

“Can I use the toilet?”: Watching Steven Moffat’s *Doctor Who* (2010–2017) as Posthuman Television

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Abstract

Interpreting the modern television series Doctor Who as an extended metaphor of everyday posthuman life, this article explicates the postphenomenological qualities of the six series released during Steven Moffat’s tenure as showrunner. By explicating precisely how the show’s televisual format amplifies and intersects with its overtly technology-centred narrative content, I develop a posthumanistic conception of Doctor Who’s intra-active rhetorical strategies. This era of the show illustrates the vital role played by the cultural imaginaries of our contemporary lifeworlds upon the realisation of the posthuman future, by vicariously implicating viewers in its mundane discourse. Additionally, its narrative penchant for frequent timeline resets is symptomatic of the intra-active engagements formed between viewers and the technological apparatus of the series itself. By closely analysing a representative sample of episodes, I demonstrate that by watching Doctor Who, viewers are interpellated to recognise their agential capacity to inform our species’ posthuman potential.

Keywords: *Doctor Who; Postphenomenology; Everyday; Television*

Introduction

In order to accurately conceptualise cultural texts as posthuman art objects, it is essential to consider not only their narrative aspects, but also their rhetorical strategies. The BBC television programme *Doctor Who* is not simply posthuman because its plots involve speculative technologies and alien life, but rather, its televisual praxis is also posthuman, since the show’s rhetorical engagements challenge and exceed the rigid humanist dualism between text and viewer. Throughout Steven Moffat’s tenure as showrunner (2010–2017), *Doctor Who* encourages its viewers to recognise that their own everyday situation within a technologised lifeworld informs the frame of reference of the posthuman future. Rather than passive receptacles, this era of the show positions its viewers as externalised, yet fundamentally implicated, components of its narrative logic. As Francesca Ferrando states, although “the posthuman is not a synonym for SF or technology [...] such fields constantly inform each other” (Ferrando, 2015, 270–271). Hence, via their digital medium, speculative televisual and filmic texts have a propensity to foreground the close association between our species and technologies in the contemporary world. Importantly, since viewers engage with the Moffat era of *Doctor Who* discursively, the phenomenological relationship formed between themselves and the show is omnidirectional rather than one-sided. By studying a representative sample of episodes, this article develops a posthumanistic conception of the intra-active strategies which underpin this era of *Doctor Who*’s speculative rhetoric. By

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foregrounding the in-phenomenal aspects of the show, this article illustrates the vital role played by the cultural imaginaries of our contemporary lifeworlds on the realisation of posthuman futures.

As the close analysis of a cross-section of Moffat era episodes foregrounds, our daily lives are irrevocably posthuman, and likewise, our posthuman situation is already categorically everyday. Accordingly, in order to analyse the show within a posthuman framework, it is crucial to conceptualize the synergistic engagement between Moffat's *Doctor Who* and its viewers as an intra-active assemblage. Karen Barad emphasises that the "ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting 'components.'" (Barad, 2003, 815) throughout our everyday lifeworlds dictates that we are constantly participating in assemblages which transcend the conventional limits of corporeality. Accordingly, Barad argues that it is greatly reductive for a dichotomy between the human and nonhuman to "be hardwired into any theory that claims to take account of matter in the fullness of its historicity" (Barad, 2003, 827). Hence, the interrelatedness of networked phenomena must be acknowledged when we consider embodiment, given that intra-active assemblages are not distinct entities, but "in-phenomena" (Barad, 2003, 817) throughout the duration of their interaction. Crucially, our posthuman situation emerges from our most mundane everyday engagements. Furthermore, as Susan Kozel suggests, our contemporary species' rapport with technology is extensive enough that "the contours of our own extended bodies" can, in pragmatic terms, be "found in our technologies" (Kozel, 2007, 99). Therefore, from a posthumanist perspective, our bodies are not hermetically sealed vessels, but intra-active actants whose capabilities alter in relation to the objects we encounter. Hence, our intra-activity with technologies provokes a process of embodied outsourcing—of cognition, sensory inputs, memory, and so forth—which engages us cognitively with the technologies at hand. Patently, when we reconceptualise phenomenological experience as intra-active, humanistic theories of embodiment fail. As I proceed to propose, the Moffat era of *Doctor Who* neatly epitomises the intra-active relationship between televisual media and their viewers that is characteristic of everyday posthuman life. The interrelation of our mundane present with the potentialities of the posthuman future is patent within the show via its depiction of the TARDIS.

