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Becoming the Multi-spy: A Technological Reading of Anna Kavan's 'Starting a Career'

Adam Maric-Cleaver

Bizarrely described on the dustjacket of *Machines in the Head* as a 'futuristic spy thriller', there is little 'futuristic' or 'thrilling' in the narrative of Anna Kavan's short story 'Starting a Career'.¹ The plot is following: Lord Legion, a reactionary politician, invites the narrator, employed by The President, a progressive opponent of Lord Legion, to his courthouse. Despite believing that they are about to be persecuted for some unknown misdeed, the narrator attends and is shocked to be offered the job of passing information presumably about The President to Lord Legion. As they leave the courthouse, our narrator thrills at the thought of their future career as, to use their words, a 'multi-spy':

Touching the envelope in my pocket, I thought of tremendous balances accumulating, safe and secret, in various banks around the world, ready to confer on me the supreme power only money can give. Why shouldn't I work for the secret services of two, three, four, five, six – any number of countries? I felt drunk, exhilarated, carried away, imagining meetings with foreign intelligence chiefs in secret cells under the Alps or the Andes, on satellites in space or bathyspheres on the ocean floor, with tough, beautiful girls who seduced men with their burning languorous eyes or vaporized them with electronic blasters.²

One striking thing about the passage is its exaltation in the fantasy of a James Bondesque spy lifestyle and the parallel between the narrator's movement and their money. Both move with a kind of instantaneous speed across the globe. The narrator's money, like the narrator, is secret and exists in multiple places at once. Both participate in an international network into which two kinds of information (the information the narrator provides to the secret services and the numerical information of money) flow freely between countries. This networked movement brings to the surface some provocative questions: what would it mean for a person to move as money does? Why is the fantasy of movement instantaneous? Is the informatic flow freedom from or a product of capitalism and its various exploitations?

¹ Anna Kavan, *Machines in the Head: Selected Short Writing* (London: Peter Owen, 2019), dust jacket.

² *Machines in the Head*, p. 195.

I believe that we can begin to answer these questions pertaining to Kavan's story by homing in on the fleeting reference to 'satellites in space' from the above passage. Whilst it is hard to precisely date 'Starting a Career', Kavan's biographer, David Collard, suggests that it is a late work 'possibly contemporaneous with *Ice*'³, which would suggest it was written sometime in the 1960s.⁴ This makes the reference to satellites all the more interesting. Throughout the late 1950s and most of the 1960s, satellite technology has entered the public consciousness in a far broader way, particularly with launching Sputnik and the subsequent space race. Perhaps most relevant here would be the launching of the first communications satellites in the early 1960s, particularly Telstar 1 and Intelsat 1, which facilitated instant global communications, and the first global television simulcast, *Our World*, by the end of the decade. At the same time, Marshall McLuhan had declared the world a 'Global Village' in his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, linked together by the high speed of electronic media, whilst UNESCO arranged in 1965 for a conference on the possible uses of communications satellites.⁵ In her book *Cultures in Orbit*, Lisa Parks makes the case that globalisation, in fact, begins with the launching of communications satellites, specifically 'satellite television has been used to construct and affirm 'global village' discourses that envision the world as a unified, organically evolving cultural, economic, political system'.⁶ This increasingly networked world is present in Kavan's fleeting reference to satellites and performed in the informational flow of the narrator and their money.

The quoted passage can thus be understood as describing a transmission or transmissions, both in the literal etymological sense (a 'sending across' the global) and in a technological sense. This article argues that by reading 'Starting a Career' and paying attention to the technological and the transmitted discourse, we can begin to perceive the story's engagement with and critique of what Mark Wigley has

³ The reference to satellites may have 1960s satellite technology in mind, but the word satellite obviously pre-dates Sputnik. Victoria Walker suggests an affinity between Kavan's later work *Ice* (1967) and 'Starting a Career' which would place it in the 1960s, but we simply cannot know for sure. However, even if 'Starting a Career' was not written precisely contemporaneously with the development of communications satellites, I hope this article shows that reading her through such discourse leads us to some revealing conclusions about the political implications of her work.

⁴ David Collard, 'Crystal clear: Anna Kavan's icy world view', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6071 (2019) <<https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA631895604&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=0307661X&p=AONE&sw=w&enforceAuth=true&linkSource=delayedAuthFullText&userGroupName=univea>> [accessed 8 December 2021].

⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962). UNESCO, *Communication in the Space Age: The Use of Satellites by the Mass Media* (The Hague: UNESCO, 1968).

⁶ Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 2.

called the ‘Network fever’ of the 1960s.⁷ Furthermore, the article also argues that Kavan’s story reveals how the promises of distributed power within networked communications and capital can obscure centralised vertical power structures.

The first section focuses on how the technological and network discourse of the 1960s seems to manifest in the disembodied flight of Kavan’s narrator. The second section contrasts this discourse with the embodied and untransmittable Lord Legion. He is a figure whose power is concealed from the narrator behind the seeming freedom gained by becoming an informatic flow or signal. The third section centres on the function of envelopes in the story as the meeting point of information, capital, and bodies.

Network Fever, Satellites, and the Flight of the Narrator

In his article ‘Network Fever’, Mark Wigley writes that contemporary discourse on networks situated around ‘openness, democracy, free exchange, and speed’ originated in the 1960s.⁸ He refers to the phenomenon as ‘network fever’, which closely associates egalitarianism with distributed (or seemingly distributed) networks. Wigley observes, ‘in celebrating this new kind of territory, we recast questions of individual identity in terms of unimaginable connectivity, ignoring the equally dramatic rise of new forms of inaccessibility to stage an institutionalized simulation of euphoria’.⁹ Whilst for Wigley network fever is not necessarily technological in nature, one of its key proponents or propagators, Marshall McLuhan, was deeply associated with communications technologies in the 1960s, and still is today. McLuhan may be network fever’s most ecstatic and utopian advocate, writing that ‘in an electric structure there are, so far as the time and space of this planet are concerned, no margins. There can, therefore, be dialogue only among centers and among equals’.¹⁰ This quote from *Understanding Media* (1964) is typical of what Wigley describes as a belief in the horizontal and decentralised networks as equalising and democratising.¹¹ It is also important for our purposes to see that for McLuhan, instantaneous global communication would

⁷ Mark Wigley, ‘Network Fever’, *Grey Room*, 4 (Summer 2001), 82–123.

⁸ Wigley, p. 83.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (California: Gingko Press, 2013 [1964]), p. 191.

¹¹ *Understanding Media*.

entirely alter power structures themselves: ‘restraints on electric absolutist power can be achieved, not by the separation of powers, but by a pluralism of centers’.¹²

How does network fever surface in ‘Starting a Career’, before we come to how it is critiqued? Even from the summary, two kinds of top-down power are seemingly overcome by becoming networked. The first is employment or, rather, the precarious position of employment itself. Throughout the story, we are always made aware that starting a career and ending a career are contingent on the whims of Lord Legion. As our narrator summarises at the story’s end that ‘instead of ruining my career, [the interview] had opened the way to one far more thrilling and lucrative’.¹³ Yet, this thrilling and lucrative career is not one in service to Lord Legion, but, instead, a career in which the narrator produces and enters a commercial network of information, something we are told has ‘market value’.¹⁴ Rather than a precariously placed employee, they become a self-employed merchant of information. Or, at least, this is how the narrator sees it.

The second power is perhaps a little more nebulous: nationality and, as we will see later, space more generally. The movement of the narrator is from a position of ‘loyalty’ to a nation’s ruler - The President - towards the pluralism of centres in the global market/village. Lord Legion, another sovereign power connected to a particular (unnamed) country, suggests to the narrator that ‘all information should be made available for the maximum benefit of the state’. Yet the story’s conclusion is, in essence, information is made available for all states, to ‘two, three, four, five, six- any number of countries’ and they refer to the ‘international sub-world’ which they have entered.¹⁵ This is, in fact, the same movement or flight as the movement away from employment, the horizontal network replacing a vertical organisation. The narrator affects globalisation or, if I can adopt a term of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, a ‘deterritorialization’, a line of flight away from bounded spaces of land or territory.¹⁶ This deterritorialization is, in fact, heavily tied to the technology itself. As Kevin Robins writes, ‘an absolutely central [] theme in most accounts of

¹² *Understanding Media*, p.191.

