

## Chapter 2

### Back to the Future: Journey to an Unknown Region

To be done with the Trinity ... the three great strata that concern us: the organism, significance, and subjectification. ... The organism is not at all the body, [the true body is] the *Body without Organs*, (BwO) a stranger unity that applies only to the multiple [and is overrun by] forces, essences, substances, elements [and] remissions. ... You cannot reach this world if you stay locked in the organism, or into a stratum that blocks the flows and anchors us to this, our world. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 158-59)

The next great step is the merging of the technologically transformed human world with the archaic matrix of vegetable intelligence that is the transcendent other. (McKenna 1992: 93)

To decode the linear organization of human society, its history, and its bodies, humanity may need to journey backwards through the strata of its history to a more flexible time that still allowed conjuring and sorcery. Robert Holdstock undertakes such a journey in the *Mythago* story cycle as he ventures beyond the rational world into primal topographies where linear time and organization no longer hold fast. Comprising a series of novels and a collection of short stories, the *Mythago* cycle explores an imagined stand of untamed British wildwood, known as *Rhyhope* or *Mythago* wood. "Infinitely bigger on the inside than its modest periphery would suggest, the wood has the property of incarnating mythagos [myth-images] from the collective unconscious of those humans who live in and around it" (Clute 1999: 852). This is no ethnographical study or a literal account of initiation with claims to historical authenticity, but rather the protocol of an experiment, an act of the imagination that explores the margins where fantasy and pure frequency and distortion collide.<sup>1</sup> The books that comprise the cycle, each exploring the imaginary woodland and the archaic myth-images it generates from the collective unconscious, are *The Bone Forest* (1992), *Mythago Wood* (1986), *Lavondyss* (1990), *The Hollowing* (1994) and *Gate of Ivory* (1998). With the exception of *Gate of Ivory* (which is not covered here), these novels will be treated as a single text that covers similar themes, namely: "the interplay of

science [namely, the science of psychology – see endnote xiii] and myth” (Brown 1993:158) as well as the mythological shaman-hero’s “crossing of thresholds ... [into a] landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms” where opposites are integrated (1993:161). Scrambling the organs of the individual (the self and its other) and the organs of society (history, culture and nature), Robert Holdstock’s *Mythago* story cycle is a mythopoetic examination of the merger between the technological and the organic, and a speculation on the potency and ambiguity of such a fusion. Delving into an imaginary past and paying homage to the sylvan myth that traces humanity’s origin from trees and forests,<sup>ii</sup> I argue that Holdstock uses fantasy to track the myth of the *generative stone* (the *petra genetrix*) and merge it with that of *generative technology* (which I have termed the *techno-genetrix*).

If, in accordance with the paradigm of the *petra-genetrix* (which is discussed in my introduction), stones can be seen to epitomize the womb of nature, then forests (like metals) can be seen to represent nature’s developing embryos. Drawing their sustenance from the generative earth and, enlivened by the light of the sun, forests were regarded by some ancient cultures as the progenitors of the human race (Porteous 1986:155-160). Moreover, forests can be read as a form of natural technology that human technology appears to mimic.<sup>iii</sup> Absorbing the heat of the sun, trees and plants convert the minerals of the earth into energy via the organic technology of photosynthesis. Like trees, the apotheosis of human technology (the mechanical machine) has as its function the conversion of matter into energy. One of the repercussions of mechanical production, ironically, is the combustion of matter and nature and its conversion into the cancerous energy of capital.<sup>iv</sup> The destruction and taming of the forest represents a counter-myth to that of the eternal pagan wildwood or greenwood of myth. Vico explains: “Vulcan [the Roman god of metal craft and tool-making] had set fire to the first forests in order to observe the open sky ... as an obstacle to visibility, the forests remained

an obstacle to human science and technology ... by burning the forest, Vulcan paved the way for the future science of enlightened times" (in Harrison 2000:1). Perhaps this hostility between the myth of science and technology and that of originary nature has given rise to a counter-rhythm in contemporary fantasy in which the wildwood is re-explored and invested with new meaning. Fantasy novelists and critics like Charles de Lint, Patricia McKillip and Terry Windling, for example, are only some of the contemporary writers that have re-invoked and explored the role of the ancient wildwood in the genesis and evolution of human culture and myth. For them, and numerous other fantasy writers (such as Tolkien), the primal forest is a sentient and timeless organism that stands in opposition to the ephemeral nature of human endeavours. "Going far beyond Tolkienesque derivatives, Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* (1986) and its sequels take readers deep into the shadowy and sometimes terrifying labyrinth of the greenwood", writes Graham Harvey (1997:183). Unlike many fantasy writers who portray nature as "passive and nurturing" Holdstock's science-fictional exploration of the imaginary forest reveals the other side of an "aggressive and alien" nature, that although "dangerous to humanity ... [is] also our home, source of life and vitality" (Harvey 1997:183).