The TARDIS

At the outset of Moffat's tenure as showrunner, a young Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) responds with muted incredulity to the Eleventh Doctor (Matt Smith) when he reveals that the object which has crash-landed in her back garden is a time machine. As time machines are a futuristic technology which is already ubiquitous in the Western cultural imaginary, Amy immediately understands the novel principle behind the advanced Gallifreyan technology, and needs only to be convinced that the Doctor's TARDIS is in fact 'a real one.'² As such, this scene begins to develop an overt rhetorical tension between the novel and the familiar in the show, inviting the corollary that the TARDIS' speculative qualities as a time machine are as decidedly banal to viewers as they appear to Amy. Because Amy so easily accepts the advanced technological capabilities of the TARDIS, the episode implies that, by extension, the TARDIS is just as mundane from the phenomenological perspectives of contemporary viewers. Likewise, in spite of the fact that the interior and layout of the TARDIS is completely redesigned shortly after each of the Doctor's regenerations—which in turn, "may sometimes have come to seem mundane" (Charles, 2015, 62) as a result of their centrality to the show—these redecorations are largely aesthetic. Hence, these

² Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations are to Moffat, 2010-2017.



redesigns are roughly analogous to the predilection of new home owners to renovate their properties in our own reality. By this logic, the Doctor's TARDIS is simply a banal article of real estate, which they inherit from each of their earlier selves, and which functions as purely the means to an end in their estimation.

One particular scene within the show overtly lends support to this mundane reading of the TARDIS. In the series five Christmas special "A Christmas Carol", Abigail Pettigrew (Katherine Jenkins) remarks "This is [...] amazing!" after entering the TARDIS for the first time. "Nah," replies the Eleventh Doctor, "this is transport. I keep amazing [...] out here". As the Doctor speaks, he opens the doors of the TARDIS wide, displaying a shoal of fish flying through the opalescent atmosphere of their native planet, accompanied by a choral soundtrack. This scene rather explicitly proposes that the Doctor's time travelling vessel is no longer remotely novel from the phenomenological perspectives of the show's viewers, due to their overfamiliarity with its auxiliary role in the show's plot. As the Doctor's lines emphasise, it is integral to the show's formula that all SFnal novelty must be found on the other side of the TARDIS doors, since the vessel no longer constitutes a sufficient source of narrative intrigue in its own terms. Even more fundamentally, the craft is mundane because, as Ivan Phillips suggests, in "its ostensible form, it is just a box, the most basic 3D geometric shape available" (2020, 159). Whereas Phillips argues that in the classic era of the show, "an awareness of further rooms beyond the console room" often gave "the sense of an interior configuration that is extensive, possibly limitless" (2020, 159), in the Moffat era the ostensible impenetrability of adjoining rooms has the antithetical function, reemphasising purely the transport functions of the craft, by omitting to depict its other multistable potentialities onscreen. Fittingly, since it visually resembles an obsolete communications technology, the TARDIS functions at this point within the show merely to facilitate the transport of characters towards more cognitively engaging SFnal phenomena. On its own terms, the craft is positioned as a significant technological component of *Doctor Who* in just two episodes of the Moffat era; the series six episode "The Doctor's Wife", and the series seven episode "Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS".

The conceit of the former episode centres around the matrix of the TARDIS being transposed into a humanoid form, after landing upon a junkyard planet within a bubble universe. The decrepit aesthetic of this planet, alongside the fact that it smells like "armpits" and is described as the "plughole" of the universe, serves to counterpoint and diminish the superlative novelty of the fact that the TARDIS and its crew have travelled outside our own universe in order to get there. As the Eleventh Doctor approaches the planet, the matrix of his TARDIS is taken captive and forced to assume the body of a humanoid (Suranne Jones) by House, the planet's near-omnipotent consciousness. "The Doctor's Wife" therefore literally anthropomorphises the TARDIS, rendering its sentient core intelligence in the corporeal form of a humanoid. Whilst she remains in this form, the Doctor can communicate with the TARDIS directly, in marked contrast to his usual inability to comprehend her idiosyncrasies. In this form, she also remains capable of maintaining a simultaneous awareness of the past, present, and future, and so effectively has precognition of what those around her are about to say and do. The episode hereby attempts to defamiliarize the TARDIS in its viewers' phenomenological perspectives, by transposing its ability to cross temporalities into a different, new, and therefore estranging form. Nevertheless, after House is defeated at the end of the episode, and following an emotional farewell between the Doctor and itself, the matrix of the TARDIS is reintegrated. The vessel thereafter reverts to its typical narrative role again in subsequent episodes, becoming purely a mode of conveyance once more. As the craft's brief narrative significance was only temporary, it seems an even more unremarkable

component of the show once it has reverted back to the mundane form of a police box. Once again, Moffat’s era establishes a semantic linkage between the background narrative role of the advanced spacecraft and our species’ predilection to assimilate technologies we encounter into the everyday sphere of our lives.

