

Genre Fiction in the Graphic Novel: The Case of Science Fiction

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The beginning of the rise of the graphic novel has often been connected to Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*. Published in 1986, the same year as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* which put the genre of autobiographical comics into great prominence, Moore and Gibbons' graphic novel engages a second major generic tradition in graphic narrative, namely, science fiction. Graphic narrative, broadly defined, has been exploring the possibilities of future developments and far distant galaxies in many different guises. Superman is an alien from the planet Krypton, the Fantastic Four are science heroes who travel into space, and many of the narratives from *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (Wolfman and Perez 1985-1986), *Watchmen* (1986) and *Kingdom Come* (Aid and Ross 1996) revolve around a struggle against cosmic evil. The series *Astro City* (Busiek and Anderson 1995-1996; with several more recent issues) revisits the history of superhero comics through the lens of a nostalgia for the future as presented in early science fiction. The EC comics from the 1940s and early 1950s and the British magazine *2000AD* might serve as examples for the edgier, darker dimension of science fiction in graphic narrative. Japanese manga features many cases of cybernetic enhancements, robotic characters and posthuman futures, including *Astroboy* (Tezuka 1952-1968) and *Ghost in the Shell* (Masamune 1989-1990). Also Tintin travels to the moon in *Destination Moon* and *Explorers on the Moon* (Hergé 1953 and 1954), and many of the famous narratives by Moebius (Jean Giraud) and others in *Métal Hurlant* and elsewhere unfold their narratives and bizarre and futuristic settings, involving the interface between man and machine and cosmic travel. In this article, *Watchmen* (1986), *Transmetropolitan* (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002) and *Saga* (Vaughn and Staples 2012--) shall serve as examples of the more ambitious treatments of the concerns of the science fiction genre in the graphic novel.

Definitions of science fiction abound for the genre's incarnations in literature and in film.

Generally, we can categorise definitions as paratextual, novological and mega-textual (see Mättää [2006] for the general distinction). Paratextual definitions suppose that the generic tag "science fiction" is applied on the cover or in the blurb (see Genette [1997]), novological definitions underline that the narrative introduces a thought-provoking "novum" into the fictional world (see Suvin [1979]), and mega-textual definitions present as the decisive feature of science-fiction that the fictional world is populated with science-fiction-specific elements like spaceships and aliens (see Broderick 1995).

Even though its paratext does not explicitly signal the graphic novel as science fiction, *Watchmen* is full of references to the genre, including classics of the genre in film like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951) playing in the cinema on the street corner where some of the action takes place. The main plot event is the false "alien attack" orchestrated by Adrian Veidt, and throughout the narrative, we find elements such as the superhuman capacities of Dr Manhattan and his trip to Mars with Laurel Juspecyk, that bring *Watchmen* close to science fiction from the mega-textual definition as well. The novological definition considers science-fiction narratives to be shaped by *cognitive estrangements*, around which their narratives revolve (Suvin 1979). The "novum" introduced in science fiction narratives might take the shape of a telescope or other implement of scientific investigation which allows us to see the world (and our position as denizens of the world) differently, or it might be the consequence of a scientific innovation that yields a thought experiment. In written science fiction narratives, metaphors might become material, the linearity of time might multiply or artificial intelligence might challenge the boundaries of the human. Chapter IV in *Watchmen*, for example, narrates Dr Manhattan's story through his superhuman conscience where past, present and future coincide, and in chapters XI and CII, readers are brought to Adrian Veidt's perception of an entire wall of television screens. Even though Suvin considers the novum as "hegemonic" (1979, 70) in science fiction, he also acknowledges the "feedback oscillation"

between the science-fiction world and the real world it reflects (71). Christine Brooke-Rose (1981), moreover, demonstrates the many similarities between the “realistic discourse” of literary fiction and the discourse of science fiction in terms of narrative technique. Science-fiction texts might work through defamiliarisations and what-if scenarios in which they are set, but they also strive for plausibility and aim to reveal anxieties arising from the real historical moment in which they are written. The urgency of *Watchmen*'s narrative feeds itself from the danger of atomic annihilation in the Cold War, which was still a very real threat in 1985-1986. John F. Kennedy and Nixon are featured as US Presidents in the graphic novel, and together with the backdrop in New York in 1985, the mention of their names provides plausibility to the challenges to perception which *Watchmen* levels at readers with its treatment of the role of superheroes, history and the media.

