *Astounding* published Judith Merril's short story "That Only a Mother," which weaves together reproductive responsibility, ablenationalism, and atomic anxiety. Told through a series of letters and limited third person perspective, the story follows Maggie, a woman who works as a calculator for the government, and her military husband as they have a baby. The story opens with concerns about how the husband has been

[151] Mitchell and Snyder define ablenationalism as a nation where "citizens are increasingly subject to the dictates of how to be more alike than different" (Mitchell and Snyder 14). This is discussed in more detail in "Tomorrow's Children."

around “uranium or thorium” and the dangers of mutation (Merril 88) and provides vague background information about infanticides committed by fathers of mutated children by strangulation (90). Through letters, Maggie conveys the exceptionalism of their baby: she can speak, sing, and at ten months has the ‘mind’ of a four year old[152] (93). Everything in the exchange points towards and exceptional family. A mother who worked on the war effort until she gave birth to a beautiful, talented child. Readers are expected to celebrate such fortune. When the husband finally meets the baby, however, it is revealed that she is indeed a mutant:

> His hands, beyond control, ran up and down the soft-skinned baby body, the sinuous, limbless body. *Oh God, dear God* — his head shook and his muscles contracted, in a bitter spasm of hysteria. His fingers tightened on his child — (95)

The entirety of the piece is a navigation of the expectation and performance of exceptionalism–to be normal, or more accurately to be *better* than normal. The ablenationalist ideal holds up that the ‘exceptions’ can only be read as positive. It is impossible, then, for a mutant to fall within these ideals despite being faster, smarter, better at singing, etc. if some fundamental ‘norms’ are not met. Within the story, the expectations of reproductive responsibility is continually emphasized, both in Maggie’s frequent mentions of literature about the risks of mutation as well as her dutiful care of the child not-yet-revealed to be mutant. These characteristics represent a performance of dutiful care for the hygiene of the home, albeit with the twist that she has permitted a mutant to live.[153] This fraught relationship undermines the ablenationalist ideal of the healthy home–Maggie is trapped somewhere between being a good mother (to a mutant) or a good mother (to public health). In this case, Maggie has chosen to be the former, and to usher into the future a new arrangement of human that is well-loved, educated, and capable of singing at a very young age.

[152] American measurements of intellect and proximity to feeble-mindedness were framed in terms of “mental age.”
[153] As previously discussed in Nancy Tomes’ work.

The risk of contamination that the mutant presents to the body public, then, becomes a matter for Maggie's husband to react to. In this moment, he must take on what is normally a maternal role–that of the household's health. He is described as experiencing a "bitter spasm of hysteria," an experience that fractures his intellectual, masculine identity. Hysteria is framed as a specifically feminine form of cognitive difference, with the origin of the term coming from the belief that the womb could wander and cause madness. The language in this passage emphasizes the impact of the presence of a mutant–Maggie's husband becomes responsible for this life and must either fracture his masculinity to uphold social ideals of the healthy home or fracture his humanity in order to usher in a new arrangement of life by allowing a mutant to live. This situation places him out of control, beyond mastery. This fracture, narratively, must be addressed. This drive carries him into (implied) infanticide as his fingers tighten around his mutant child. At the same time, the irresolution of this moment allows room for interpretation–this embrace can go in either direction, that of tightening in care or tightening for the sake of harm.

The affective experience of this story relies on stringing the reader along and then revealing that the danger *was always already connected to humanity*. The story brings readers into a space that implies reproductive danger, but assuages these fears with the assumption of mastery and exceptionalism. The child is smart, the child is beautiful, and the child can speak. The implication of these signals is that the child is completely nondisabled. This compulsory assumption, discussed in the chapter "Are We Not Men?" echoes McRuer's question-and-answer structure of "'deep down inside, wouldn't you rather be like me?' (which is to say: able-bodied)" with the only socially acceptable answer being "'yes'" (McRuer 306). The corollary of the question, its lingering implication, is about what scale this able-bodiedness accounts for in the

desirability of the child. Where does the need for 'normativity' end? The narrative of this short story presents a eugenic script for the removal of non-normativity as codified along gender lines and which enacts violence upon a disabled character who is (through omission of discussion around race) likely white. However, the logics which guide this narrative are only explicitly framed around the identification and categorization of a "mutant." The implications behind the infanticide, the title, and the horror of the revelation of being limbless rely on what is left unstated: that such a child would be a threat to future generations of humanity, that such a child could not materially contribute to society, or that the aforementioned traits disqualify them from identification as human–thus meriting destruction.[154] The ephemera of this decision, however, point to a world, or at least hint at the possibility that a world could exist where this spectacular mutant could be accommodated.