“The Doctor’s Wife” is not alone in commenting upon the mundane qualities of the Doctor’s technologically advanced TARDIS. In the series five episode “The Time of Angels”, Moffat’s rhetorical purpose in deliberately banalising the Doctor’s sophisticated craft becomes more readily apparent. Whilst watching him pilot the craft, River Song (Alex Kingston) gleefully informs the Doctor that the strange yet distinctive sound the TARDIS makes when it materialises and dematerialises is “not supposed to” happen, and is actually an indicator of poor TARDIS piloting. Hence, the familiarity of *Doctor Who* viewers with the characteristic noise is retroactively revealed to have arisen as a result of the Doctor “leav[ing] the brakes on” each time he pilots the craft. River’s spousal rebuke consequently suggests that the Doctor is far less adept a pilot of the SFnal craft than viewers had previously been led to assume. The episode’s ludic banalisation of what is ostensibly one of the show’s principal speculative technologies suggests that the TARDIS is at least partially explicable in the context of contemporary viewers’ everyday lifeworlds, despite it being an “impossibly advanced technology” (Phillips, 2020, 159). Accordingly, the humorous potential of this scene relies upon viewers reappraising the TARDIS in direct relation to their own quotidian life. As this co-constitutive interaction demonstrates, the discursive relationship between viewers and *Doctor Who* is coactive. As I proceed to explain, the interplay between novelty and banality which is figured about the TARDIS is not merely comic, but broadly symptomatic of the show’s in-phenomenal rhetoric.

Televisual perception

As I have begun to demonstrate, Moffat’s era of *Doctor Who* draws attention to the coactive relationship between the show and its viewers. In a posthumanist vein, Eloise Govier utilises Barad’s notion of the in-phenomenal to propose an alternative to the “rigid boundaries between human and AI entities” which are characteristic of Western conceptualisations of technology (Govier, 2018, 148). Importantly however, Govier’s theoretical framework is equally applicable to the assemblage materialised between viewers of television and televisual cultural texts. If, from a posthumanist perspective, it becomes necessary “to think of the human–technology relationship as in-phenomena” (Govier, 2018, 150), it is equally necessary to problematise the presumptive binarism between the televisual viewer and televisual text. As such, we must consider televisual texts to be always already engaged in in-phenomenal relationships with the viewers who watch them, facilitating a state of cognitive reciprocity between the two entities. Hence, rather than being passive objects in any sense, televisual texts have an intra-active capacity to influence the cognitive processes of their viewers. By the same reasoning, Fiona Hobden emphasises that the past of our species is “not a real place we could visit, if only we had a time-machine (or TARDIS). Rather [...] the malleable, increasingly nuanced, and ever-changing product of our imaginative engagement with” contemporary representations of history comprises the only permanent artefact of the past (Hobden, 2009, 149). Via its position as a mainstream Western cultural production, Hobden proposes, *Doctor Who* actively intervenes in the recorded histories with which its historically-based narratives are interfaced, and so imaginatively and substantially alters its viewers’ understanding of their species’ past. Analogously, this article proposes that a parallel phenomenological process also results from viewers’ imaginative engagement with *Doctor Who*, in respect to the show influencing their perspectival outlook upon our species’ present and future.



As I argue, the participatory character of the show demonstrates that its posthuman aspect is not detached from reality, but rather inextricably situated within the realm of lived experience.

In this sense, the viewer's everyday lifeworld becomes a critical site of hermeneutical potency, since it constitutes the point of intersection between those technological engagements already common within their own reality and the posthuman technologies common to *Doctor Who* plots. In her monograph *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Ferrando argues that “the ways we are developing technology are not neutral, but have deeper consequences” (Ferrando, 2019, 43-44). She accordingly asserts that the continuing development of our species is “a naturalcultural process, [precipitated] through the continuity of biological adaptation and cultural practices” (Ferrando, 2019, 122), since the ubiquitous nature of technology in Western societies pervades each of our everyday lifeworlds. As a result of the non-linear modification of our phenomenological frames of reference by technological means, our everyday lives are already conspicuously posthuman in ontological terms. Furthermore, given that each of us “has a different and unique way to form their own phenomenological experience [although] their cognitive apparatuses are similar” (Ferrando, 2019, 139), the cognitive situation of our species is subjectively actualised and liable to vary immensely from person-to-person. As viewers' intra-active engagement with *Doctor Who* illustrates, our species' posthuman trajectory is a non-eschatological process which coheres within our subjective phenomenological experiences of daily life.