If media are the “extensions of man”, connecting us to the world and to each other, as Marshall McLuhan famously suggested in *Understanding Media* (1964), then a change in the way in which we mediate the lifeworld also changes fundamentally the ways in which we think and live.

Television enables other modes of community and public communication than the novel and the newspaper had, for example, and together with the dominant medium, also forms of social life and processes of the formation of political will change profoundly. Science fiction, with its cognitive estrangements, often takes up the problems and possibilities connected with media developments, most famously perhaps in George Orwell's *1984* (1948), where television turns into an instrument of surveillance and reading literature provides a place of refuge from social pressures. In *Watchmen*, TV plays a similarly dominant role, not only in the multi-screen wall described as the “ultimate weapon” by Veidt, but also through the ways in which televised news precipitate Dr Manhattan's exile from Earth and how advertisements, TV shows and serials constantly underscore and comment on intimate moments between Laurel, her mother, Dan Dreiberg and others. The only character seemingly untouched by the media is Rorschach who chronicles his experiences in a hand-written diary. In the more detailed discussion of *Transmetropolitan* and *Saga* that follows, we

shall see how the graphic novel in the last two decades built on the generic heritage of science fiction in *Watchmen* with respect to its narrative technique and its engagements with contemporary media ecologies.

Transmetropolitan: *Spider Jerusalem and his World*

It takes the threat of a law-suit to bring the journalist Spider Jerusalem back into The City at the beginning of Warren Ellis' and Darrick Robertson's *Transmetropolitan* series. Spider had been living happily tucked away in a spectacular mountain landscape for many years, when he is reminded of a publishing contract that he has not fulfilled. In order to write, Spider knows, he needs to go back to The City and expose himself once more to a place where, it seems, civilisation has gone too far. Advertisements reach as far as the eye can see; the walls of your flat are basically screens of television, which turn themselves on as soon as you wake up in the morning; subliminal messages that make you dream of consumer products and info-pollen than change the shape of your perception are all part of what it means to live in The City. A meaningful human existence is accelerated to the degree that it becomes threatening in relation to our present-day standards. A new religion is founded every minute; aliens have sold their DNA to humanity so that we can produce drugs that turn the human body into an alien body; consciousness can be uploaded into a cloud of micro-bots and cryogenics services reconstruct the bodies of those who had their heads frozen in the twentieth century, leaving these new-born revenants lost in a brave new world. While the denizens of The City seem to have adapted to their lifeworld without any demur and, largely, accept its invasiveness and instability, Spider returning from his mountain revolts linguistically, physically and intellectually against it.

Unsurprisingly, the newspaper column which Spider writes to earn a living in The City is called "I hate it here". He uses the column to address corruptions in the city administration and police force, to reveal the depravity of politicians, to go against stream-lined mass media that dominates The City

and to give an alternative voice to those who are controlled by it. Spider and his journalistic activities are the challenge to the mediated reality of his lifeworld that invites readers to revisit their own world critically. In a world of stream-lined corporate media, where press releases are news, Spider engages in investigative journalism and writes in the gonzo style of Hunter S. Thompson, producing first-person narratives that look for truth but have no interest in smooth, inoffensive objectivity. “Y’see, they say journalism is the art of controlling your environment, but that’s all wrong. I can’t control anything with this typewriter. All this is, is a gun,” Spider explains (Vol.1 *Back on the Street*, 62). His language is not designed to keep his environment stable and relatable, recreating protocols of familiarity, but rather to punch holes into it and to express his anger. Spider’s frequent drug use is also connected with this communicative strategy. When he sets out to write a column at the end of Vol.4: *The New Scum*, for example, Spider fills himself up with drugs before he starts his work. The logic behind his drug use lies in his attempt to get at the truth by stripping back the veneer of civilisation and getting at the raw, emotional core of his take on the world.