¹³ *Machines in the Head*, p. 194.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1972), p. 139.

contemporary technological transformation concerns the elimination of distance'.¹⁷ With this in mind, one can notice that in the passage quoted at the beginning of this article (the section I will refer to as the 'flight of the narrator'), all the points of reference are either beyond nations (the bottom of the sea, a satellite in space) or at the meeting point of multiple nations (The Alps and The Andes). The narrator is transmitted across and outside of the boundaries of nations.

So, like McLuhan, the narrator seems to view networks in the network fever sense - as facilitating freedom and flattening the hierarchy. But is 'Starting a Career's' network necessarily technological? This late passage requires attention with reference to satellites because the sense of instantaneous movement of the narrator and their money ties into certain discourses around satellites in the 1960s, which are in turn tied to network fever. For instance, Arthur C. Clarke's address to the 1965 UNESCO *Communication in the Space Age* conference conceived the connections of satellites in a similar manner to the narrator's flight:

The communications network, of which satellites will be nodal points, will enable the consciousness of our grandchildren to flicker like lightning back and forth across the face of this planet.¹⁸

Notice here not only the similarities to the flight of the narrator, the instantaneous electrical movement and the network of 'nodal points' but also the emphasis on a disembodied consciousness. This is a very particular conception of satellite transmission, which Clarke shares with McLuhan, who suggested in 1964 that, with 'satellite broadcasting', humanity was 'now approaching an extension of consciousness'.¹⁹ Satellite networks then not only restructure power and nations, as more broadly described by McLuhan, but also move us further outside of our own bodies. Accordingly, our narrator in 'Starting a Career' is never described physically, never gendered or sexed. By the end of the story, they wish to present a 'mediocre façade', which signifies their bodily appearance, whilst their inner, transmittable consciousness soars.²⁰ Their role as The President's party, in which they present this façade, is given in mechanical (as opposed to electronic) terms - 'an inconspicuous cog' in the 'Presidential machine'. On the other hand,

¹⁷ Kevin Robins, 'Against virtual community for a politics of distance', *Angelaki*, 4:2 (1999), 163-170 (p. 163).

¹⁸ Arthur C. Clarke, *Voices from the Sky* (London: SF Gateway, 1965), p. 138.

¹⁹ *Understanding Media*, p. 177.

²⁰ *Machines in the Head*, p. 196.

their identity as a multi-spy is defined by their ‘psychological skill’, their ability to shift their consciousness and ‘juggl[e] identities’, separating the façade of the body from the multiple and transmittable mind.²¹ Writing on cyberfeminism, Amanda Du Preez calls this the ‘disembodied fantasies’ of new technologies, where integration into the technological becomes a transcendence of ‘bodily realities’.²² Du Preez notes, ‘the proposition assumes that there is a state that can be aspired towards, where visceral functions and pains can be eliminated on the way towards incorporeal virtual consciousness’.²³ In McLuhan, Clarke, and Kavan’s narrator, network fever carries this cybernetic hope of bodiless freedom of consciousness in the 1960s network of communications satellites.

The suggestion of disembodiment in a vast distributed network as a freeing and equalising space outside of space brings to mind the contemporary network of the internet or The Cloud. This is not a coincidence, as Western discourses around satellite networks and The Cloud offer many parallels. Parks has pointed out that the 1960s discourse around satellites ‘reinforced a fantasy of global presence in which the world is figured as a realm of access and familiarity’ with ‘the Western individual smack at its center’, whilst Tung-Hui Hu has argued that, because The Cloud ‘deaden[s] our ability to see people as anything but users’ it ends up becoming ‘a neoliberal fantasy about user participation’.²⁴ Both, then, serve an imperialist and capitalist function, universalising the ‘Western individual’ or ‘user’ in a seemingly ubiquitous electronic network, the rhetoric of which emphasises global movement, access, and use (again, network fever). But what are the limitations of such a capitalist technological network? And how is the critique launched in ‘Starting a Career’? What is the narrator missing?

Lord Legion: The Case for Embodied Power

To answer these questions, it is, perhaps counterintuitively, necessary to move away from the narrator and examine the story’s other central character: Lord Legion. In contrast to our narrator, Legion is an

²¹ Ibid., p. 196.

²² Amanda Du Preez, *Gendered Bodies and New Technologies: Rethinking Embodiment in a Cyber-era* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p. 20.