Accordingly, since the Steven Moffat era of *Doctor Who* regularly utilises recursive or mundane schemata to gesture towards the reciprocal nature of our present and future, the six series comprising this era of the show evoke a space of posthuman potential through conspicuously postphenomenological means. In Don Ihde's monograph *Postphenomenology*, he observes that “our lifeworld [...] has a deep *technological texture*” (Ihde, 1993, 13), and as such, he proposes that we must reconceptualise our phenomenological frameworks in order to comprehend the extent to which contemporary modes of perception are technologically contingent. Furthermore, Ihde argues that normative Western conceptions of technology too frequently perceive technological progress “as a kind of ‘internal destiny’ arising from Euro-American values” (Ihde, 1993, 56). As he argues, our tendency to interpret technologies as external and inert phenomena is a hangover from Enlightenment ideals of human progress. This leads to the mistaken presumption that our modes of embodied experience are innate and unchangeable, and hence, we commonly presume that we are able to operate independently of the technological apparatuses we routinely engage and interface with in day-to-day life. As Ihde specifically notes, “Teleserial and cinematic presentations” have an implicit ability to “convey a partial ‘virtual reality’ sense which not only makes one feel one is ‘there,’ but [to also] carry a kind of ‘realism’ that is hard to deconstruct in any immediate audio-visual present” (Ihde, 1993, 63).

Our association with technologies—including televisual media—subsequently marks a fundamental alteration of the frames of interpretation which our species uses to interpret its lifeworld.³ Hence, our species' in-phenomenal modes of intra-action with technology gradually and implicitly alter our subjective modes of perception. Technologies are not passive vessels which we employ for our advancement, but entities which we inextricably engage in symbiotic relationships with. Whilst the notion that perception “is a socially constructed, historical invention” (Ihde, 1993, 12) necessitates a significant redress to traditional phenomenological

³ For a detailed overview of how technology necessitates a movement from phenomenological to postphenomenological understandings of cognition, see Ihde, 1993.

models, it underscores that all conceptions of technology and "human" perception are socially constructed. Crucially, this significant ontological shift is paralleled by *Doctor Who*'s rhetorical emphasis upon the close interrelation between our mundane lifeworlds and posthuman existence. Specifically, a codependent interface of present and future is produced by the programme's speculative representations of mundanity, and accordingly, the Moffat era generates an extended metaphor for postphenomenological perception. As such, the agential positionality of any given viewer is decentered, and the cognitive intersections between their mundane lifeworld and the SFnal visual rhetoric of the show manifests an intra-active territory, which is characteristically posthuman. Employing the postphenomenological framework I have outlined, this article proceeds to closely analyse and further explicate the intra-active schemata of a representative cross-section of episodes from the Moffat era of *Doctor Who*.

"The Pilot"

As with their depiction of the TARDIS, episodes in the Moffat era regularly emphasise the propensity of the everyday to inform the posthuman future. This is particularly true of the series ten premiere episode, "The Pilot". At the outset of this episode, the Twelfth Doctor (Peter Capaldi) has been working as a lecturer at St Luke's University in Bristol for 'over seventy' years and has apparently not travelled in his TARDIS at all during this span of time. Over the course of seven decades, he has been stationed on Earth guarding the vault which imprisons Missy (Michelle Gomez) and has maintained the facade of being an enigmatic academic. However, soon after the Doctor meets the student and canteen worker Bill Potts (Pearl Mackie), he is forced to reengage with his more familiar variety of adventures. Whereas Bill has become a student to escape her menial existence, the Doctor desperately wants to travel the universe again to escape his menial existence on Earth. Although they are of a vastly different scale, their motivations are almost identical. Analogues are drawn between the Doctor's and Bill's respective urges to escape their stultifying everyday existences throughout the episode, implying that the two characters have largely analogous experiences of mundanity. This dynamic comprises a crucial component of the episode's intra-active rhetoric, revealing that the Doctor's SFnal life can be just as routine as our own contemporary existences, and thereby creating a strong cognitive association between viewers' everyday lifeworlds and the posthuman future.

