

The Michelist Revolution: Technocracy, the Cultural Front, and the Futurian Movement

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IN *The Futurians* (1977), Damon Knight recounts an intriguing historical convergence:

The Futurians decided to investigate Technocracy, then a fashionable utopian movement: it advocated the management of the economy along engineering lines, the substitution of labor credits for currency, etc... Wollheim, Michel, Lowndes and Cohen took the Technocracy study course and met the Technocrats' guru, Howard Scott, a large, domineering man whom Lowndes described as having all of the John W. Campbell's least admirable qualities... this phase did not last long, a year later the Futurians were calling Scott a crackpot. (47-48)

The original contribution this article brings to the growing critical conversation on pulp-era SF studies is an archival dissection of the Futurians, their literary legacy as an outgrowth of the Depression-era Popular Front, and their tangled relationship with one of the era's most prominent cultural formations, the Technocracy Movement. This research uncovers the direct, ambivalent engagement of one particularly representative Futurian, John B. Michel, with the Technocracy Movement, and the underlying implications this archival research entails for our understanding of interwar SF history and culture.

The Futurian group is an obligatory touchstone in most discussions of science-fiction literary history. With thirty years of hindsight, in *The Futurians* Knight became the group's chief chronicler, registering the seismic commercial impact the Futurian Science Literary Society had on SF history and fandom: "out of this little group came ten novelists, a publisher, two literary agents, four anthologists, and five editors (with some overlapping of roles)" (vii). Knight renders in this memoir an acerbic group portrait of the diverse troupe of characters this exclusive fan movement consisted of; Knight also hints at the larger literary and cultural milieu out of which the group emerged. Despite its eventual widespread influence, Knight concludes "the Futurian pattern of mutual help and criticism was part of a counterculture, opposed to the dominant culture of professional science fiction writers centering around John Campbell" (84). In his own memoir *The Way the Future Was* (1978), Frederik Pohl likewise recalls the subcultural Futurian disputes as the *de rigueur* attitude for pulp-era fan culture, and driven in large part by the fragile, easily bruised egos of the testosterone-laden post-adolescents that made up the group, and their tireless spoiling for fighting the good fight. Pohl declares, "No CIA or KGB ever wrestled so valiantly for the soul of an emerging nation as New Fandom and the Futurians did for science fiction" (Pohl 74). Ironically, Knight suggests that the short-lived and highly controversial Futurian ideology might have ultimately triumphed in their bitter rivalry with New Fandom (or the Queens Science Fiction League), given the formative roles ex-Futurians played in founding the Milford Conferences, the Science Fiction Writers Association, and the midcentury science-fiction publishing industry in general.¹



Aside from its impact on the publishing industry, the Futurian controversy, in its telling illustration of the nature and scope of the genre, also has more recently become a locus for a host of debates swirling around SF studies. In an article for *Science Fiction Studies*, Milner and Savage limn the Blochian utopian longing that underlay the Futurian fictionists and their image of themselves as a revolutionary cadre of Young Turks obsessed with politicizing technoculture. In *Astounding Wonder* (2012), Cheng similarly refers to the committed advocacy for the unrealized progressive potential of science and technology that typified Futurian writing, yet contends that the Futurians failed to create a space for science-fiction fandom in which amateur rocket clubs and science enthusiasts could co-exist with a coherent political-ethical ideology (238-39). In a discussion of the aborted Marxism of the group, Burling similarly argues that Futurians were ideologically incoherent and soon obsolete: “by the time the youthful Futurians began to produce something approaching Left-sf, however, the contentious but still relatively heady days of the 1930s political experimentation had given way to the fearful realities of the atomic boom, growing uneasiness with rampant consumerism, and the political repercussions of the hardline anticommunist milieu of the 1950s HUAC and McCarthy period” (Burling 242).

Acknowledging this incoherence, in the following discussion this article offers an archival analysis of the Futurian controversy, especially through its proponent of John B. Michel and through the Futurian legacy disseminated in the social science fiction of Asimov’s first Foundation series. This article stresses that the group displays a consistent commitment to a cultural critique of technocracy. Despite the complexity of the Popular Front and its byzantine cultural politics, it was no secret to the participants in the pulp-era science-fiction community that the Futurian stance closely resembled the grand technocratic rhetoric espoused by the cult-figure Howard Scott who held that unique to the modernizing interwar years was an economic-cultural state of affairs in which “this generation of Americans has the technology, the materials, and the machinery [to achieve] a new civilization” (Scott 10).

During the economic collapse of the early 1930s, what the popular press called a “technocraze” reached an acme of activism in which radical technologically-minded leftists agitated for total governmental overhaul. In the early 1920s, Howard Scott as head of the Technical Alliance had affiliations with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in forwarding research studies and projects. Following the stock market crash, Scott’s theorizing was no longer “consigned to Greenwich Village coffeehouses” (Akin 49) and began to assume mainstream legitimacy among political and academic circles. At Columbia University, Scott joined the engineering professor Walter Rautenstrauch to form the Committee on Technocracy in January of 1932, before this committee precipitously disbanded in 1933. Rautenstrauch helped to lend Scott the authority of mainstream legitimacy, even though the two soon wrangled over irresolvable intellectual differences. Briefly, though, the Committee could agree to target the capitalist price system as the chief contributing factor for the egregious inefficiency and tail-spinning debt of the Depression era. The Committee on Technocracy argued that best business practices might be rational and profit-maximizing for the high-powered Wall Street broker, but for the entire spectrum of society such unregulated capitalism exacerbated the division of labor and hijacked the potential abundance that optimized industry could provide. The Technocrats’ strongest selling point during the throes of the Great Depression may have been the rapid rise of unemployment and inflation as well as the slashing

of wages and a dismal Gross Domestic Product. Such plummeting economic indicators stood in stark contrast to the acceleration of seemingly miraculous new technology based on Fordist mass-production principles. The populist side to this phenomenon that the Committee inspired eventually called for messianic engineers to retake control of the world-system. This championing of the heroic technocrat contributed to the Chicago-based Technocratic Party, which was socialist and anti-capitalist to the point of urging a general strike that would spark a revolution.