Transmetropolitan’s representation of mediatedness connects with these concerns. As Steen Christiansen points out, a rivalry between word and image prevails in the series with the written word as a “symbol of truth” (152). The stream of mediated information in *The City* teems with images in bright-colours that are swiftly changing across the screens. Spider himself, on the other hand, works for a newspaper called *The Word*, he writes on a laptop that has a keyboard studded with the keys from old-fashioned typewriters, and his text appears on the page in captions that recall the aesthetics of early text-processing efforts with its courier fonts. The force of Spider’s communication depends on his use of language, not on any visualisation. Ellis and Robertson fully employ the comic as a medium that entails both words and images in order to represent their different communication regimes. When the mediatedness of the image, with its simulacrum-like connotations, is foregrounded, we have panels in the bright colours and the slightly grainy texture

of a television screen. When the mediatedness of the word is foregrounded, we have captions in black and white with the reduced detail of the type-written font. Often, as for example in the representation of Spider's reporting of the riots at Angel 8 (in Vol.1: *Back on the Street*), the events themselves are presented in an unmarked visual style in the comic book in parallel with its double mediating in panel/screens and caption/columns. Readers of *Transmetropolitan* are given an articulated representation of the work of mediation in the world of the comics series, moving back and forth between the mediation proper to the world (namely, television images), the mediation proper to the character (namely, verbal discourse) and the mediation proper to the comic book.

Transmetropolitan makes these distinctions its own when it shows the ways in which Spider's relationship to the world around him changes throughout the narrative of the series. One morning in Vol.3 *The Year of the Bastard*, Spider wakes up in black and white, until the sensors in his apartment notice that he is conscious, turn on the bright and multi-coloured amfeed screens, and Spider's body is physically jerked back as he is slumping to the bathroom. Spider, however, always works to defy the logic of the world he moves in. In the beginning of Vol.1 *Back on the Street*, he avoids a traffic jam by leaving his car and walking on the hoods of the cars in front of him into The City. When he is the only reporter inside the Angel 8 complex at the time when the riots break loose, he types a "live column" to his newspaper, reporting on the events in his first-person gonzo style that is represented in the visuals of a typed manuscript, and replaces the stream of images that usually pervades The City on its public screens. When Spider makes up his mind to cover the Presidential elections between the candidates "The Beast" and "The Smiler", also the process of his decision-making depends crucially on the comics form (Figure 1). In the first panel, Spider walks down the street, after he has avoided calls from his publisher and from his newspaper editor to give his take on the election, when suddenly his gaze is drawn to the oversized promotional posters presenting the candidates as larger-than-life images or panels within the panel. Then, Spider is looking up to these faces shown from above, from what must be the point of view of the faces on

these posters. In the next panel, however, Robertson flips the perspective, so that now Spider seems to stand perpendicular to the posters, looking down on the faces of the candidates. Just as Robertson defies the continuity of the panel by panel sequence as an artist, so does Spider defy the logic of the world he lives in as a journalist who goes against the grain of mediation favouring the word over the image.