Although Holdstock's *Mythago* cycle returns to a primitive mythos (or the "emerging memories of the past", as the author describes it [1991:20]), his work does not represent a glamorised return to some idealized forgotten time, but rather a science-fictional examination of the interaction between science and myth that is rooted in the present. Carol Brown avers: "Holdstock examines the process of myth and its role in modern society as he attempts to reintegrate myth and its apparent displacer, science" (1993:159). Filled with shamanistic magic, masks that take the wearer into a frightening and primal spirit world, and explorations of the beautiful and terrible power of nature, the *Mythago* cycle nevertheless introduces scientific methodologies and symbols as it searches for a

synthesis. Holdstock, for example, combines the mappings, carefully documented expeditions, and scientific analyses undertaken by his explorers of the Wildwood's internal zones ("where whole landscapes and time periods exist as mythagos that can be entered and explored" [Konratiev 1990:4]) with less rational forms of exploration such as the making of voodoo dolls, the activation of geomantic energies, the use of masks and the conjuring up of animistic spirits. Konratiev describes the cycle as follows:

By taking the particular approaches and styles characteristic of high fantasy [i.e. the magical and the fantastic], and science fiction [i.e. the scientific and the rational] respectively, and by bringing them together not as an amalgam but as a fusion of those elements they all have in common and guided throughout by a clear and unwavering personal vision, Holdstock has given imaginative literature a renewed power to convince and compel. He has led us into an area of our nature (and 'nature' itself) that is raw and frightening in some ways, yet also, in a primal fashion, immensely comforting. (Konratiev 1990:4)

Holdstock's examination of the wildwood is both logical and anti-rational (or fantastic) in that it fuses the "essentially analytic, theorizing [and] 'masculine' approach taken by Holdstock's scientific protagonists [George Huxley and Wynne Jones]" (Konratiev 1990:4) with the "feminine" fluid approach "of characters such as Tallis, whose paths are those of the shaman, the artist [and] the poet" (Konratiev 1990:4). Holdstock has fused these methodologies together in a synthesis that enables "reality to be perceived from different points of view" (Konratiev 1990:4).

Delving into the "passage of memory from mind to wood" (1992:20) and back again, Holdstock conjures up an organic vegetable matrix, a sylvan mind whose capricious effects are akin to those of the numerous renegade artificial intelligences (AIs) that occupy the annals of traditional sf and cyberpunk.<sup>v</sup> Renegade machine intelligences, as in many other sf works, explore the notion that "machine intelligence might be reckoned the logical end-product of evolution on Earth" (Clute 1999:253). In Holdstock's *Mythago* cycle a similar theme is

explored but the ascendant (and insurgent) machine is a forest, which, like the mechanical AIs of sf, has “been endowed with – or spontaneously evolved – self awareness” (Clute 1999:254). In *Lavondyss* (1988), it is speculated that perhaps a future science will find its way [backwards] into the first forest (1990:278). Vague hints are given in *Mythago Wood* (1986) that a future science did, in fact, succeed in sending mysterious forces backwards into a time shortly after the last Ice Age in order to enliven and protect the first forest that was emerging as the land thawed from the glacial retreat (Holdstock 1986:270 & 284). Utilising a strange science-fictional future quantum technology, the wildwood in the *Bone Forest* (1992) is described as bending time, opening up gateways into alternative dimensions, and continuously “altering its relationship with its own internal architecture” (1992:78). This trickster mind plays havoc with linear time, runs in spirals, and conjures phantasms from the dark dreams of human greed, pain and fear that have penetrated its constantly shifting borders. Holdstock’s fiction provides a glimpse into a strange organic mirror that re-absorbs the fantastic surplus generated by our dreams and fears whilst reflecting the archetypal machineries of human technological and cultural myth.