Some of the chief tenets attributed to a highly influential pulp-era science-fiction group known as “the Futurians” closely couple the group not only with this Technocracy Movement but with the larger 1930s social bloc cultural historians label the Popular Front, including labor advocacy, anti-Fascist rhetoric, and militant support of New Deal programs. Roger Luckhurst cogently posits that “Campbell and the Futurians regarded SF within very different political paradigms offered by, respectively, the Technocracy Movement and the Popular Front” (Luckhurst 68). This aligning of the Futurians with the Popular Front seems appropriate as one common origin story of the group underscores John Michel and Frederik Pohl’s association with the Young Communist League. While by no means exceptional for the time, this card-carrying membership has often been overlooked given, perhaps, strident anti-communist rhetoric active both then and in successive decades. Knight quotes Donald Wollheim to affirm the radical progressive credentials that covertly underlie the Futurian championing of technology: “we were Stalinists disguised as technocrats” (Knight 66). Indeed, in his expanding of the Popular Front social Movement into “the Cultural Front” or a politically diverse mosaic of cultural projects and affiliations, Michael Denning identifies the Futurians as ethnic, working-class contributors to the growing body of American proletarian literature (Denning 225).

John B. Michel is a marginal and perhaps justly neglected figure in SF literature, but nonetheless highly illuminating as a catalyst for this important group in his crucial role as a writer, editor, fan, and club organizer credited often at the time with galvanizing the ideological backbone of the Futurians. Yet scant biographical or critical data is available on Michel who does not even warrant a mention in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Given his participation as member of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association in the early 1940s, the *Fancyclopedia 3* does in fact have a thumbnail biography [here](#) and a brief entry on “Michelism” [here](#). Michel’s bibliography has indeed been indexed and put online by the Internet Science Fiction Database [here](#). There is also an extensive listing of all his myriad fanzine contributions at WikiZine [here](#). From tracking down the primary materials referenced in these sources, along with other meager scraps of reminiscences and testimony, a hazy portrait of this prototypical Futurian emerges. Michel was by all accounts a politically-oriented contrarian but still capable of nuanced rational debate, a hot-headed firebrand too crippled by a stammer to give his most famous speech, a passionate critic from his pre-teen years on, a maladjusted, sickly charmer, a gifted, energetic, but ultimately unambitious science-fiction fanatic who often published under a pseudonym, possibly out of embarrassment. Michel personally impressed and befriended the likes of Donald Wollheim, Isaac Asimov, and Frederik Pohl, and for a short time became romantically entangled with Judith Merril, introducing her to the Futurians.

Today, though, Michel is remembered mostly, if at all, as a name-checked Futurian indistinguishable from that faintly scandalous association with the Young Communists and later the CPUSA, even though he was later expelled from the party

in 1949 for absenteeism. Beyond this informal link to the Cultural Front and the widespread radical agitation of the interwar era, Michel is now at best a trivial historical footnote. Though vigorously active in the 1940s, he is not an especially towering figure in the science-fiction pantheon, especially given that while many of his compatriots went on to long and storied careers, this cantankerous partisan either compulsorily disappeared or voluntarily retired from much of the science-fiction community, spending his later years scribing children's books, erotic novels, and the occasional science-fiction story, before dying middle-aged in car accident in 1969. However, the term "Michelism" — as the Futurian ideology came to be called at the time — gained currency precisely because of Michel's pivotal role as an articulate and active spokesman for the loose-knit group. This paper discusses original research on the Futurians conducted in the Eaton Collection at UCR, especially in the prozine, fanzine, and the semi-prozine archives. The rich materials housed in these archives help to shed light on a sense of the vanishing ideological context of pulp science fiction and the evolving political-cultural outlooks and attitudes of major writers such as Isaac Asimov, Frederik Pohl, James Blish, or Cyril Kornbluth. And an understanding of Michelism offers a tantalizing glimpse into the radically politicized and polarized culture of New York science-fiction community in the 1940s, and its wide-ranging impact on an American technoculture slowly coming into its modern fruition.

"Mutation or Die!": The Futurian Controversy and the Technocratic Imperative

A surviving manifesto of the Futurians is the [speech](#) delivered by Donald A. Wollheim on behalf of the diffident John Michel in Philadelphia at the Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention in October 1937. In this fiery tirade, Michel demands science fiction "smash the status quo" and advocates a "Utopian" or "idealistic" vision that would "seek the advancement of civilization along strictly scientific and humanistic lines." To avoid extinction, science fiction, Michel declares, has to mutate and selectively adapt to "the machine that will shatter forever the reactionary assault on civilization [that] is already in motion." Michel's intertwining of sociobiological and technocratic rhetoric literalizes the radically transformative Futurian response to the accelerated changes of their technological environment. Viewing the SF literary space as a training ground for the future engineers and technocrats, Michel contends that the fictional explorations of the universe, which science-fiction pulp magazines purveyed in large volume, constituted the utopian fulfillment of an evolutionary destiny: "it is our job to work and plan and prepare, to teach and expound for the coming of that day when the human race shall stand erect as should a man and gaze on the stark, naked cosmos with firm eyes."

As we shall see, Michel both became obsessed with and also openly distanced himself from any direct connection with the Technocracy Movement (and a facile cultural link between pulp science fiction and Technocracy too often strains credibility [Westfahl 70]). Nonetheless, as a testament to the anxiety over radical politics that such rhetoric might seem to invoke, the Futurians were famously barred from the inaugural World Science Fiction Convention of 1939 held in New York City. While not conservatively Technocratic, the democratized technoculture that Michel and Futurians espoused developed out of the world-changing political and economic factory system institutionalized by Henry Ford and scientifically quantified by Frederick Winslow Taylor. Fordism and Taylorism introduced optimizing economies of scale into the global marketplace such that industry experienced a rapidly accelerated degree of productivity, speed, standardization,

novelty, and affordability in the early twentieth century. As Michel was keenly aware, the increasingly conservative Technocracy Movement saw all the potentially utopian benefits and none of the tragic flaws of the Fordist system. Similarly, Martha Banta has more recently argued that assembly-line factories of mass production led not only to the manufacturing of an increasingly automated society but also the draconian social engineering of human bodies into this brutalizing technological matrix.