Spider, however, does not always succeed in divorcing himself from the appellations of the media ecology around him. In Vol.3 *The Year of the Bastard*, Spider for example decides to watch television for a day, orders off a shopping channel, phones a call show and finally becomes featured in the news himself because of the flamboyant insults with which he harasses the guests on the call-in talk show. “I have become television,” he comments in horror (115). In Vol.6 *Gouge Away*, Spider learns that his assistant had sold the rights to his persona behind his back and that now television teems with shows reflecting his newly kindled fame, such as the infantile but not exactly child-friendly version “Magical Truth-Saying Bastard Spidey!” and the more heroic prime-time incarnation “From the Mountain to the City: The Life and Work of Spider Jerusalem.” The events of these narratives are presented in panels that are made to resemble television screens. When Spider passes out after taking drugs in compensation, versions of his story continue to roll before his inner eye, such as a King Kong-version and a version in hell, the markers of mediation disappear, but it is still rather clear that the logic of commercial media masters his thinking. In response, Spider decides to take up writing his column again at this point and, after the authorities prohibit normal media circulation for his column with *The Word*, switches to the online community of *The Hole*, which allows him to keep publishing his column until he brings down the current government of “The Smiler” and he can consider his work done.

By the end of the *Transmetropolitan* series, Spider returns to the mountain, and Ellis and Robertson give readers the two books which Spider was supposed to write in the form of two comic books.

Here, words and images stand next to each other. Splash pages by different artists and short passages in Spider's distinctive prose style comment on each other without entering any particular stage of rivalry. The detail of these images and the stability of the composition on the single page are markedly different from the stream of mediated images that determines the mediated environment familiar from *The City*, where concerted attention to the image is neither encouraged nor invited. Readers certainly could spend time with the mediated images of the comic when the action is set in *The City*, but this quality of the image only comes to the fore in the splash pages of the final two comic books, and it unfolds with or against the text in the captions. *Transmetropolitan* mirrors here the beginning of the series, where Spider enters *The City*, and where segmented captions with his voice-over narration are placed next to significant elements of the image of the cityscape, parsing the visual field and making it comprehensible in Spider's first act of mastering his environment. The series also repeats the many passages where the comic presents Spider's columns with long captions over large images (if not necessarily splash pages, see for example "21 Days in the City" in Vol.5 *Lonely City*). By the end of the series, the entire comic is turned into Spider's work and readers arguably are supposed to have reached this stage of judgement in navigating word and image themselves.

Transmetropolitan is science fiction in that it presents life in a future city, where all manners of body modification are possible, where matter can be created at will (in so-called "Makers" that well-do apartment owners pride themselves on) and where it can be dissolved into clouds of microbes just as well. Such instability of the material world is underlined by the simulacrum-like nature of the visual dimension of media, which corresponds to notions of "liquid modernity" (Zygmunt Bauman) and "supermodernity" (Marc Augé; the concept is mentioned by Spider himself). Spider, however, stands against the logic of this environment. He almost always wears the same clothes, his body is tattooed and his medium of choice strongly simplified, and he thereby provides the seemingly only point of continuity and authenticity in the world in which he is placed. He chooses a

language that is excessive, bordering on the carnivalesque, in order to match the protocols of behaviour and fashions that are considered normal in The City. The cognitive estrangements of *Transmetropolitan* depend exactly on the convergences and divergences between Spider and his world, between Spider's favoured version of mediation and that of his world, and by the end of the series, readers might have started to reflect on the dominance of the visual outside of *Transmetropolitan* and into the world of the turn of the twentieth century.

Saga: Readers and Their World

Different from *Transmetropolitan*, which remains located within The City of the future, Brian K. Vaughn's and Fiona Staples' *Saga* series makes use of space travel and great adventures in the outer reaches of the galaxy. Indeed, *Saga* is perhaps most readily categorised as a "space opera" or "science fantasy", the genre of escapist delight and big emotions in a galaxy far away with tales in the tradition of the *Star Wars* films. Readers follow the story of Alana and Marko, who belong to two different, warring species, but fall in love over the reading of the novel *A Night Time Smoke* by one D. Oswald Heist. Alana's and Marko's relationship is viewed as a dangerous betrayal on both their home planets, and they have to go on the run together with their infant daughter Hazel, pursued by royalty from the dominant class of the Robot Kingdom (a species with TVs as their heads), Marko's parents and ex-fiancée, as well as assorted journalists and bounty hunters. The series, at the time of this writing spanning six trade paperbacks, chronicles their escape from the constraints of their world and its preconceptions, and the emotional and social forces that try to tie them down again.