Following the episode's opening titles, Bill is woken by the beeping of her alarm clock, and starts her routine shift at work frying chips in a deep-fat fryer. The footage of Bill's menial labour is, however, undercut with footage of her attendance at one of the Doctor's lectures. Ironically, this is a lecture about how the temporally embedded nature of perception only lets "you see one day at a time". Of course, as far as Bill and the Doctor are concerned, they are each essentially living the same day over and over again, stuck in lives bereft of excitement or variety. The next morning, Bill's alarm clock wakes her once more, and she begins an ostensibly identical daily routine (Moffat, 2016, 8). Although time inevitably passes, Bill is trapped in a cycle where the content of the days she experiences scarcely varies.⁴ In stark contrast to the Doctor's evocative figuration of life as an amazing 'magician' of time in his lecture series, her lived experience is conspicuously bereft of intrigue, as is also true for the Doctor himself. Later, Bill follows her romantic interest Heather (Stephanie Hyam) to take a look at a puddle on a patch of tarmac. This puddle is unusual, Heather reasons, because "it hasn't rained for a week". Nevertheless, Bill makes the banal

⁴ Moffat's script for "The Pilot" indicates that this particular sequence was intended to narrate a week of Bill's life in this manner, rather than merely two days, as in the final form of the episode.



counter-presumption that it must be urine, as “half the students here are blokes”. Crucially, it later transpires that Bill has been too keen to presume that the universe is as mundane as her life currently is, since it transpires that the puddle is in fact “a left-behind droplet of a liquid spaceship”, which happens to be sentient on its own terms, and is even capable of assuming humanoid form. Evidently, Bill’s predilection to perceive her lifeworld in exclusively mundane terms inhibits the possibilities of her experiencing any phenomenon beyond that familiar sphere of reference.

After encountering the liquid spaceship remnant in her shower, however, Bill’s everyday lifeworld itself is disrupted, and her existence no longer seems anywhere near as reassuringly normal. She subsequently runs to alert the Doctor that she has seen something undeniably alien, and the pair are forced to take sanctuary in the TARDIS. Yet, upon entering the Doctor’s dimensionally transcendental craft, Bill reverts to explaining her phenomenological experiences in mundane terms, presuming that its control room is simply “a knock-through” into the adjacent office. Within her limited frame of phenomenological reference, the TARDIS seems to be “a really posh kitchen”, and she asks whether she can use its toilet. After the craft dematerialises, she at first assumes that it must instead be a lift, and then, after seeing that it has teleported, is amazed that it can travel “anywhere at all in the whole university”. As the couched wordplay here emphasises, Bill can conceive of matters on the cognitive scale of the ‘university’, but not on the scale of the universe. Although she gradually attains a more accurate understanding of just how alien the TARDIS is through these successive assumptions, her slowness in grasping the full extent of its novelty results from her inability to abandon her mundane frame of reference entirely. Whilst she had habitually believed that the entire universe must be just as uninteresting as her own life is, when the TARDIS materialises in Australia, Bill finally realises just how egregiously inaccurate her assumptions have been.

Accordingly, when the Doctor attempts to wipe her memory of all the thrilling events and alien planets that she has experienced during “The Pilot” near the episode’s conclusion, Bill protests vehemently. As she argues, “this is the most exciting thing that’s ever happened to me in my life. The only exciting thing”. Seeing that the Doctor remains unconvinced, she instead begs “Okay, let me remember for a week. Just a week. Okay, well just for tonight. Just one night. Come on, let me have some good dreams for once”. Since she now understands the speciousness of her entirely routine life in truly cosmic terms, she cannot bear the thought of returning to a cognitive state where she is permanently separated from the posthuman novelty that exists beyond her unfulfilling life on Earth. Whereas Quiana Howard and Robert Smith argue that “humanity is mostly presented as an ideal that must be protected and preserved at all costs” in the show (2013, 43), throughout the Moffat era, viewers are frequently interpellated cognitively towards the increasingly posthuman perspectives of characters such as Bill; a move symptomatic of “a window opening up onto the unknown” (Gomel, 2014, 9) vista of all that which is post-human—a far broader panorama by far. If the Moffat era does have a didactic aspect, it does not simply show “us how to be the best humans we can possibly be” (Howard and Smith, 2013, 43), but rather, queries those perceptual handicaps which delimit the boundaries of humanity in the first instance. Because the basis of Bill’s plea resonates with the frustratingly pedestrian nature of the seven (or more) decades during which the Doctor has been forced to remain on Earth, he eventually relents. Subsequently, he permits Bill not only to retain her memories, but also to make new ones by continuing to travel with him in the TARDIS. As “The Pilot” demonstrates, although our contemporary phenomenological perspectives are deeply embedded in our thought processes, they are not an objective means of interpreting the cosmos, and hence, are liable to shift as our

species gradually continues to become increasingly posthuman. By rhetorically interrogating the primacy of its viewers' phenomenological stances, *Doctor Who* televisually stimulates that exact paradigm shift towards posthuman perception.