In the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*, Frank R. Paul's iconic cover art illustrates the pitfalls and critical blindness of such Technocratic fantasies through its rhapsodic rendering of a scene from E.E. Doc Smith's *Skylark of Space*. As a precocious teenage boy, Michel defends Smith from criticism in an early published letter discussed below. The cover showcases what critics often label the first space opera in an arresting painting colored in vibrant yellows and reds that seems to mystify or escape the oppressions and brutalities of industrial technology. In the foreground, Dick Seaton tests the capabilities of his "whatsitron" that channels the energy of his newly discovered element "X," which Paul signifies through an airbrushed green glow hovering around a firmly gripped throttle. Seaton in a leather helmet, red jumpsuit, and black boots has strapped himself into a jetpack-like rig that Smith describes as a "heavy harness, which carried numerous handles, switches, boxes, and other pieces of apparatus," all of which Paul intricately delineates. The scene brings to life the moment of lift-off when "there was a creak of straining leather and he shot into the air for a couple hundred feet, where he stopped remained motionless for several seconds" (Smith 34). Floating aloft and smiling, Seaton waves to his wife, Dorothy, who in a flapper bob and pantsuit waves back with her handkerchief. Surrounded by the leafy manor of his millionaire backer Martin Crane, Seaton as heroic engineer and radically independent technocrat defies gravity in style. The cover neatly symbolizes the delight and wonder technological advances in the Fordist period may grant, while seemingly ignoring the manifold adverse consequences of such innovations.

When Michel was only 14, he won a plot contest in *Wonder Stories Quarterly*. Raymond Z. Gallun wrote a story developing Michel's idea, which appeared in summer 1932 as "The Menace from Mercury." The gimmicky space Western is most notable perhaps for its blatant escapism and lack of overt ideological positioning. The story concerns, after all, Clive Torrance, an engineer from the imperialistic inner planets of our solar system who vacations from his duties as taskmaster on the iridium mines of Neptune's satellite colony to investigate a queer event on Mercury reminiscent of the Aurora Borealis, with the Martian Pakoh as plucky sidekick. Torrance and Pakoh are trapped in a force shield automated by a cone-like atomic machine that Torrance heroically rams to destroy to break through the shield. Likewise, Torrance is equally heroically rescued last minute by Pakoh who throws his Martian toy, a "Jo-Jo," like a life-saver in the ensuing wreckage and flame. The teenage Michel's precocious letters to *Amazing Stories* in the period are likewise ingenious but devoid of his soon-to-be trademark political stance. In July 1932 of *Amazing Stories*, Michel offers what the editor T. O'Connor Sloane labels "Another Scolding Letter," and, in a fashion that recalls his later sociologically oriented Futurian attitudes, assaults a fundamental pillar of the Gernsbackian credo, viz., stressing the plausible science in the fiction. Michel calls "more 'impossible stories' and less of hard fact," lamenting that "gone are the days of fanciful imaginative fantasies," while still celebrating the work of David Keller, Edmond Hamilton, John W. Campbell, and Peter Schuyler Miller for "keeping up the standard" (168). Not

allergic to fiery dialectical thinking in a letter to the March 1933 issue of *Amazing Stories*, Michel would about-face, railing against the “tantrum and irrelevant ravings” and “terrible trash” of “vampires and werewolves and Romanian castles, and ghosts groaning on the floor every half inch or so” to preserve the honor of science fiction written on behalf of “scientific fraternity” and for “materialistically minded public” (1147). Michel’s burgeoning politics only begin to become evident in his concluding statement to “the Rob-Smith Controversy” in the January 1933 issue of *Amazing Stories*. Michel defends E.E. “Doc” Smith’s use of vulgar slang in his space opera against a scandalized reader, not on “nationalist grounds” but in the interest of accurately representing “not only the masses, but also the higher ups, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy” (957) all of whom resort to hardy, now-dated expressions like “dough,” “hootch,” and “talkie” to express themselves. Having already integrated himself into SF fandom, Michel uses the letter-to-the-editor in the September 1933 issue of *Amazing Stories* to plug “The Cosmos Science Club of America,” which “promote(s) friendship and closer ties” and “advance(s) science and science fiction” (476).

By the time John Michel returns to visibility in the prozines, the young man in his early twenties has already matured into a full-fledged Futurian. Under the nom-de-plume of Hugh Raymond (partly swiped from his original collaborator, Raymond Z. Gallun), Michel published “Year of Uniting,” a particularly representative anti-utopian novelette and political allegory, in the Winter 1941-42 issue of *Science-Fiction Quarterly*. In the “Prime Base” section of the Spring 1942 issue of *Science-Fiction Quarterly*, editor Robert A. W. Lowndes quotes a response to the story from Bill Stoyr who admires its attack on “fetish-like belief in science” (146) but shows distaste for the plausibility of a democratic world federation. Lowndes qualifies that the scientific tyranny depicted in the story was decidedly “unscientific” and highlights the traces of a pro-science underpinning to the story. In the summer 1942 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*, John Michel weighs in himself with a revealing apologia for the extrapolative thought experiment behind “Year of Uniting.” Michel explains, “when I first conceived of the story, I had the Technocrats in mind as the prototypes of the ‘science government.’” This cultural-historical key to reading this story is even more revealing if we remember that despite their early roots in Veblen’s theories, the Technocrats had long been associated with conservative political interests. In the 1932 Republican National Convention, for instance, Howard Scott warmed the crowd for the incumbent Great Engineer, Herbert Hoover, with soaring technocratic rhetoric to complement the fanfare of trumpets, balloons, flag-waving, and a big cinema screen.³

In this letter, Michel attest to his deep familiarity with the Technocracy Movement and acerbically alludes to Scott’s outing as crank in his incoherent radio [address](#) given on January 13th, 1933 in the Hotel Pierre in New York City. Michel avows: “I have long since been acquainted with this movement, its theory and ideology, and think I know as much about it as anyone, excluding the High Priest of Spark Gap, Howard Scott himself”(145). Exposing the incompleteness of popular reductive claims that all pulp-era science fiction was uniformly politically naïve or reactionary, Michel goes on to identify the “essentially fascistic character” of Technocracy incarnate. Although perhaps attaining the veneer of a “decent standard of living,” such a tyranny inevitably becomes “anti-democratic (Howard Scott has referred publicly to democracy in unprintable terms)” and could not possibly “cater to the desires of any but a tiny minority class of ‘experts’ who have appointed themselves arbiters of American destinies.” With World War II raging in

Europe, Michel clings to his vision of a World Federation despite Stoyr's reservations since "we are fighting, at the present time, a worldwide war of universal democracy and the right of the majority to decide how they shall live." Showing allegiance to his own peculiar left-wing and progressive co-optation of ideas from the Technocracy Movement, Michel restates the Futurian mission statement and concludes his remarks with an optimistic faith in the benign power of science and technology in the coming postwar years: "And with that victory will come the truly scientific future—the only future worthy of the human race."