Saga is comparable to *Transmetropolitan*, however, in that the series works its cognitive estrangements through its treatment of mediation. Again, *Saga*'s is a storyworld where many advances of entertainment technology have been made, including the Open Circuit, a soap opera / wrestler format that creates a virtual reality in which viewers can immerse themselves completely

while wearing a bucket-like device over their heads. The key medium in *Saga*, as in *Transmetropolitan*, however, is an anachronism withstanding the trends within this media ecology. In this case, it is the printed paperback romance, *A Night Time Smoke*. The novel is first presented wrapped in plastic, as if it were a collector's item that is not part of the present-day media ecology. Soon, *A Night Time Smoke* becomes a piece of evidence in the hunt for Alana and Marko for their pursuers and a way to relate to these characters for their readers. In Vol.2, when the background of Alana's and Marco's relationship unfolds, readers also learn more about the novel. Chapter eight in the trade paperback (or the eighth comic book) begins with a detailed view of the final page of the novel, held in Alana's hand, including her comment "Holy. Fucking. Shit" in the speech bubbles. On the following pages, Alana, then a soldier on duty, rushes off to tell her companions that this novel has changed her life profoundly and to find another who will also read the book and partake in a discussion about it. Only when she meets Marko, then a prisoner of war, does she have someone to read the novel to, and, in this shared experience, the two fall in love. Reading the novel *A Night Time Smoke* sets the entire plot of the comic series *Saga* going, and Alana and Marko's story almost becomes that of Eames and the Contessa, the two main characters in *A Night Time Smoke*. *Saga* extends the parallel between the two narratives by having Alana and Marko at rare instances speak in the lines and the font from the book and by choosing an image in which Alana and Marko pose in the composition of the racy cover image of *A Night Time Smoke* as the cover for the fifteenth comic book. When Alana and Marko find themselves in trouble and do not know what to do, it seems hence only logical that they decide to visit the very author of this novel, D. Oswald Heist, to ask for advice.

This intimate relationship between a novel and its readers is also transferred to *Saga* itself in the ways in which its readers are cued to relate to the graphic novel. The material quality of the comic book is often used in *Saga* to place readers into the position of Alana and Marko reading *A Night Time Smoke*. When the first splash page of Chapter 8 (or the eighth comic book) presents Alana

finishing reading *A Night Time Smoke*, this is not only relevant for the characters in the fictional world. Readers' hands holding the comic book work as a relay of extension to Alana's hands holding the book in the picture, and similarly, readers also read what Alana reads. This strategy runs through several instances in *Saga*. Opening the tenth comic book (chapter 10 in the trade paperback version), readers see a splash page where Marko stands, seemingly meeting their gaze, and says "Please keep reading". On the first page of the comic book, with no reference to elsewhere in the fictional world, he could be addressing the readers of the comic book here. It is only when readers turn the page that they can relate Marko's gaze and verbal address to Alana who had been reading *A Night Time Smoke* to him. Even though *Saga*'s readers never get to read this paperback romance (no more than some short passages are reproduced in the graphic novel), their identification with the main characters as readers of that text is underlined through the frequent mention of it and through the subtle use of metafictional devices that almost place the novel into their own hands.

As readers of *Saga* come to realise by and by, the series is narrated by Alana's and Marko's daughter Hazel from hindsight in a special font that seems to be hand-written on the panel images. Her voice evaluates the events, often in an ironic fashion, which underlines the impression that the narratorial discourse has indeed been jotted down as a kind of running commentary. Hazel is an omniscient narrator, and she often reminds readers not only that she knows how the story will continue (for example, by commenting "This is the story of how my parents split up" on a panel image indicating reconciliation in Vol.4 chapter 19) but also that she can direct readers' attention beyond the flow of information of what is relevant in the current moment of the narrative (for example, by reminding them that "I guess you already know what happens next" at a cliff-hanger moment in Vol.3 chapter 15). On the level of the materiality of the comic book, on the level of the characters realising that they take up roles shaped by characters in the novel and on the level of the verbal narration by Hazel, where and when it occurs, *Saga* works against the transparency of the medium that is often associated with the space opera and science fantasy, and thereby establishes its

cognitive estrangement.