"The Power of Three"

Although the time that the Doctor spends as a lecturer at St Luke's University is the longest consecutive span of time which he spends on Earth in the revived series, the second longest occurs during the series seven episode "The Power of Three". This episode depicts the beginning, the end, and numerous intervening moments within "the year of the slow invasion". As alien incursions go, the slow invasion is a remarkably boring one, instigated by the inexplicable overnight manifestation of millions of unresponsive, identical, palm-sized black cubes all across the Earth. As the episode proceeds, viewers witness the cubes gradually becoming a habitual component of daily existence throughout the world, allegorising our species' ability to gradually become increasingly posthuman via our propensity to intra-act with technologies. Initially, the cubes' manifestation is regarded as a truly groundbreaking event in the history of civilisation, albeit also a significant threat. Although the planet enters a state of global emergency when they first appear, people are not excused from having to attend their routine shifts at work. As Rory (Arthur Darvill) prepares to leave the Ponds' house, UNIT soldiers break down the front door and Kate Lethbridge-Stewart (Jemma Redgrave) enters, intending to gain intelligence about the cubes by interrogating the Eleventh Doctor. As it transpires, however, the Eleventh Doctor can rationalise their appearance no better than UNIT can, and the group therefore agree that the best plan of action is to observe the cubes over a long period of time.

Across the globe, meanwhile, people are making the most of the remarkable phenomenon. Besides taking the cubes "to work, taking pictures, making films" of them, they also create thousands of Twitter accounts impersonating the cubes. For the time being, the cubes are experienced as a novelty, and since they are an unknown quantity, they briefly provide an interesting diversion from the overly familiar routines of contemporary life. Paradoxically, however, people are simultaneously beginning to assimilate the cubes into their everyday lives, no matter how unusual and useless they appear. And as invasion forces go, they are most certainly boring. Although the Doctor pledges to watch the cubes "round the clock", by day four of the slow invasion he has become restless waiting around on Earth simply watching Amy and Rory eat "endless cereal", whilst waiting for the cubes to do something conspicuously alien. Although the Doctor attempts to keep busy and pass time by performing a number of household tasks in rapid succession at first, this only keeps him busy for approximately a single hour, and he thereafter begins to realise the true banality of Amy and Rory's lives firsthand. Here, we see firsthand what Alec Charles defines as the importance of "precisely the small, mundane lives of ordinary individuals" (2015, 143) to the show's rhetorical strategies. Only a week into the slow invasion, the world media have become just as impatient with the cubes as the Doctor, and news channels have begun to speculate that, rather than alien artefacts, they are merely "the greatest stealth marketing campaign in business history". Crucially, the cubes have remained inanimate, and for the news agencies of the world who are eager to maintain viewership figures, inanimate subjects are unworthy of sustained speculation, regardless of how unusual they appeared to be initially.

Although the subsequent two months of the slow invasion are elided by the episode's narrative, the cubes have still not done anything noteworthy three months after they first arrived. By this point, interest in the cubes has entirely waned, and they are being used as paperweights and office



golf obstacles by the same people who were initially fascinated by them. They are now perceived to be utterly banal objects, and people have become utterly habituated to their continued presence on Earth—to the extent that they are being disposed of *en masse* in litter bins. After only three months, the cubes are already widely perceived as nothing more than a nuisance, and a large number of people simply wish to be rid of them. For a recent parallel, consider the sense of bizarre abnormality at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic against the tedium of continuing lockdown and social distancing measures as the months drag on. Nine months into the slow invasion, the UN declares the cubes provisionally safe, and Banksy has released a statement that the cubes are not their doing. On *The Apprentice*, Alan Sugar has sent the candidates out to sell as many cubes as they can, as they have become a phenomenon mundane enough to permeate the inimitable cultural habitus of reality television. At last, ten months after they first arrived, the cubes start to move, happening to do so whilst the Doctor is playing “on the Wii again”. Like the populace of Earth, he has become so habituated to the picayune presence of the cubes that when one rises up in front of the television screen, he absentmindedly asks it to move out of the way, and amusingly, it takes him a few seconds to realise that there has been a notable development in its behaviour. As it transpires when their purpose is finally revealed, the cubes are quite literally the alien equivalent of pesticide, designed to eradicate civilisation prior to our descendents colonising the galaxy. As usual, only the Doctor’s intercession has saved our species from an ignominious fate at the hands of a more highly advanced species. As numerous episodes from the Moffat era do, “The Power of Three” not only engages with the phenomenological aspect of viewers’ everyday lifeworlds, but also analogises the intra-active cognitive processes by which they are becoming posthuman.