The story itself of "Year of Uniting" begins with a typically grandiose boldfaced hook characteristic of pulp magazines: "After ten years of scientific government, strictly planned economy and abundance for all, John Clayhorn realized that the price America paid for security was— freedom!" (*Science Fiction Quarterly* 124). The story takes place in the American future of 1952, where an ostensible utopia of ample leisure and total security has been achieved by a revolution initiated by the Science Government. The wrenching of the Factory System away from capitalist hoarding has created a post-scarcity abundance of optimal efficiency free from starvation, labor, or sickness. New York City has been rebuilt into featureless utilitarian towers and streets paved with grey plastic. This latter detail seems to invoke specifically the fleet of grey cars and the grey automobiles with which Technocracy Inc. became notoriously reminiscent of European trappings of militarized, authoritarian power. Tobacco and alcohol has been banned by an American Gestapo who enforce a police state through spy-ray surveillance, reconditioning in psych hospitals, or summary executions John Clayhorn's friend Gregory Sanders complains about such a brutal rule by a technocratic elite: "I dunno. It looked like a wonderful set-up. Science cleaning up the corners and all that. I wonder what really happened" (126). With unmistakable echoes of Huxley's *Brave New World*, Clayhorn concurs, "The Science Government kept everyone happy, reflected Clayhorn bitterly. If they became unhappy, oblivion intervened" (130).

Clayhorn and Sanders have joined an underground international resistance known as Friends of Freedom that communicates through covert micro-wave radio broadcasts. Clayhorn's dissident radio is discovered and the rebel is interrogated and condemned to the execution chamber. When all seems lost, the female Captain Marsh rescues Clayhorn from his cell and ferries him away in a submarine. It turns out that World War II ended once the Science Government takes over the U.S and a newly emergent World Federation "realiz[ed] the economic potentialities of a hostile Western Hemisphere, the people of the rest of the world overthrew their old governments and established true democracy throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia" (133). The World Federation is a truly democratic, anti-racist, anti-sexist utopia that distinguishes itself from "pseudo-scientific sect of technology-worshippers" by adhering to a socialist-utilitarian vision that enshrines a "towering [social] structure of immense strength wherein the individual worked for the happiness of all" (135). This World Federation is the polar opposite of the Science Government and its "tyrannical, degenerate and disintegrating state founded primarily upon the principle of the old order and doomed inevitably to destruction" (133-34). The story ends in the Citadel of the Washington D.C. Control Center, alarms blaring, thousands of World Federation planes careening toward the continent. With her dying gasps, Maria, Clayhorn's wife, mowed down by machine guns, then grabs an official radio mike and endeavors to instigate a mass rebellion: "People of America! she crie[s]"

and sway[s], "Take the state into your own hands! This is the day of your freedom, the year of uniting" (142).

Utopia

As a cautionary tale, "Year of Uniting" taps into a conventional narrative of the Technocracy Movement and its betrayal of utopian promise. The Technocracy Movement is often framed as a gradual compromise, a swing on the political-cultural spectrum from an anti-capitalist stance toward a pro-corporate one. For in its heyday, the Technocracy Movement obtained some mainstream credibility. The December 26, 1932 issue of *Time*, for instance, contained a profile of Howard Scott and the New York-based Technocracy, Incorporated. The *Time* profile is equal parts anxiety over Scott's statistics concerning the number of people being automated into unemployment, awe-struck wonder over Scott's vision of socially planned abundance, and sneering dismissal of his lack of expertise, his fraudulent personal narrative, and his crackpot projects like his idea to replace money with energy tokens called "Ergs." In a partial defense of the much-maligned SF literature of the period, Andrew Ross connects the Technocracy Movement to Paul's pulp illustrations, the 1939 New York World's Fair, and Streamline Moderne aesthetics: "the dreamy rhetoric of technological futurism has been taken over lock, stock, and barrel by corporate advertisers and managers in the business of selling tomorrow's streamlined worlds" (Ross 128). Ross compellingly sees the Technocracy Movement as subsumed under the imperatives of the business and corporate world and as a failure of a technologically utopian vision and socialist desire. For the movement can be traced back in part to *The Engineers and the Price System* in which Thorstein Veblen calls for a "practical soviet of technicians," the social planning and systematic coordination of "industrial experts, skilled technologists, who may be called 'production engineers', for want of a better term" (Veblen 52). Veblen's vision of mobilizing an elite cadre of highly trained and specialized engineers into a Platonic ideal of philosopher-kings revolved around the belief that if resources could be allocated efficiently at the industrial level, then duplication and wasted efforts could be eliminated, full employment obtained, consumer needs met, and strikes and deadlocks between unions and management made a thing of the benighted past (Akin 11, 24).

"Awake! The Future is Upon Us!": The Futurian Controversy and Michel's Short Fiction

In the Futurian organ and fanzine *The Science-Fiction Fan* (U.S.A.), Jack Rubinson describes Futurians concisely: "a number of American fans have joined up with Technocrat Societies, which hold the view that the ultimate salvation of society is in the hands of technicians and scientists." More exhaustively, the July 1940 issue of the same fanzine published Robert A. W. Lowndes' "The Michelist Movement in American Fandom," which recaps the history of the Futurian controversy from the October 1937 Philadelphia Convention to the World Science Fiction Convention in 1939. In one camp of SF fandom and readership were the Michelists, including Donald Wollheim, Robert Lowndes, John Michel, Frederik Pohl, Jack Rubinson, Cyril Kornbluth, Jack Gillespie, and a teenage Isaac Asimov. The Michelists participated in the Science Fiction League and the International Science Association, and voiced their mission statement in the resolution at the Philadelphia Convention that received a near two-thirds majority with 20 assenting and 12 dissenting votes. Lowndes summarizes the resolution or what he describes as the "Michelist revolution": "the resolution called for fans to recognize realities outside of fandom

and to place themselves on record in favor of human progress via science and opposing barbarism and war and all forces leading thereto." The Futurians, though, display an ideological diversity characteristic of the Popular Front; unlike Michel and Wollheim, Lowndes, for instance, was hesitant to advocate socialism since "[socialism] could fright many fans who might have been on the verge of joining the movement openly."⁴ Indeed, the Futurians were in fact derided as "the Communist Party's Agitators in Science Fiction" by members of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) including William Sykora, Sam Moskowitz, James Taurasi, Jack Speer, John Baltadonis, J. Chapman Miske, Fred Shoyer, T. Bruce Yerke and Daniel McPhail. Sam Moskowitz would write about the left-leaning tendencies of the Futurians as an excusable Depression-era flirtation with Communism in *The Immortal Storm* (1954).⁵ Despite the Futurian support for the war and especially the cultural-front politics of the New Deal, Moskowitz, Sykora, and the rank and file of the so-called New Fans often lobbed the nationalist grenade that the Futurians were unpatriotic dissidents, especially as the United States edged closer to entering the war. In the April 22, 1939 of *Science-Fiction Newsletter*, for example, the fan response "We Learn with Joy" contends that "that New Fandom members all over the world support the present government of the USA (the New Deal, in other words, & President Roosevelt etc)...with so many Hitlerites and demagogues within our borders & in high places, it is quite cheering to learn that worldwide Newfandomites support US democracy. Bravo Messers Sykora, Taurasi, & Moskowitz!" (1).