While Alana appears as a masked actress on Open Circuit to earn money for her family, she is reprimanded for addressing the audience and “punch[ing] a glory hole” through “the fourth wall” (Vol.4 p. 15). Alana, however, is no Spider Jerusalem, and this remains an isolated incident in *Saga*. The series itself rarely resorts to giving voice to a full-on attack on the conventions of mediation. It rather employs subtle metafictional and metanarratorial devices throughout its narrative, as we have seen for its presentation of the printed paperback romance *A Night Time Smoke*, that allow its narrative to retain an immersive quality. *Saga* is one of the comics that provides an excellent counterexample to the notion that metafiction disrupts and denaturalises the reading process (for another example, see Kukkonen 2011). Instead, *Saga*'s metafictional moments, tying in with the materiality of the comic book, the mise-en-abyme of characters reading, and playfully omniscient meta-narration, articulate the immersive reading experience in the sense that they make distinct its elements and features to the reader without, as it were, breaking the illusion.

Through these metafictional and metanarrative moments, *Saga* carefully evokes and recreates in the comics form a mode of reading that is held to be typical of the written, literary narrative. Maryanne Wolf, in her treatment of the history and science of reading (2008), speaks of processes of “deep-reading” in literary narrative, where readers are immersed in the subject matter but, through the particular use of language in a literary context (with its self-reflexive and slightly defamiliarizing aspects), also come to a certain degree of awareness of the constructedness of the linguistic, literary artefact. *Saga* arguably re-mediate these features of “deep-reading” for the comics form, and thereby creates its anachronistic feel not only through the introduction of the paperback romance but also through the mode of reading which emerges from it. The paperback romance belongs to the realm of mass culture and popular expressions of culture just as much as the comic book and advanced television formats imagined through Open Circuit. The features of “deep reading”, on the

other hand, are more obviously connected to literary narrative, such as Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, or Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in Wolf's account. Vaughn and Staples, however, choose to relate deep reading to the form of the printed, fictional text in its low culture guise. Thereby, *Saga* endorses the mediation of the novel as the basis of such complex modes of reading, rather than make it dependent on the high-culture context of literary discourse.

Saga's strategy of cognitive estrangement therefore entails a re-mediation of reading the novel through the medium-specific means of expression in comics and graphic novels. The re-mediation I speak of here is different from the remediation processes in the classical study by Bolter and Grusin (1999) in that we do not have a new medium that uses devices from an older medium to *find* its form. By the time the series had begun its run, comics have been around for more than a century and graphic novels have since developed a broad array of narrative expression. *Saga's* remediation thus follows not the logic of the historical development of media changes but rather sculpts its own remediation as cognitive estrangement of the media ecology at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Will we be alright in the future? Will we be able to relate to the world and its mediation in meaningful ways? Will the cultural skills that we have enable us to use the cultural technologies at hand? These are worries in a world where the acceleration of media change seems to outstrip the development of human capacity. When changes in our mediated environment move too fast for our cultural skills of reading words, images and their sequence to keep up with them, such cultural anxieties come to the fore in literature, film and graphic novels. My focus on mediation as the basis of cognitive estrangement might at first glance chance pace from cybernetics, global and cosmic disasters as thematised in more conventional science fiction, but the concern about humans and their environment connects them.

