

Marc Augé. *The Future*. Trans. John Howe. Verso 2015. 112 pp. \$80.00 CAD (Hardcover ISBN 9781781685679); \$11.16 CAD (Paperback ISBN 9781781685662).

Any treatise on the topic of time is bound to be broad in scope. Past, present, and future remain central to most, if not all, established doctrines, epistemologies, and issues. The very trifurcation of time itself remains equally and continuously intriguing. It is perhaps appropriate that Augé's writing on the topic takes the shape of an essay, or, rather, a series of essays. Specifically, the issue set in these essays is the *future*. In order to tackle the burden of such a challenge, Augé sets out back in time: Flaubert, Sartre, Moliere, and Proust—such references are common. He, however, remains perfectly comfortable in this illustrious past, and firmly sets himself up for a penetration through future into *the future*. Repetition is his key tool for the inversion of collective and individual, miniscule and vast, past and future. 'Deep into the unknown to find what is *new* [sic]!' (Baudelaire, as cited by Augé, 17) should be the trusting reader's guide for the *The Future*.

Marc Augé's *The Future* fully follows Adorno's claim that '[t]he law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy' around which Verso's Futures series is organised. Augé presents an essayistic, short book that ranges in its topics from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* through technological innovation to claims about what might constitute an educational utopia. As one can imagine from such a wide array of topics, the concept of the future here is not necessarily the central issue at hand throughout the book, although it always remains clearly in the visible periphery. Of greatest note are Augé's opening and closing chapter, where he both defines his view on the future—it is not an abstraction detached from us, but an experience firmly rooted in the present—and relates his general work to the concept of time. Perhaps it should be noted that the work is quite general in nature and somewhat broad in scope. Augé's anthropological work, and his key concept of non-place most of all, is largely absent, and in the rare case that it is present it is only briefly touched on.

The penultimate chapter provides an intriguing discussion of pedagogy by way of Sartre and the existential school of thought. Augé's 'Educational Utopia' (85) aims to channel the forces of history with the purpose of redirecting humanity as a collective to an appropriate end goal. This seems to be a recurring theme in the book. Augé attempts to distinguish between the individual and the collective, both to separate and interweave them simultaneously. However, in each chapter while trying to emphasise one or the other, he ostensibly gets to a point where the dominant one becomes inverted and its opposite is revealed as key. It is not simply to say that Augé is being dialectical; rather, he seems to be keen on interweaving the notions of the individual and the collective in relation to both history and future in such a way that both remain undetermined—more potential than actual. In the case of the 'educational utopia' that he proposes, he ventures through a modern problematic of education claiming that French youth is currently uneducated (87), or citing sociological views that modern education is at the core of social issues such as inequality (88). At the same time, Augé turns this contemporary problem on its head by way of Montaigne, Rousseau, and finally Sartre. Using a speech made by Sartre in Japan in 1966, the reportedly 'dated' language is made again to speak of an educational policy that speaks about the 'technicians of practical knowledge,' as well as those 'technicians of universal knowledge,' synonymously referred to as intellectuals (90). Thus by explicitly arguing for a utopian educational reform, Augé aims to prove that real steps towards practical educational reform are possible.

In another part of the book, Augé explores the antinomies in modernist fiction. At various points he makes relevant the work of Flaubert—where the 'the tension between meaning and free

dom...is exemplified by the paradox of Flaubert' (29). Here, again as in the described above 'educational utopia,' Augé ventures into the opposition of the characters of *Madame Bovary*'s apparent meaninglessness, their perpetual character of being in a world they cannot comprehend, with the creative freedom of the writer, Gustave Flaubert. To Augé, *Madame Bovary* is both familiar and surprising, both banal and sensational, about everything and nothing at the same time. It is through repetition that Augé, much like Flaubert himself, establishes this continuous capacity for rediscovering the obverse side of things. At the same time, it is not the case that these descriptions are meant as explanatory (37). Paradoxically, Augé mimics the flourish of Flaubert, yet never fully claims that the inferences the reader is led to ascribe to Flaubert's intentions could just as well apply to Augé's. Thus, Augé leads us to the question central to Flaubert— is it nothing or everything that is at the centre of the book? 'Must we really plumb the depths of despair because we are disillusioned [...]? Or should we give up the illusion of despair [...]?' (44) Thus, Augé makes the transition from the technicalities of the universal to those of the practical, to paraphrase Sartre, from literature to everyday life (90). Typically for his writing, this practical reflection is immediately made relevant to the collective—'[t]he planetary crisis now underway has a deep dimension that transcends economics' (44).

It is the technological dimension of contemporary life is at the centre of innovation. Innovation, in Augé's perspective, is reminiscent of Marcel Mauss's 'total social fact' (63): it incorporates all social actors and it covers all aspects of society (63). It is central to the democratising process (66), humanism (66), technological invention (63), and business (72). This totalising process of globalisation, despite its all-permeating quality, remains invisible and indefinable—'[w]e all have the feeling that we are colonized, but we do not know who by' (72). Needless to say, for Augé this feeling, as well as the process that brings it about, is persistent. Continuing on from globalisation, there is the issue of the global south and north, their opposition and the disparity between them. Examples of this include George Steiner's claim that the research budget of Harvard University exceeding that of the sum of all the European research universities (76). Then, on another hand, there is the opposition of development that Augé highlights in terms of an economy of meaning; there is the excess of meaning which 'stem[s] from a principled reference, arbitrarily postulated, to the whole' (80); or science, the 'model of modesty' (80).

One of the most interesting points that Augé makes is in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, titled 'Bet on the Future: Meaning, Faith, Science' (73-84). This 'model of modesty', in other words—science, appears to follow the already defined paradox inherent in Flaubert's literary works. Science has its ambition and modesty intertwine in the specific example of CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC). Namely, its failure to discover the Higgs boson (at the time of writing the elementary particle had not yet been discovered), would not be a permanent dead-end, but rather a necessity for further theorising. Secondly, this model has at its core the 'vertiginous' logic (82) of connecting the physics of the infinitely minute to that of the infinitely vast. Furthermore, Augé aptly points out, CERN's LHC is a 'spectacle of transnational coalition of endeavour' (82). It is again, this 'deep dimension that transcends' (44), where the lack (in Flaubert's case of meaning; here, the Higgs boson) is opposed to the freedom of opportunity (Flaubert's creative act; science's ability to theorise).

Towards the end of the book the reader is left with the suspicious feeling of vertigo. Despite its brevity, *The Future* demonstrates a profound depth that although at times is overly specific (as in the case of *Madame Bovary*, which even to the patient reader requires some effort to justify as pertinent to *the future*), remains evocative in the best way possible. Through a series of sudden shifts

Marc Augé masterfully unveils the ‘absence of large scale political projections’ (83) in contemporary society, which, still, for him, remains an opportunity. It is an opening up for a ‘real chance to devise changes on the basis of concrete historical experience’ (83). Once again, Augé reverses the abstract into the concrete, and then back again; thus, opening up the space for a utopia, a real one.

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