Lowndes defended the Michelists against their critics for their staunch refusal to celebrate escapism, searchingly asking "And where was the golden age? Outside science fiction magazines was despair, poverty, and in Europe a new dark age" (8). Other Futurian fans were more vociferous. In the December 1939 issue of *Science-Fiction Fan*, for instance, C.S. Youd, the alias used by the British writer John Christopher, dismisses E.E. "Doc" Smith's space operas as "a lot of balderdash," and parodies critics who were only satisfied when their science fiction can claim the dubious honor of stating "here are none of your dirty Reds, your Wobblies."⁶ By contrast, Youd argues "it is this refusal to consider the class struggle that stamps magazine SF with the other bunk." For his part, Lowndes is content to chart the origins of Michelist movement from the International Science Association's impatience with the myopically technoscientific "Gernsback delusion" in *Amazing Stories* and its continued distaste for John W. Campbell's lack of "sociological" content in *Astounding*.

Another example of class-inflected, war-driven debate in the pages of *The Science-Fiction Fan* occurs in the editorial "Vagabondia, STF" by "the Vagrant." The editorial laments the technocratic affiliations of the Third Reich: "But now...how much has science, prostituted by madman, discovered in the way of mass desolation?" (The Vagrant 3). The editorial goes on to upbraid the corrosive conditions of capitalism in which "war, famine, economic crisis are all man-made, man-controlled and predictable" (The Vagrant 4). The editorial claims to epitomize science-fiction fan consensus that tends to "place our finger upon the real culprit: an economic system which makes such a society as the present one (and all that goes with its war, economic insecurity for millions, famine, scientific prostitution etc) inevitable" (The Vagrant 18).

Another characteristic exchange of Futurian rhetoric and its wide-ranging reach on the genre at the time can be sampled in the April, May, and July 1938 issues of the Los Angeles-based fanzine *Imagination*. In the May 1938 issue of *Imagination*,

Donald Wollheim published “In Defense of Michelism,” which argued that the world is beset by a crisis of unemployment, intolerance, and impending war and that science fiction must engage these problems head on. Wollheim defends his Futurian stance in response to “A Reply to Michelism” in the April 1938 issue of the same fanzine that argued “world-saving” rhetoric was hyperbolic and inappropriate given that putatively (i.e., extrapolated from the Philadelphia Convention attendance) there were only three hundred active fans in Futurian clubs and groups, and one-third of those were “distinctly anti-socialist, anti-communist, and very patriotic.” Wollheim contends, though, that there might only be relatively few active members of Futurian groups, but countless millions would be affected by the impending disaster, and the science-fiction community must do their “tiniest bit toward helping along that sole aim of saving our world.” Aside from the conservative editorial stance of *Imagination* that rebuked John Michel’s militancy and reasserted the zine’s desire not be dragged into “bloody politics” (*Imagination* July 1938, 14), it is in part Wollheim’s appeal to international solidarity flying in the face of hegemonic discourses of race and nation that provoked the unabated ire often directed at the Futurians. Thus a reactionary-racist outburst of one critic in the same issue rants, “world fellowship: bleach me, Wollheim, all Negroes and the other colored races till they be as white as I.” The anti-racist character of Futurian fiction is a consistent through-line of their work; in the August 1942 issue of *Future Combined with Science Fiction*, for instance, Futurian Norman L. Knight has a heroic black character Humberling recognized for his heritage and its “unique contribution to Earth culture” (Knight 12).

This early-40s period also marked Michel’s most prolific output of short-stories. While none of his other work was so straightforwardly engaged with Technocratic cultural politics as “The Year of Uniting,” all his other stories consistently had blatant politicized overtones. The Fall 1942 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*, for instance, contains “Glory Road” by Michel’s pseudonym Hugh Raymond that imagines a postwar period where American capitalism will be peacefully toppled by techno-scientific rationalism. The slightly retro characters of the story seem to leap out of a William Dean Howells novel, or, more appropriately, the bygone Edisonade template from turn of the century: Silas Gregson is the cigar-chomping, fat-cat president of Transcorp; Professor Amos Hawks, the heroic lone tinkerer and independent scientist; and Clem Witherspoon, the cracker-barrel engineering genius. Professor Hawks refuses to sell his invention, a catalyst made of “sodium salicylates” for the first space-faring rocket, to the unscrupulous Gregson. In the first scene, Professor Hawks speaks righteous fury to the robber-baron Gregson: “Your corporation is the last stranglehold on world or progress and I have no intention whatsoever of allowing you to increase the power of that hold and line your pockets” (Raymond 129). The thought experiment of the science-fictional premise is a fairly nuanced and perspicacious one for a nation gripped by a cataclysmic world war: what if the Allies succeed in fighting for “democracy” only to have that progressive victory immediately superseded by “traitors to science” (Raymond 135) or the techno-scientific power consolidation of monopoly capitalism?

The twist of the story is that Clem Witherspoon turns out to be an undercover Martian university professor and — at the rocket-fuel test before government experts in Death Valley, California — reveals that he supplied the catalyst as a reward to Earth since this postwar environment vouchsafed “a civilization [that] has at last completely emerged from barbarism and freed itself

from the clutches of savage rule and privileged self-interest” (Raymond 136). With the retrograde self-interest of Gregson thwarted, Earth can now join Mars, Venus, Pluto, and the moons of Jupiter in an Interplanetary Scientific Confederation dedicated to “aiding people less further along the road to power and happiness” via space travel, the titular “road to glory” (Raymond 138).