Confrontations with the renegade trickster-intelligence of myth are not unique to Holdstock’s sf. William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* trilogy<sup>vi</sup> also invokes visions of an unpredictable sentient matrix that inhabits a mythical topography where wild metamorphoses and boundary dissolutions are the norm. Gibson’s AI is a voodoun-like trickster, a ghost-in-the-machine, a bastard offspring of corporate technology, scientific logic and myth. Such a return to the mythic “trickster archetype ... serves to release the flow of life energy [back] into the world”, writes Ronald Schmitt, remarking on Gibson’s “blending of modern technology with practices and symbols meant to suggest primitivism” (1993:65). Holdstock’s explorations of the archaic wildwood have a similar, if not more intense, resonance to Gibson’s. Carroll Brown writes: “the concentration of both realms [the scientific

and the mythic] within the psychomythic landscape of *Mythago Wood* demonstrates that the boundary [between two seemingly opposed world-views] can be crossed" (1993:163). This search for synthesis and a return to the primal energies of a living earth is one of the central themes of contemporary paganism – a heterogeneous subculture that shares Gibson and Holdstock's attraction to the blending of myth and science, magic and technology. Douglas Rushkoff comments: "the neopagan revival incorporates ancient and modern skills in free-for-all sampling of whatever works, making no distinction between occult magic and high technology. ... It is a synthesis of old and new ideas" (1994:143-47). This heterogeneous pagan fusion blends magic and computers, science and myth, transcendence and embodiment. Contemporary theologian Graham Harvey remarks: "it is significant that the primary literature of paganism is neither theology, textbooks, nor 'how to do it' manuals, but fiction ... mainly sf and fantasy" (2000:1). This attraction is based on the genre's tendency to render visible the invisible frequencies as well as to "allow and encourage explorations and encounters that linear, hierarchical, systematic distillations prevent" (2000:1).

Many contemporary pagans received their first introduction to shamanism not through a reading of academic or anthropological texts, but rather through sf, notes Graham Harvey, citing Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* as prime examples of "pagan sf" (2000:1). To these works, Lance Olsen adds the sf of Greg Bear, Pat Cadigan and John Shirley as examples of "postmodern fantasy" narratives that "attempt to destroy modern absolutist distinctions between terms like materialism and spiritualism and to reconstruct those terms in a new and more challenging conceptualization" (1991:287). Such a reaction against the tight boundaries of the modern scientific world represents a return to a "pre-Christian ontology that recognizes not only boundaries ... but the possibility of merger and crossover" (Brown 1993:163). This "return of the shadow of spirit to the language of technology" and science (Olsen 1991:282) is

also present in the sf of David Zindell and Kathleen Ann Goonan, authors whose works will be explored in later chapters.

The “pagan” texts of sf make extensive use mythical themes from a variety of cultures and historical times to tell vivid, memorable and thought-provoking new stories that often return to the theme of the wildwood or the boundary-less regions of a magical cyberspace or matrix. The anarchical zone of the greenwood “represents a rich and varied ancient mythology that relates humanity to an array of other-than-human creatures and energies” (Harvey 2000:1). Myth recognizes the greenwood and its denizens, the elves and faeries, as trickster energies with which humanity must learn to engage.<sup>vii</sup> Similarly, the characters who enter Gibson’s cyberspace seem to be entering a world that is not wholly unlike Holdstock’s otherworldly, ageless and ethereal shadowy forest world of perpetual possibility. Olsen writes: “Gibson’s computer hackers travel from a materialistic geography registering realistic chronology, logic, and stability, to an ethereal one registering spiritual timelessness, alogic, and possibility” (1991:283). This move from rigid linearity to non-linear suppleness, writes Olsen, is slowly saturating the contemporary mind through the introduction of computers, chaos theory, quantum physics and non-linear dynamics (1991:283).

Although seemingly at odds with Gibson’s jaded high-tech hackers, Holdstock’s psychonauts<sup>viii</sup> are nevertheless analogous. Like the psychomythical forest of Rhyhope (one of the names by which the forest in the *Mythago* cycle is known), the cyberspace matrix traversed by Gibson’s band of cyber-voyagers represents a return to a potent mythical theme, namely, “the magical transference of consciousness into another physical state” (Schmitt 1993:72). The cybernetic sublime invoked in the *Neuromancer* trilogy represents “the search for a union of opposites, for a final destruction of boundaries ... [a search for] that which touches on the infinite ... [and] that which is ambiguous, uncertain, and unclear”

(Olsen 1991:283). As avatars of the mythical sublime, untamed forests represent a similar desire. "In the depth of cultural memory forests remain the correlate of human transcendence", remarks Robert Harrison, "they have retained to this day their ancient associations of antecedence and freedom with regard to the institutional order" (2000:6). Like the paganised cyberspace of Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy, the ahistorical world of the forest, as I will attempt to demonstrate, is a world of transgressed boundaries and potent fusions. "The forest", writes Danish novelist Kirsten Ekman, "is a place where things are impure and dissolute ... wanting to merge with one another ... [where] fluids seep and penetrate, tissues rupture and roots work their way through torn fibres ... [where] bodies dissolve and are transformed beyond recognition" (Ekman 1998:89).