²³ Du Preez, p. xvi.

²⁴ Parks, p. 26. Tung-Hui Hu, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), p. 143 and 145.

avatar of vertical power, a state figure presiding over others. At once antiquated and networked, he emits and receives transmissions (messengers, information) in a manner befitting the information age whilst maintaining an archaic aesthetic. His courthouse is furnished with ‘scrolled and gilded pieces of the Second Empire period’, whilst Legion’s heralds bear an ‘antique mumbo jumbo of drums, torches and tasselled trumpeters’.²⁵ We learn that ‘Lord Legion’s court was a survival from the remote past, an anachronism, a mystery’.²⁶ Yet when Lord Legion talks the narrator into becoming a double agent, he slips into a discourse of network fever, albeit with a sovereign bent: ‘I believe all information should be made available for the maximum benefit of the state’, positioning him as an Emersonian all-seeing eyeball in a sea of data.²⁷

Despite this somewhat networked aspect, Lord Legion is strictly bounded and embodied. Indeed, where our narrator skims the global with electronic speed, Legion avoids and rejects being transmitted. We are told he never appears on television and makes sure that no photographs of him exist.²⁸ On arrival at the courthouse, the narrator is given a telephone link to Lord Legion and is shocked that he actually takes the call: ‘Fancy him answering the phone himself, just like anyone else!’²⁹ Lord Legion is not transmitted within the network, it seems though he is connected to it, so much so that it is brought into question later whether it was, in fact, Lord Legion on the phone. The courthouse itself is a firm boundary, with machine-gun nests and a complex ritual of blindfolding, disorienting for those who enter.³⁰ Where the narrator is multiple and sprawling, Lord Legion is embodied both uniquely, looking ‘not at all like the President or any of the important people I’d met’, and boundedly, with ‘eyes set deep like recessed spotlights under the ridge of the brows’.³¹ He is, in turn, an extension of the courthouse, hence his spotlight eyes. The narrator encounters him at its centre, where Lord Legion begins ‘unwrapping himself’ from his snow-covered winter clothes, another layer, another set of boundaries to move through.³²

²⁵ *Machines in the Head*, p. 191.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193–4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 192.

And here, ultimately, we find what is hidden by network fever, both in and outside the story: a centralised power structure that exists outside the disembodied and post-national network. Even more precisely, we should say a capitalist structure. The narrator's career is, after all, predicated on Legion, who could just as easily destroy it. As observed earlier, employment is always haunted by the threat of unemployment or worse in 'Starting a Career', and Lord Legion's power is always emphasised. The narrator believes transmission in the global village brings economic freedom, but Kavan allows us to understand what such 'freedom' is conditioned on: the wealth and power of 'untransmitted' individuals. We might compare this critique to Raymond Williams's famous admonishment of McLuhan, in his 1974 book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, in which he writes: 'the physical fact of instant transmission, as a technical possibility, has been uncritically raised to a social fact, without any pause to notice that virtually all such transmission is at once selected and controlled by existing social authorities.'³³ This becomes particularly important when we consider that Legion represents not only the embodied employer/capitalist but also an aspect of state machinery and, as such, the owner of a particular (though unspecified) national territory. Earlier I mentioned Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization, which those thinkers observe as a key component of capitalism. But Deleuze and Guattari emphasise complete deterritorialization would destroy capitalism, and so it also constantly effects reterritorializations such as central banks, nationalism, fascism, signs.³⁴ Lord Legion and the courthouse, as we will see, might be seen as a reterritorialization of the power of the global village, the nodal point at which the flows of information the narrator images connecting at the end of the story actualise.

The narrator, as deterritorialized as they are disembodied in their post-national network fever, obliterates local or bounded space. To them, it seems 'right and appropriate that snow had hidden the familiar town, revealing another, mysterious, muffled, as different from the place I had always known as my present expanding ideas differed from the small preoccupations of boyhood and adolescence'.³⁵ These 'ideas', the potential of an economically independent future, are spatialised with the town, moving beyond this familiar town into a vast, post-national global village.

³³ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2003 [1974]) p. 131.

³⁴ *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 257.

³⁵ *Machines in the Head*, p. 195.