Another typically Futurian story by Michel in this period can be found in the Summer 1941 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* in “Path of Empire.” Much more caustically satirical than “Glory Road,” the story involves Carvell Swane, a walrus-mustachioed and monocled privateer on a ship called *Firefly*, and a member of the Space Guard or Terrestrial Interplanetary that viciously exploits the solar system. Swane is swinishly pleasure-seeking and embodies the future micro-history by which space exploration was followed by capitalist consolidation, and explorers and traders were rapidly replaced by industrialists and developers, and “forward went the tide of empire on waves of gold, whisky, drugs, and adventuring” (Raymond 139). On the lookout for loot, Swane travels to Karduk, the capital of Mars, in search of a religious cult leader known as the Guardian, but encounters only fellow Space Guard Strohan Vars instead. Vars believes in legal protection for an exploited underclass of Martian natives working as miners and on the verge of open rebellion given that “The policy of laissez-faire the government is pursuing in regard the policy of Terrestrial is sure to end in disaster” (Raymond 142). Drunkenly entering a Martian Temple, Strohan Vars confronts Swane about the ravages of a new imperialism: “thirty years ago we came and conquered this planet. Conquered it utterly and ruthlessly” (145). Strohan then confesses to be the Guardian and that “the guardian is an arm of the government— an instrument of its power, no real god” (Raymond 146). The mordant gallows humor of the ending concludes with Strohan ritually sacrificing Swan to a huge Jovian swamp slug.

Michel’s other stories testify to the supple versatility of the Futurian platform that resisted any doctrinaire formula and adapted itself to a wide variety of fictional circumstances and agendas. “Washington Slept Here” (*Future*, August 1942) is a science-fictional mystery and political allegory about the diminishing living conditions offered by invidious real-estate companies literalized by a mutated Venus fly-trap that takes its victims in a building where General Washington supposedly once slept alongside the continental troops before the battle of Long Island. When a character encounters the commemorating plaque, he moans: “Too bad you read that, you’ll probably raise the rent now” (Raymond 71). And the hapless protagonist Gus Heller wonders, “who wouldn’t scam out of old dumps like the ones we’ve got?” (Raymond 70). In “Hell in the Village” (*Science Fiction Quarterly*, Winter 1942), the FBI tangles with occultists and a nefarious Nazi scientist in the colorfully portrayed liberal excesses of Greenwich Village: “The Bohemian inhabitants are still there and salons flourish as much as they did in the days when Mabel Dodge Luhan had her dames hangdog on the lower Fifth Avenue near Washington Square, and the Omnipotent Zoom or Boom or something invented the postwar admonition, ‘do as thou wilt,’ and topped off the advice with the biggest series of orgies this side of Sodom and Gomorrah” (Raymond 131).

In “Earth Does Not Reply” (*Science Fiction Quarterly*, Summer 1941), Martian astronomers, Ljorna and Quej, fight the collectivist political imperatives of their hive-mind species— especially “the immolation act” that requires ritual suicide — and escape their dying world to make it to Earth only to land in the remotest deserts of central Australia and falsely conclude Earth is a desolate wasteland. In “The Powerful Ones” (*Science Fiction Quarterly*, October 1942), three ethnically

diverse amateur alchemists invoke the genuine artifact in a fringe science experiment gone wrong and an immortal skeleton quickly dispatches the triumvirate. In “Clagett’s Folly” (*Future*, December 1942), a millionaire sponsors a prize for a first havoc-wreaking moon-landing and ends up angering the native hyper-advanced lunar aliens who proceed to bomb Earth’s major cities to post-apocalyptic smithereens. In the seemingly anti-war “The Inheritors” (*Future Fantasy and Science Fiction*, October 1942), with a byline attributed to John Michel and Robert Lowndes, the inhabitants of Earth go underground and build subterranean fortresses to escape the surface world poisoned by gas warfare. The fortresses are occupied by “roiling machines” (Michel and Lowndes 58) of coils, dynamos, and gears that make food, create heaters, purify water, and filter air. The militarized inhabitants soon discover, though, that their political enemies have been wiped out by a slowly evolving coming race in its all-devouring animal stage.

Social Science Fiction: Isaac Asimov’s Foundation Series and the Futurian Legacy

Even though Futurian rhetoric climaxed with Michel’s peak output of stories at the apex of World War II, wartime paper and labor shortages depressed the pulp-magazine market and substantially curbed the exponential pre-war growth of the Futurians. Still, one legacy survived the gradually dimming limelight of the movement; Isaac Asimov never hid his life-long loyalty to the Futurians, though he was only an active member of the Manhattan-based “Futurian Science Literary Society” starting in September 1938 for about a year. In the first part of his autobiography *Memory Yet Green* (1979), Asimov declares the group was “some of the most intelligent (if sometimes erratic) people I have ever known” (Asimov 211), highlighting that the Futurians wanted “to use science fiction as a way of fighting fascism, and it was almost impossible to this in those days without making use of Marxian rhetoric, so that these activist were accused of being Communists by the opposition” (Asimov 211). Even though Asimov reaffirms that, among these impoverished science-fiction readers and fans, “solidarity was solidarity, and it was my intention to stay with the Futurians,” Asimov later describes his shamefaced attendance of the first World Science Fiction Conference, despite the fact that the Futurians were bounced from the conference by “the burly Sam Moskowitz...and a number of his cohorts” (Asimov 244). At the time, the ambitious Asimov avoided antagonizing the dictatorial fiat of John W. Campbell who held the Futurians in contempt given, as Asimov recalls, Campbell was “(my diary says) ‘a hidebound conservative’” (Asimov 212).

In “Asimov’s Guide to Asimov,” Asimov backpedals about his own political affiliations to a certain degree, claiming “I have never read anything by Marx...consequently, I don’t really know anything about Marx and I therefore fail to see how anything I write can represent a Marxian view of history, either clear or distorted” (Asimov 203). Asimov is directly responding here to Charles Elkins’s unflattering essay, extending comments made by Donald Wollheim in *The Universe Makers*, that the Foundation series represents a “vulgar” historical materialist vision of inexorable historical change. While perhaps bristling Asimov by holding him up to a benchmark of critical explicitness and rigor the pulp writer never had any intention to meet, Elkins is certainly correct to claim, “if Asimov was at all aware of the pervading political and intellectual milieu of the New Deal decade, he would have been exposed to the clamorous controversies between the Left and Right as well between the Left of the time” (Elkins 103). Regardless of Asimov’s Marxian

credentials, the “Foundation” series remains relevant today since it serves as a complex science-fictional allegory for cultural-political dissent, unlike what Asimov categorizes as “adventure” and “gadget” science fiction; this Hugo-winning foundational series of classic space opera holds up as a sterling example what the author—in a strange, syncretic mixture of the Campbellian and the Futurian stances— calls “social science fiction...the only branch of science fiction that is sociologically significant” (Asimov 14).