The script of revealing a mutant at the end of the story as a mediation on care and responsibility was also at play in comic books at this time. In a reversal of the setup of "That Only a Mother," "Child of Tomorrow" from the comic book *Weird Fantasy* Volume 1 Issue 17 presents the mutant(s) first and makes the connection in the latter half. The story of the comic begins with a global atomic attack that happens while its main character, Jerry, is working in a lead mine. He travels home, marries his unscarred sweetheart, and quickly takes a contract looking for uranium in a distant country. As the rest of the humans around him die from radiation, he returns to a country that is populated by "friendly mutants" (7) [figure XXXXII].

[154] A detailed conversation of the aesthetics of human disqualification can be found in Tobin Siebers' *Disability Aesthetics*.

Figure XXXXII: A chiseled-jawed white man with brown hair walks away from four white mutants with a variety of shifted facial features.

What is remarkable about this comic is the swiftness and ease with which the main character accepts his fate and the fact of the mutated world around him. After a quick threatening gesture, he trusts the mutants around him to introduce him to the fact that they're all five years old, look and act fully adult, and that no one else survived because of the radiation. They also state that two-headed mutants are "insane" and a threat to everyone. Upon returning home, he is immediately beset by a two headed mutant that is revealed to be his son/daughter [figure XXXXIII].

Figure XXXXIII: A white man with brown hair flips over the body of a mutant with two heads atop one body.

The mutant reveal of this story is several layers deep, and covered in fraught signification. Jerry, who was immediately ready to accept that mutants were a largely fine lot, returns home to find a two-headed mutant and kills them.[155] Moments later, he realizes that they were his own offspring. The closing panel of the comic leaves the reader to ponder the mess of symbols taking place in one page. The visible image is one of a blonde woman's head and a brown-haired man's head on one body. The body is wearing a white shirt that lifts with the rise of a breast on one side. They wear brown short pants that are belted at the waist. The mutant that Jerry has killed bears his face and that of his wife; it also is its own, new entity somewhere within a world of seemingly infinite bodily variation (though everyone's skin tone is the same). The mess of the reveal leaves the reader to ask what paternal expectations they had for Jerry–is he right in gunning down his own child? Is it more or less appropriate when it's Jerry and not the mutant

[155] I use "them" here out of respect for the plural identities and genders held in one body.

who is the outlier? Were the 'friendly' mutants honest in their claim that mutants with two heads are mad?

Instead of making the mutant the exception, "Child of Tomorrow" makes the ethics of humanity the outlier that must be reconciled. In a world where humanity has already vanished, the moral imperatives of maintaining its boundaries becomes moot and unmoored. The act of the mutant reveal is perhaps one of the greatest boons to come from mutant fictions–the reveal of a mutant offers more questions than answers. In this moment of arrest, mutant fiction becomes an example of Istvan Csisery-Ronay's science fictionality, "which is neither a belief nor a model, but rather a mood or attitude, a way of entertaining incongruous experiences, in which judgment is suspended, as if we were witnessing the transformations happening to, and occurring in, us" (3). By disrupting the assumptions around able-bodiedness, these stories, especially through repetition, provoke readers to rethink and re-question the underlying assumptions of difference meriting cure, containment, or being cut out. They do especially through their mobilization of the grotesque, where Csisery-Ronay argues, "it is laws, not bodies that leak" (185). The mutant bodies in these stories are stolid, solid figures, but the laws around maintaining able-bodied humanity become leaky and uncertain.

Towards the Superman

In the March 1939 issue of *Astounding*, the story "Towards the Superman" speculates on how positive or negative eugenics could move humanity towards whatever comes next. On the surface, the article seems to be gesturing towards possible post-human arrangements of our genetic antecedents. It offers insights into the ways that time in space changes bodies and their needs. It introduces the ideas of breeding and shaping humanity to select for specific characteristics. The article compares humans to cattle and dogs, noting that breeds such as the St.