The link between this deterritorialization, the Lord Legion's fortified courthouse, and the functioning of networked capital should not be underestimated. Marxist theorist Franco Berardi points out that

'Financial capital is not interested in the territory [...] as it has no contact with extra bunker spaces. Financial profit is realized in the dimension of simultaneity and virtual exchange. The financial class dwells in militarily protected gate communities...'³⁶

Berardi does not think of these bunker spaces, linked together through electronic mediation (whether satellite or internet) as themselves territories, yet in 'Starting a Career' bunker spaces and gated military zones like the courthouse are centralised, reterritorialized, nodal points of the network. The places the narrator leaps to in their flight are all bunker spaces: bathyspheres, 'secret cells', even the satellites themselves. These render the 'extra bunker spaces' as non-places, deterritorialized zones of pure movement. This is the point at which the interests of capital and technology join. Hence the town onto which the narrator emerges is 'muffled' and effaced by their starting a career *and* instantaneous transmission. It is nothing compared to the projected, virtual, satellite space into which they imagine they have moved. Meanwhile, Lord Legion's impregnable and acutely defined boundary holds the actual power within and above the network.

The Envelope, Enveloping, and The Empire

At the start of this article, I noted that the transmitted movement of the narrator, with its disembodied simultaneity, seems to mimic the imagined movement of money into bank accounts around the world. This further link between capital and the global village becomes most explicit when looking at the story's treatment of envelopes. It begins with an envelope, a summon from Lord Legion, given to the narrator by a soldier who enters his room without knocking.³⁷ The story also ends with an envelope, this time containing payment for the information supplied by the narrator.³⁸ The envelope no longer contains a message, but money: the information it contains is beyond language, and is now a gesticulation of capital.

³⁶ Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London: Verso, 2016) p. 138.

³⁷ *Machines in the Head*, p. 189.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

It is noticeable, too, that information the narrator has to offer is never specified. It is not the information that is being bought in 'Starting a Career'; it is the envelope, the medium, the narrator, in spite of Lord Legion claiming it is the information that has 'market value'.³⁹

There is a conflation of the network of communications and the network of capital not only in their 'simultaneity and virtual exchange' (in the words of Berardi) but also in their medium or their existence as media.⁴⁰ Should we then, perhaps, bring in McLuhan's famous adage, 'the medium is the message'? A case can be made, but I would like to suggest another passage of McLuhan, who might offer us insight instead of a reflection for the first time. McLuhan writes:

'As work is replaced by the sheer movement of information, money as a store of work merges with the informational forms of credit and credit card. From coin to paper currency, and from currency to credit card there is a steady progression toward commercial exchange as the movement of information itself...'.⁴¹

This quote is particularly interesting here because not only does it describe the movement of money into the informatic flow, but that money 'as a store of work' merges with this flow. 'Starting a Career' is not only this meeting of money and information (or money as information) in the networked individual, but the work of the individual is in itself the movement of information, the movement, thus, of stores of work. The narrator's movement across the world, into satellites and to the bottom of the ocean, distributing information, is paralleled only by their rising wealth, their simultaneous (and instantaneous) accumulation of money as information, which is circulated through their own movement as information and so on. Deleuze writes on the shift from money as an object to money as information in his essay 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', situating it specifically between Michel Foucault's disciplinary societies and Deleuze's societies of control:

'...discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a standard set of currencies'.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., p. 194.

⁴⁰ Berardi, p. 138.

⁴¹ *Understanding Media*, p. 100.

⁴² Giles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', *October*, 59 (Winter 1992), p.3-7 (p. 5).

In this shift towards money as information, control is exercised through adjusted modulations, or in other words, through adjusting transmissions as flows.

To return briefly to cybertheory, Sarah Kember summarised it in her essay on cyberfeminism and biology as ‘the concept of life as information’.⁴³ That is to say, it is not that the narrator becomes a merchant of information (as they imagine) but rather another piece of information themselves. Their corporeal ‘mediocre façade’ becomes separated from the part of them which moves as money and information moves freely through electronic communications.

This conceptualisation is akin to what Jodi Dean calls ‘Communicative capitalism’, in which ‘capitalist productivity derives from its expropriation and exploitation of communicative processes.’⁴⁴ In other words, the emphasis moves from the production of commodities and workers to produce those commodities to the appropriation of relationalities, lines of communication. The ‘concept of life as information’ allows the narrator to operate as a relationality, a movement between nodal points. Communicative capitalism in ‘Starting a Career’ is the appropriation of envelopes or people as envelopes, the movement of information and money (as information), which forms the global village or network of capital between the bunker spaces.