In an essay comparing the New-Wave space operas of M. John Harrison’s *Centauri Device* to Samuel R. Delany’s *Nova*, Rjurik Davidson uses Asimov’s original “Foundation” trilogy as foil, especially because of its ideological underpinnings, amounting to the conclusion that “liberal capitalism, rationally complemented by the rule of a technological elite, is intrinsically and unquestioningly better than feudalism” (Davidson 272). Yet one should not conflate Asimov’s Futurian faith in technologically progressive future so easily with a technocratic liberal capitalism. To do so would ignore the great lengths Asimov goes to debunk evil robots as much as evil empires, or what he dismissed as “The Frankenstein Myth” that governed popular superstitions about science and technology. It is easy to forgive the logical leap that construes Asimov as an unabashed technocrat and true believer in the free flow of techno-capital. Indeed, the persistent analogy in the Foundation series of the collapse of the Galactic Empire to Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or the corollary analogy of the monastery-led Medieval period to the First Foundation-led interregnum, would seem to imply a dubious Enlightenment teleology with modernity as the pinnacle of restored Western civilization.

Yet close attention to the series contradicts an overly reductive version of this reading of Asimov fiction which, canonically speaking, is perhaps the most significant Futurian legacy. To begin with, in the Foundation series, the telos of the progressive future history is emphatically not the Galactic Empire. In the “Prologue” to *Second Foundation* (1953), for instance, Asimov describes the Galactic Empire with a neutral, decidedly not jingoistic hand: “[The Empire] included all the planets of the Galaxy in a centralized rule, sometimes tyrannical, sometimes benevolent, always orderly” (Asimov vii). Asimov does not celebrate liberal capitalism as anything but a weigh-station to future progress; the utopian vision of the Foundation series is consistently portrayed not as liberal capitalism, but a post-scarcity technocracy. Published by *Astounding* in 1944 but collected in *Foundation* (1951), “The Traders” involves the first steps of Hari Seldon’s plan to rebuild galactic civilization from its devastated ashes. The First Foundation scientists establish trade relations with a powerful planetary kingdom, Askone, through offering their services of advanced scientific knowledge in the form of a post-scarcity transmuter that miraculously converts metals into gold. The transmuter uses atomic technology, further cementing the link between the U.S. and the First Foundation. In order to rescue Eskel Gorov, a fellow trader and undercover Foundation agent for the slowly encroaching First Foundation, Limmar Ponyets offers a single transmuter to an ambitious local politician Pherl (Asimov 136). Ponyets knows that the politician might use the transmuter in the short term for the gold, but when the machine breaks down, so will the technophobic taboos that prevent the First Foundations from expanding its spheres of influence. Although the reader is supposed to side with Ponyets as an agent of the First Foundation, Asimov is keen to point out the exploitative underbelly at the core of this one-way capitalist exchange based on “intelligent self-interest” (Asimov 136). Ponyets extorts enormous quantities of tin from Askone’s mining estates not only by offering his

entire cargo of atomics, but also by threatening Pherl with the recorded footage of the transmuter, against Askone's strictures and punishable by death. When an unconvinced Eskel upbraids Ponyet's unscrupulous sales techniques, Ponyet responds with post-catastrophe proverb, "never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what is right!" (Asimov 120). Far from a liberal-capitalist utopian ideal, this catchphrase is hard-boiled and cynical, and no ringing endorsement of the temporary stopgap on civilizational decline that is the first Foundation.

In contrast to Futurian anti-utopias like Michel's "Year of Uniting," the Foundation series repeatedly embraces a Futurian-affiliated rhetoric of the marshaling of class power by a progressive, if woefully compromised, technocratic elite. In June 1942, Asimov published in *Astounding* the second "Foundation" story, "The Bridle and Saddle," collected in the *Foundation* fix-up as "The Mayors." In the story, following the collapse of the Galactic Empire, the Mayor of Terminus City, Salvor Hardin, defends the vestiges of technological advancement preserved by the Encyclopedist Actionists, a kind of practical soviet of technicians, against the neighboring empires of the Four Kingdoms, especially the imperial aggression of King Leopold I of Anacreon. To do so, Salvor invokes the popular religion of "scientism" promoted by the Encyclopedists in rhetoric heavily indebted to the pro-union, class-based, and Cultural-Front rhetoric of the Futurians. Salvo explains his "interdict," a counterstroke against an attack on Terminus City by the Anacreon emperor, as a labor protest: "I might explain that every priest on Anacreon is going on strike, unless I countermand the order" (Asimov 107). The popular solidarity and uprising of the Actionists neutralizes the imperial ambitions of Leopold I, galvanizing the workers into a shut-down of the communications systems, public transportation, hospitals, water, and energy infrastructure (Asimov 109). In the fantastic extrapolations of his far-future space-opera, the concealed ace in Asimov's sleeve that eventually makes good on an initial stage in Hari Seldon's grand plan is rather more grounded in the science-fictional cultural formations and debates swirling around the Cultural Front: namely, a general strike.

Contending that Asimov masters the cliffhanger trick in the pulp-serialization toolkit by structuring his fiction like an interlocking chain of sequential problems followed by their deferred ingenious solutions, James Gunn argues that the puzzlebox introduced in "The Merchant Princes" (published as "The Wedge" in *Astounding*, October 1944) that Asimov leaves unsolved until the end of the first Foundation trilogy is that of "economic deprivation" (Gunn 49). Having outsmarted the military might of imperial warlords and religious potentates, the Foundation threatens to rip apart as a result of the vast disparities the capitalist traders impose on the galaxy. "The Merchant Princes" involves the trader Hober Mallow who instigates a mass revolt by an unruly mob of the disenfranchised poor that neutralize the imminent threat posed by the barbaric rulers on the planet Korel. Even as this immediate danger dissipates, Hober mulls over an unpromising future for the Foundation traders locked into a vastly unequal, interdependent system with the Korellians. At the end of the first Foundation novel, Hober can only resign himself to the creation of a pernicious but stable "plutocracy" (Asimov 200), nurturing a wan hope for another the enlightened eradication of capitalism as just another superstitious vestige of the pre-utopian past. Hober perversely longs for "crises in the time to come when money power has become as dead a force as religion is now" (Asimov 200).