Engaging in a language of "metaphoric density" (Clute 1999:538), Holdstock utilizes a type of twisted language in bringing into focus the human myth-making capacity. The landscape uncovered by his fiction is a labyrinth of quantum time loops in which every path, whether physical, psychological or spiritual, curves back on itself. Holdstock likens the sylvan mind of Rhyhope wood to the human brain, a fiery organic technology fed by unconscious desires and able to actualize symbols (1990:289). Unconscious desires and symbol production are, in themselves, trademarks of the navigation of cyberspace as articulated by Gibson (Olsen 1991:283). A confrontation with Holdstock's convoluted sentience is an encounter with human desire itself, and it forces his characters to undertake shamanic journeys deep into their unconscious selves.<sup>ix</sup> Like Gibson's cyberspace matrix, Holdstock's wildwood is a place where transcendence is endlessly deferred. Characters struggle through a tangle-wood of projections, dislocations, displacements, and unfinished stories, haunted by the spectres of the primitive past and echoes from an ambiguous future. At best, they are able to achieve integration (between human and non-human realms as well as between the conscious and unconscious), thereby gaining the ability to return to their own

realities. At worst, they remain trapped by their desires in a spectral realm of uncertainty.

The ghosts that frequent the mindscape of Rhyhope forest are referred to as “mythagos” or “myth-images”. Physical embodiments of uncertainty, turmoil, and cultural anguish that are drawn out of the human unconscious by the mysterious creative energy field that is the mind of the forest, mythagos are described by Holdstock as boundary-blurring creatures gestated during periods of cultural transition when the human unconscious is in an agitated and therefore symbol-generating state (1984:47-9). “Formed from the unheard, unseen communication between our common human unconscious and the vibrant, almost tangible sylvan mind of the wood itself” (Holdstock 1992:16), mythagos are described as organisms shaped by the sylvan mind from the “dreams and forgotten memories” of its human explorers (Holdstock 1992:31). These images-turned-flesh embody “sudden explosive *changes* in belief ... self-imaging ... an understanding of nature ... [and] an understanding of conception itself” (Holdstock 1990:291); intense moments in the shared history of humanity that have been etched into the collective unconscious, a mysterious realm without boundaries described by Jung as a storehouse for the dreams, fantasies, desires, and myths of all peoples across the ages (Jung 1964:21).

Oozing from the ground and trees, mythagos take on the physical forms of riotously tattooed, painted and scarified mythical heroes as well as cultural figures such as tricksters, rebels, and shamans. Drawn from the minds of humans who voyage through the forest in search of their wildest dreams and fantasies, these hybrid primitive figures seem to have a particular relevance in the contemporary cultural imagination. Cultural critic David Lévi-Strauss writes: “the increasing exploration of lost primitive practices and techniques looks beyond the Ideology of Progress to a possible syncretic future. That the ‘heresy’ of primitivism is gaining

momentum now ... signals a cultural shift from progress to survival" (in Vale 1989:158). Survival in today's information networks depends on reclaiming the imagination and revisioning our collective past, writes Hakim Bey (1991:79), calling for the onset of a new form of "Psychic Paleolithism" (see endnote xii).

Instead of leading us out of the body (our own bodies and that of the earth) into the transcendence promised by technological and scientific progress, Holdstock leads us inwards into the primal unconscious, and backwards through history into a foment of dreams and desires (a zone of limitless possibility and danger that is symbolised in the *Mythago* cycle by the shadowy forest and its earthy denizens, which are drawn from archaic imagery). Holdstock's sf offers a window into an unsettling elastic zone where our stories take shape and spawn monsters. In the primal world that Holdstock's sylvan mind invokes, survival depends on the ability to engage with the world as trickster and to form seemingly random connections between signs, symbols, energy flows, fantasies, objects and strange mutations. Such an engagement with a playful yet virulent world also forms the nexus of Donna Haraway's notion of cyborg politics.

"Any voice from the time of origins is structurally the voice of the other", writes Donna Haraway (in Van Loon 1996:239). "Cyborgs do not search for pure origins ... [instead, they are concerned with] revisioning the world as a coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse" (1996:239). Although the world of the *Mythago* cycle returns to the myths of pre-history, Holdstock does not imagine a return to a lost innocence or a world of pure origins; rather, he fashions an ambiguous world, drawn from the human unconscious by a capricious sylvan mind that inhabits a multitude of overlapping times and possibilities. Survival in this world, a metaphor for the strange world of the collective unconscious that the shock of sudden historical ruptures bring to the fore, requires that we learn to

converse with the trickster in our primal unconscious and allow ourselves to undergo strange transformations (see endnote xx).