Nevertheless, Kavan shows that this connected capitalist power, the enveloping (pronounced both *enveloping* and *enveloping*) of money and people, is not itself *formed* from these relations (the lines in the network), but that reterritorialized and embodied figures like Lord Legion possess the actual power. That Lord Legion is an anachronism only suggests that the form of power is older than the technological controls it uses. Parks is right to observe that, in the 1960s, by equating Western satellite broadcasts with modernity and universality, there is a kind of neo-colonialism present in the discourse of global villages.⁴⁵ Lord Legion not only has the aesthetics of colonial power, with his vast self-portraits and uniformed heralds: the network which provides his flows of information and money (the envelopes, literal and figurative, which move in and out of the courthouse) is itself a kind of colonial network.

⁴³ Sarah Kember, ‘Reinventing Cyberfeminism: Cyberfeminism and the New Biology,’ *Economy and Society* 31, 4 (2002), 626–641 (p. 630).

⁴⁴ Jodi Dean, ‘Communicative Capitalism and Class Struggle,’ *Spheres*, 1 (November 2014), p. 1–14 (p. 2).

⁴⁵ Parks, p. 29.

The link is perhaps most explicit when Kavan describes a corridor of the courthouse as ‘as wide as the Irrawaddy’, a river in what is now Myanmar.⁴⁶ Myanmar was formally British Burma, where Kavan lived with her first husband Donald Ferguson in the 1920s, a time which she detailed both in *Let Me Alone* (1930) and *Who Are You?* (1964).⁴⁷ Kate Houlden’s analysis of the latter notes that the ‘brain-fever-birds’ described in the novel evoke a feeling of locality (they are indigenous to the region) and yet are ‘oddly “globalised”’ in their description, their cries ‘transmitted to the other birds’ from ‘all distances and directions, from everywhere at once’.⁴⁸ A kind of inverse operation occurs in ‘Starting a Career’. Where the birds are local aspects of a colonised country plugged into a broader global network of empire, the river Irrawaddy is brought into the bunker space of a presumably Western country. The colonial aesthetics of Lord Legion extend to the courthouse being like the lands of the former colonies themselves, as though they had been brought back like one of the British Museum’s stolen relics. This is, of course, a kind of global village *par excellence*: the exotic made local, brought into the boundaries of the home, enveloped. It is not brought into the territory of the narrator, who has no territory, but into the home of the traditional colonialist power embodied in Lord Legion.

‘A Thrilling Enigma for Posterity’

In reading ‘Starting a Career’ as a networked and technological text, one concerned with the increasing connectivity of the world, we can better understand how the complexity and interconnectedness of a McLuhanesque world can obfuscate more conventional forms of power (capitalist exploitation and colonialism). Read this way, the text offers an insight into the dangers or pitfalls of network fever and the emergence of the global satellite networks.

As we have seen, the perspective that the instantaneous movement of information (and money) is equitable to power is a delusional one in ‘Starting a Career’, a by-product of network fever. The power lies with figures who can use communicative capitalism but are not transmitted or absorbed into the

⁴⁶ *Machines in the Head*, p. 191.

⁴⁷ *Machines in the Head*, p. 16. Anna Kavan, *Who Are You?* (London: Peter Owen, 1964). Anna Kavan, *Let Me Alone*, (London: Peter Owen, 1930).

⁴⁸ Kate Houlden, ‘Queering the World or Worlding the Queer? New Readings of Anna Kavan’s *Who Are You?*’, *Women: A Cultural Review* 28:4 (2017), 295–311, p. 307–8. *Who Are You?*, p. 1.

network, such as Lord Legion. Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker's book *The Exploit* begins with an email from Geert Lovink saying, 'Internet protocols are not ruling the world... In the end, George Bush is'.⁴⁹ We can detect a similar sentiment in Kavan's story, only regarding the instantaneous electronic environment of the global village. And it is not the borderless flows of information that rule the global village: in the end, it is Lord Legion.

⁴⁹ Andrew Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 1.

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