The link is perhaps most obvious through notions of distributed cognition (see Clark 1998) and posthuman perspectives in the humanities that tend to stress the degree to which the human individual is interconnected with its environment (see for example Hayles 1999). In the textual examples discussed by Hayles and others, this connection can take the shape of cybernetic enhancements or the shape of nature that becomes uncontrollable and alien, in both cases, the human has been displaced from the centre of perspective, and the relationship between the human and its natural, cultural and mediated environments turns into a problem. The literary form which these posthuman thought experiments take is often science fiction with its cognitive estrangements. Many comics in the French tradition of *Métal Hurlant* and also some of the classics of Japanese manga, such as *Ghost in the Shell*, would foreground the more technical aspects of the cybernetic and the degree to which it enhances and invades the human body in the interface with the environment. The science fiction strands of EC comics would concern itself with the worrying underside of the technological progress in twentieth century that might open the door to alien elements when humanity still lacks the wherewithal to deal with these threats. In each of these cases, the development of the human capacities and the development of the environment within which we live seem out of step. The issue of mediation can take the shape of the interface between man and machine, characters perceiving (or failing to perceive) meaningful affordances in nature, or, indeed, a media ecology which accelerates the current state of affairs.

It is often said that science fiction is more eloquent about the time in which it was written than about the time in which it is set. This adage is certainly true for both *Transmetropolitan* and *Saga* with respect to the ways in which they reflect on the changing media environment of their time and its relationship to readers' cultural skills in navigating this environment. *Transmetropolitan*, written in the 1990s, concerns itself with the perceived dominance of television, its plethora of channels in the age of satellites and cable, and the ever-increasing rhythms of editing. *Saga*, written in the

2010s, arguably reflects on the progress of digitisation which has rendered the long read of the printed book and the related mode of “deep reading” into an extra-ordinary occurrence. In both cases, the comic series gives narrative shape to what Alvin Toffler called “Future Shock” in 1970. According to Toffler, “today, the whole world is a fast-breaking story” (1970, 14). Social and cultural parameters of the world are progressively accelerated in the “super-industrial” world, leading to shorter news and product cycles, the phenomenon of “liquid society” (as mentioned in the section on *Transmetropolitan*) and new media forms that seem to emerge more quickly than the development of cultural skills to master them have time to mature. *Transmetropolitan* and *Saga* both negotiate these changes. Both series suggest not keeping track with the media changes that they represent in their futuristic fictional world (and which their readers experience – somewhat differently – in their own lifeworld) but rather to look back to the affordances of older media as a means of resistance and mastery within this world.

Transmetropolitan works towards tearing off the veneer of civilisation and defying the logic of its dominant, visual mediation by referring back to the earlier mode of the type-written word. In *Saga*, on the other hand, we have an attempt to find the right kind of veneer and mastery of mediation by re-mediating and re-creating the mode of “deep reading” through metafictional moments in the graphic narrative. The two series, however, take significantly different forms that allows us to locate *Transmetropolitan* and *Saga* at separate ends of the science fiction spectrum.

Transmetropolitan, with its anger and drug-induced search for the truth in a mediated environment that is invasive and threatening, can be placed at the cyberpunk end of the spectrum of science fiction. *Saga*, on the other hand, with its readiness to embrace fictionality and strategies of metafictional articulation, relates itself more to the notion of the space opera, even though it adds the significant dimension of foregrounding the process of reception itself.

In both *Transmetropolitan* and *Saga*, the human is placed back at the centre of the environment and

its connections with this environment are revisited through cognitive estrangement in mediation. Nevertheless, these cognitive estrangements in the graphic novel also link with today's debates around the posthuman and the Anthropocene (two related but not synonymous concepts), as thematised for example in Richard McGuire's *Here* (2014) or Chris Ware's *Last Saturday* (2014-2015), which problematize the place of the human programmatically. Tensions between speculation and reality can be traced from *Watchmen* to *Transmetropolitan* and *Saga*, and further into these more recent graphic novels, underlining the central position of the science-fiction genre in the graphic novel and its relevance beyond the familiar tropes of space travel and alien encounters.

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