Time travel

As the prominence of a mundane rhetoric within this representative sample of *Doctor Who* episodes emphasises, our species is engaged in a process of becoming posthuman through its mutually informative and everyday interaction with technologies. However, our development from human beings towards being posthuman is not simply a movement from point A to point B. Rather, we are engaged in a complex and prolonged movement of stochastic becoming, which is conditional upon an interrelated array of factors which influence our material conditions. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari utilise the figure of the rhizome to describe such manifold processes, since “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be [which] is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, 7). Deleuze and Guattari note that rhizomatic processes engender the formation of “strange new becomings, new polyvocalities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, 191), and equally, the rhizomatic process of becoming posthuman is enacted in miniature by the intra-active association between viewers and episodes of *Doctor Who*. Specifically, the mutualistic association between viewers and the show is characterised by constant becoming, as relative and phenomenologically-grounded cognitive states are reworked through the interactions between the two in-phenomena parties, reconfiguring subjective appraisals of novelty and familiarity. Moreover, the specificities of time travel also play a crucial role in the show’s intra-active rhetoric.

In the series five episode “Flesh and Stone”, the Eleventh Doctor realises that the cracks in space and time which are pursuing him around the universe have rewritten history, erasing many established events from temporal existence. As a result, the majority of the events which had transpired in *Doctor Who* prior to the Moffat era have been entirely erased from the memories of Earth’s population, including the Doctor’s companions. Crucially, however, the show’s viewers

continue to harbour the knowledge of the now-erased events that preceded the show's present diegesis. Accordingly, viewers' interactions with the show in the Moffat era are undertaken on the understanding that the 'truth' of its diegesis is perspectival, and crucially, that the truest evocation of the show's plot is contingent upon their own continued interaction with it. At numerous points when the show's previous chronology is rewritten—through a wide assortment of plot devices—the viewer's memory alone retains the phenomenological experience of the preceding diegetic events that had transpired. Yet, as these same events have been erased from the continuing show's chronology, the supposed periphery between viewers and the show is blurred irreparably. Viewers of *Doctor Who* are subsequently made complicit in the perspectival creation of the show's overriding diegetic narrative, and their memories of earlier episodes become a vital constituent component of the show's narrative logic. Viewers' memories essentially become a televisual archive, supplementing the reset diegesis of the show whilst they remain in interface with it. Hence, the numerous narratives of this era which involve temporal redaction are symptomatic of the intra-active engagements formed between viewers and the technological apparatus of the series itself.

For Tat Wood, the classic series of *Doctor Who* is "best thought of as an anthology series, wherein each individual story is a one-off with some [recurring] characters" (2007, 15), whereas the continuity of the Davies era exhibits a relatively straightforward chronology peppered with callbacks to the classic series. In contrast to the casual and amnesiac approach to continuity which Wood identifies in the show's classic era, the Moffat era retools discontinuity as an aspect of its postphenomenological schema. Distinctively, this era is bisected by abundant resets to the show's diegetic chronology. In the series five episode "The Hungry Earth"—set in 2020, ten years after the episode's air date—Amy and Rory exit the TARDIS, and soon spot their future selves on a nearby hillside. The Eleventh Doctor reasons that their future selves have presumably come to "re-live past glories" by watching their past from afar. However, when Amy and Rory are both sent back in time to the 1930s by a Weeping Angel in the season seven episode "The Angels Take Manhattan", their time streams are permanently transformed, and they will now never appear on the hill to wave to their former selves in 2020. Similarly, when Clara meets a man named Orson Pink (Samuel Anderson) in the series eight episode "Listen", Pink is heavily implied to be her great grandson. Nevertheless, her almost visually indistinguishable partner Danny Pink (also Samuel Anderson) is later killed in a road accident in the series eight episode "Dark Water", and never has children with Clara as a result. Crucially, the Moffat era operates under the presumption of an eternalist—or tenseless—conception of time, and therefore supposes that the future exists simultaneously with the present and past, as timeframes which are merely located in different dimensions from each other. Eternalist conceptions of time presume that any given object "has the properties of being future, past and present at different times" (Currie, 2007, 145), yet cannot inhabit more than one of these states simultaneously. Moffat era episodes accordingly suppose that many events which occur within the aforementioned temporal dimensions are subject to alteration, and that the consequences of any alterations in one temporal dimension will influence related events in others.