Bernard and the Bulldog, while cultivated by humans according to human ideals, "could [not] successfully face life without Man's care. Neither could fight the coyote and live" (Tooker 90) and similarly points out that "as men, we would not have superhuman foresight to lay down plans for our betters" (89). In these passages, Tooker is as much hoping for *less* utilization of eugenics as tearing down the ideals of eugenicists. He criticizes the limited scope of vision that humanity possesses, much as Peter McAllister criticizes contemporary men for not living up to their genetic potential.

Unfortunately, Tooker simultaneously leans into the logics of eugenics as he argues for the "elimination of the unfit" (94) as a solution. The piece assumes that present humanity cannot know what will be best in the future, but is able to recognize the worst of the present. This dissertation has argued,and continues to do so, that cultivation of care for variety, through appreciation of the mutant in particular, lays the better foundation for future once-humanity. Even the limited scope of Tooker's work recognizes that "mutation is required" (90) for the new humanity to come into being. I argue that through the application of disability aesthetics and radical practices of care, it is possible to hold onto a variety of possible futures.

Mutation is inevitable, the result of time and reproduction. In the second issue of *Amazing Adventures*, a series of comics published by Ziff-Davis, this inevitability of change is heralded by two humans navigating their abduction by an alien other and their eventual return to earth. In an early panel of the comic [figure XXXXIV], a human man comes to terms with his abductor, a seeming combination of robot and gorilla.

Figure XXXXIV: a white man looks into the bulging eyes of a square-headed alien with gorilla-like fangs and robotic tentacle arms.

The differences between this alien and this man are quickly resolved; the alien is a museum curator gathering specimens. For an indeterminate period of time, the human man and woman help in this easily recognizable endeavor. Having no connection to this alien, they eventually find a way to escape and attempt to return to their home. The ending of the comic reveals, however, that there is no home to return to. Rather than returning to the welcoming arms of humanity, they once again are incarcerated in a zoo, this time by the descendants of humanity (figure XXXXV).

Figure XXXXV: A white man explains their predicament to a white woman while in a cage in front of a crowd of short, bald, hook-nosed white people.[156]

In this concluding panel, the man explains that they have been incarcerated as an exhibit of an earlier time, a practice that was happening in New York concurrently with the publication of this comic He explicitly invokes American practices from the first half of the twentieth century--that of keeping people of color in zoos.[157] He voices the anxiety that mutant fictions tap into–if humanity assumes itself to be the pinnacle of existence, how can that which mutates from it be anything other than a threat–a threat from a superhuman future or a subhuman past? It's this uncertain oscillation that charges the mutant in science fiction and allows it to fragment the category of humanity. While recognition of the alien as something wholly separate was immediate, reconciliation between the 'advanced' peoples of Earth and their human antecedents

[156] This is a not-uncommon form of posthuman / mutant, especially those with telekinetic powers or heightened intelligence.

[157] An extended disability studies reading of this panel is necessary to unpack the connections between the freak show performers billed as "The Wild Men of Borneo," the life of Ota Benga who was kept in the Bronx Zoo, and the cultural histories of containing disabled people and people of color, disabled and nondisabled alike. Blackness has been eliminated in this future world, as occurs in many other narratives of this time period.

is not possible. This comic represents the underlying anxiety at the heart of the mutation, that the resultant mutant will become dominant and humanity as-it-is-known will fall out of its position as supreme being of Earth.[158]

Taken together, I use these examples to model the importance of attending to mutant fictions as methods for understanding, appreciating, and ultimately fostering variation among humanity. It is necessary to implement an approach to disability aesthetics that recognizes that mutants herald more than the end of Man, but instead the potential for something more human– more of the already existing and powerful variations of humanity. Siebers writes "human communities come into being and maintain their coherence by imagining their ideal forms on the basis of other bodies" (Siebers 198). Imaging mutant futures as the ideal requires intense reconsideration of the layers of symbols and signs that come together in fictional mutants. To re-orient towards cherishing variation rather than homogenization means a capacious approach to mutants and mutation. The first half of the twentieth century saw just such a cherishing of difference.

The acceleration of mutant stories brought the symbol of the mutant from a stigmatized position into one of desire for readers and viewers. The stories made space for oppressed and minoritized people to see themselves in positions of power and threat, if only for a moment. They made space for those already privileged to see themselves as a beset minority and to want to occupy mutant space. Critical attention to these inversions and the ways in which mutants make the category of human more permeable is necessary to understand the turn towards the radically inclusive speculative fiction of later decades to the present.

[158] The unspoken portion of this anxiety is that it represents the fear of white masculine humans experiencing the treatment they visit upon others.

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