In the next story, "The Mule," first serialized as the cover story in the November 1945 issue of *Astounding* and later assembled in the fix-up *Foundation*

and Empire, Asimov, encouraged by his publisher Campbell, perhaps shows some disenchantment with the heady rhetoric of the Futurians, but nonetheless dons the mantle of his technocratic ethos conspicuously. Asimov adapts the Futurian cultural politics to take into account a rhetorical complicity with the thriving war machine of both Nazi Germany and the Allied Powers. In the beginning of the short story, the heroine, Bayta Darrell, recaps the far-future space-opera premise of a Hari Seldon's plan to preserve and compress progressive social energies through the building of a Foundation in the interregnum following the collapse of the galactic Empire. This counterfactual future history of preserving a restorative technoculture through the apocalyptic anarchy of global war clearly resonates with Asimov's contemporary world. Yet Bayta explains the disintegration of the newly established Foundation into the competing sovereignties of warlords and traders does not derive from an instrumentalizing domination of technology run amok. Rather, the social principles of the Foundation, and its imaginary futurological science of "psychohistory," serves the technocratic and Taylorist ideal of retaking the means of production, controlling modern industrial technology as a means to a progressive end, and as a result optimizing efficiency and waste management: "Inertia! Our ruling class knows one law; no change. Despotism! They know one rule; force. Maldistribution! They know one desire; to hold what is theirs" (Asimov 90). Bayta and her husband Toran are partisans of an underground resistance to the despotic Foundation and as such represent the oppositional interests of the "external proletariat" (Asimov 105). William Timmins, who filled in for Hubert Rogers during World War II, compensates for Asimov's minimalist attention to scenic description with a cover that appears to be loosely inspired by the story. The cover features a secret hangar in which a couple in spacesuits run from a V-2 rocket to the opening in a cave wall that occupies most of the center of the cover and at the bottom of which the shadow of a lone figure looms forebodingly.

This figure might be the Mule, a Campbellian mutant telepath named for his sterility and doggedness. The Mule is such a statistical improbability that he foils Hari Seldon's predictive science of psychohistory. The Mule easily manipulates the crumbling Foundation to become a ruthless dictator, and the Russian-born Jewish-American Asimov clearly intended contemporary resonances with Adolf Hitler to be unmistakable. Timmins's cover underscores escape from a shadowy cave of illusion, past the menacing gatekeeper of the Mule, and into a dazzlingly bright future. Illustrators of Asimov's fiction often have recourse to picturing puny humans dwarfed by some sublime or terrifying vista such as Hubert Rogers's cover to "Nightfall" in the September 1941 issue of *Astounding* or Michael Whelan's "Trantorian Dream," which graced the cover of *Foundation's Edge* (1983). In "The Mule," though, Asimov has modified his splendidly complex sense of wonder, and his radical technocratic cultural politics, to countenance the actuality of a war dominated by technological horrors like the atom bomb and gas chambers; Seldon's plan simply fails to anticipate the singular genetic anomaly of the freakish Mule or his charismatic powers of leadership, which are telepathic and, like Curt Siodmak's bestseller *Donovan's Brain* (1942), seem to rely on an implicit analogy with the invisible phenomena of radio waves. Likewise, although the location of the Second Foundation is kept a carefully guarded secret, the First Foundation topples under the Mule's trickster powers of mass deception and mind-control. In other words, while not blind to the fascist overtones of technocracy's engineer mythos and its covert Ubermensch rhetoric, Asimov also urges a progressive breakthrough, an evolutionary leap that would generate a mutant adaptation to the harsh realities of

the cosmos that has fundamental parallels with John Michel's Futurian oratory, advocacy, and fiction. The stubborn refusal of this guileless optimism to acknowledge the unavoidable pitfalls of technocratic capitalism soon becomes a primary bone of contention that generations of later SF writers and artists found most problematic in Asimov's influential work, not to mention those of his largely forgotten Futurian compatriots.

Notes

1. Only Harry Warner voices a lone dissenting view on the signal importance of the Futurians in SF history and culture, contending "the role of Futurians in general fandom has been somewhat overplayed." Warner, *All Our Yesterdays*, 218.
2. Despite the revelation in a December 1932 *New York Herald Tribune* exposé that Scott lied about his training and formal engineering education in Europe (a fact Veblen during his association with Scott in the Technical Alliance always doubted) and the deliberate effort made by Rautenstrauch and Columbia University to dissociate themselves from the floundering movement, Howard Scott went on to head Technocracy Inc., in contradistinction to the Continental Committee on Technocracy (CCT) led by Harold Loeb. Segal contends that Scott and Loeb diverged importantly along class lines and their respective commitment to broader technologically utopian reforms: "The CCT was led by well-to-do cosmopolitans seeking not only economic reforms but also social, political, and cultural ones; Technocracy Inc. was led by lower-class technicians with exclusively economic objectives." See Segal, *Technological Utopianism in American Culture*, 123.
3. This information comes from John Dos Passos's description of the Republican National Convention for *The New Republic* in June of 1932. Dos Passos finds perverse glee in noting that the projector failed to materialize the Great Engineer on the cinema screens due to technical difficulties. Much like Michel, Dos Passos had an ambivalent relationship to the Technocracy Movement, as evidenced by the pivotal role technocracy plays in *The Big Money* (1933). For a brief discussion of Dos Passos at the convention, see Carr, *Dos Passos: A Life*, 302.
4. Although Michael Denning makes only the passing reference to the Futurians mentioned above, to grasp how the group was not ideologically monolithic, despite aspersions cast by New Fandom, it is useful to keep in mind Denning's notion of a patriotic, anti-fascist *cultural front* forged beyond the rigid confines of the CPUSA, admittedly at the height of its cultural power in the interwar years. Denning explains his notion of a cultural front succinctly: "Any history of the Popular Front must give the Communist Party its due — it was without a doubt the most influential left organization of the period and its members were central activists in a range of formations and institutions — while recognizing that the popular front was more of a historical bloc, in Gramsci's sense, than a party, a broad and tenuous alliance of fractions and subaltern classes" (Denning 6).
5. A hysterical anti-communist, Moskowitz congratulates himself on his proto-McCarthyite credentials and his pivotal role in early SF fandom as "the world's premier eighteen year-old red-baiter," while also grudgingly admitting that the Futurian "observations as to the condition of the world in 1937-8 were highly accurate". Moskowitz, *The Immortal Storm*, 167-68.
6. Suggestive of the transatlantic cross-pollination of the pulp-era science fiction and fan community is Mike Rosenblum's testimony that on September 18th, 1938 Donald Wollheim swapped out the unmemorable term "The Michelists" and renamed the

group the term the stuck, the Futurian Science Literary Society, in direct response to Rosenblum's British fanzine *Futurian War Digest*. See Rob Hansen, *Then: A History of U.K. Science-Fiction Fandom* accessible online [here](#).

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