Hence, these narrative inconsistencies are not simply continuity errors, but rather, intentional rhetorical manoeuvres. In either of these instances, the show's perspectival narrative logic becomes dependent upon viewers' ability to remember alternative pasts and futures to those phenomenologically experienced by the characters of the reset diegesis. The Doctor himself



remembers many of the show's aborted timelines, and UNIT are aware of some,⁵ but the viewer is in the unique and vicarious position of being capable of remembering them all. By signifying that time is constantly in flux via its intra-active moves, this era of *Doctor Who* rhetorically emphasises viewers' imaginative agency to influence the trajectory of their own present and future. Indeed, as the series eight episode "In the Forest of the Night" makes clear, our actions in the present are a matter of great importance, since in aggregate, they entirely determine the nature of whichever posthuman future will ultimately arise. Despite finding herself in an inexplicably rewilded London in her own present, Clara is scarcely fazed by this fantastic event because she and the Doctor have seen "the future, lots of futures", and she summarily assumes that the perturbing situation is preordained to have an amiable resolution. Nevertheless, as the twelfth Doctor reprimands her, those amiable futures are "about to be erased" if she does not make the correct choices in the present. Furthermore, as the series ten episode "Smile" even momentarily ventures, in the future era of the show's timeline, "Earth was evacuated" after an unidentified apocalyptic event occurred, and the few survivors had to become colonists. Viewers' choices in the present, this implies, matter immensely.

Likewise, David Roden argues that the process of becoming posthuman will likely "involve a transformative and irreversible change in embodiment or phenomenology" at a subjective level (Roden, 2015, 179). From this perspective, our everyday lifeworlds once again become a principal site through which the process of becoming posthuman inevitably becomes manifest. As David Wittenberg hypothesises, "time travel framing narratives become a valuable, possibly indispensable means for writers to link present and future realistically, and thereby to legitimize social prognostications" (Wittenberg, 2013, 30). Wittenberg's hypothesis is highly relevant to this era of *Doctor Who*'s intra-active rhetorical strategies. Although even the earliest *Doctor Who* plots revolved around time travel, the stories of Moffat's era frequently evince his characteristic focus on how "the time travel aspects" (Hills, 2010, 32) of the show transform the phenomenological positionalities of its characters, and so have an explicitly posthuman character. Via both the episodic format of the programme and the multiple canon resets which bisect the Moffat era, *Doctor Who* depicts a multifarious and pluralistic range of possible futures for our species. Moreover, the show directly implicates its viewers in the realisation of these posthuman futures by utilising representations of their mundane lifeworld to cognitively engage them in the posthuman aspects of the programme. Crucially, Roden rejects the imposition of "*future-proof constraints on posthuman possibility*" (Roden, 2015, 89), since all attempts to preordain the conditions of any future which we have not experienced phenomenologically are necessarily short-sighted and overly-deterministic. Therefore, whereas discrete speculative texts are not even remotely accurate means of predicting the future, watching *Doctor Who* nevertheless comprises a valuable means of recognising that individuals have agency in informing the shape of the posthuman future.

To an even greater extent, the episodes which conclude series seven of the show are also explicitly intra-active. In "The Name of the Doctor", the eleventh Doctor travels to a ruined planet named Trenzalore, which is ordained to be the site of his eventual death following a prolonged and heroic last stand. However, only two episodes later chronologically, in "The Time of the Doctor", Clara convinces the Time Lords to "help [...] change the future". As a result, they grant the Doctor a new regeneration cycle, and this generous act not only prevents Trenzalore being annihilated, but also rewrites the timeline in which his death had been predetermined. As this

⁵ In the series eight episode "Death in Heaven", it is revealed that UNIT hold files on all the prime ministers of the UK, including the Master, who only became prime minister in a by-then aborted timeline.

momentous alteration of the show's narrative indicates, the continuity of the Moffat era is broadly palimpsestuous, and the intra-active assemblage materialised between the viewer and the show is the manuscript upon which it is written. Specifically, the recurrent canon resets which occur throughout this period of *Doctor Who* function in an in-phenomenal manner, dramatising the fact that our contemporary perceptions are contingent upon the interactions enacted within our already inextricably intra-active lifeworlds. As such, the show's rhetorical engagements rupture traditional phenomenological perspectives, and gesture towards the significant extent to which our species' perceptual apparatuses are shifting in a distinctively posthuman manner.

Conclusion

This article has detailed the rhetorical moves via which the Steven Moffat era of *Doctor Who* positions its viewers within a mode of intra-action with the prospective elements of its SFnal discourse. The future of our species, *Doctor Who* impresses, is a conditional posthuman territory bounded only by the limits of our imagination in the everyday present, and therefore open to negotiation. Whilst Barad's principle of agential realism holds true for *Doctor Who*, further research is required in order to determine the extent to which other speculative televisual texts utilise parallel rhetorical schemata to gesture towards matrixes of posthuman possibility.

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