

FLATLINE CONSTRUCTS (EXCERPT)

Mark submitted his Philosophy and Literature PhD thesis to the University of Warwick in 1999. Entitled Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction, the thesis explores a radical plane of immanence—the Gothic flatline—on which the anthropocentric tendency to give agency to inanimate objects is subverted, so that everything—animate or inanimate—is seen as ‘dead’. Rather than privileging human agency over the agency of objects, Mark argues for their radical immanence within the emerging technosphere: the world of cybernetics. He asks, “what if we are as ‘dead’ as the machines”?

Never one to alienate his audience with an isolated academic discourse, Mark illustrates his theory with a

constellation of popular sci-fi movies and books. Bursting with influence from his time with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, here Mark is nevertheless distinguishing himself from their anonymised hivemind, writing in a style that is very much his own—the Gothic Spinozist mode, first articulated in his PhD thesis, that will become familiar to readers of his later work. Mark defines Capitalist Realism, in part, as our ‘inertial, undead’ ideological default. In *Ghosts of My Life* he remembers darkside *Jungle*’s active identification with the ‘inorganic circuitry’ beneath the living tissue of the *Terminator*. In *The Weird and the Eerie* he expands his Gothic Materialism of the cybernetic, initially separated from the supernatural, to include the Fortean atmosphere of the English pastoral that so interested him in his later years, positioning neolithic stone circles alongside android anatomies.

In his eulogy to Mark, Robin Mackay wondered “what remains after the physical body’s gone, when the singularity of a life can no longer rely on that frail support and needs other carriers”.¹ With this in mind, what role does this Gothic Materialism play within the Fisher-Function? Rather than becoming immediately facetious, can Mark’s real death recalibrate the stakes of his conceptual deaths? Can death in this mode be collectively thought in a way that prepares us for—and helps us to move beyond—our present reality, not only of

1 Robin Mackay, ‘Mark Fisher Memorial’ [speech] (Urbanomic, 2017).

personal grief but of capitalist apocalypticism?

Matt Colquhoun