Like the hybrid creatures that populate Holdstock's sf, Haraway's cyborgs represent an attempt to fuse categorical oppositions and mediate between opposing modes of perception. Haraway describes cyborgs, like those who venture into the wildwood, as explorers of the borderlands of cultural hegemony (where myth and reality merge) in search of novel forms of embodiment and new freedoms. Delving into dreamlike worlds of the imagination, they nevertheless remain grounded in scientific epistemology.<sup>x</sup> In this, they are like the shamanic heroes of epic fantasy, who must always return to the real world after their adventures into the fantastical realms of the forest: "if they [the mythical heroes] remain in the greenwood, the forest becomes deadly ... they become slothful and cease to be heroes", suggests mythologist Steven Roger (1995:1). The purpose of the hero-figure, like that of the shaman or the cyborg, is to return to the material world bearing the insights and transformative power that he or she has gained in their journeys into the wilderness and chaos that lies beyond the borders of the culturally-defined "real". In so doing, they herald novelty, synthesise dangerous oppositions, and bring to light the intimate and vital connections between the real and the imaginary, the living and the non-living, the biological and the artificial.

Like the sylvan mind of Rhyhope, the hero and the shaman utilise dreams, "descending ... into a spiritual labyrinth ... a landscape of symbolic figures" (Campbell 1949:101). Holdstock explains: "there is a magic in dreams that these days we can't value. They can express combinations of experience. They can create vision. If the vision is clear, is lucid, if it can be controlled, if its symbols can be comprehended, it gives power through something we take for granted. Intuition!" (1994:353).

Drawing heavily on Jungian psychology and the writings of Joseph Campbell, Holdstock equates the “mythogenic” process of Rhyhope wood with a stimulation of the deepest level of the human psyche, the unconscious (1992:31).<sup>xi</sup> Kindled by periods of great cultural strife or excitement, the collective unconscious spontaneously creates shaman-like hero figures that are avatars for the “evolution of [cultural] thought” (Holdstock 1988:279) as well as “the idea of exploring the underworld” (1988:279). Drawing from Joseph Campbell’s seminal exploration of the hero myth, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1993), Holdstock equates the hero with “the fool ... the trickster ... the warrior ... the hunter ... [and] the shaman” (1988:353). “Amongst the most perilous ... adventures undertaken by the heroes of myth”, writes Campbell, “are those of the shamans” (Campbell 1949:98). By far the most hazardous of the hero-shaman’s adventures, according to Campbell, is his or her quest into the land of the dead (1949:99). This netherworldly quest is revitalised in the *Mythago* cycle, in which the realm of the dead is equated with the unconscious mind, a shadow realm where ancestral memories of forgotten times commingle with contemporary cultural fears and aspirations. Each of Holdstock’s characters that undertake journeys into the wood endure metaphorical rites of passage; journeys into ancestral realms of primal forces. The purpose of their journey is ostensibly analytical: “to learn ... to communicate through those persistent images of the [forgotten] past that are locked in each and every one of us” (Holdstock 1984:51).

These characters [of shamanic heroes], often based on historical figures, more often than not on imaginary but *needed* figures, had become an integral part of the human mind, existing just across the mysterious boundary between full awareness and that state of acknowledgement of an underconscious process at work – dreams, rituals, visions – that may be called intuition and insight (Holdstock 1994:83-4, my emphasis).

Rhyhope wood blurs the “mysterious boundary”, drawing out these archetypal images, fleshing them out, and making them visible. The mythogenic potential of

Rhyhope is extended to all unspoilt "natural environments" (1984:49) and throughout the *Mythago* cycle, Holdstock alludes to the existence of other "ghost woods" that have somehow managed to defend themselves against the encroachments of humanity (e.g. 1984:129). This overlap of autonomous nature and the unconscious echoes Jungian psychology. Jung writes: "the lowest collective level of our psyche [the collective unconscious] is simply pure nature. ... Nature which includes everything, thus also the *unknown*, inclusive of matter" (in Von Franz 1974:8). According to Jung, the unconscious and nature form part of an all-containing continuum, a non-perceptual psychophysical background that he termed the *unus mundus* – a world that appears to exist outside ordinary laws of time (in Von Franz 1974:9). Patterns, which Jung referred to as *archetypes* (or "constituents of nature"), seem to flow from this background into the temporal world from time to time and at such junctures the *unus mundus* may be glimpsed through "dreams, visions, or spontaneous fantasies" (Von Franz 1974:3). When this happens, the archetypes, which normally operate in the background, or in the individual's unconscious mind, are ostensibly clothed by the conscious mind, attaining a degree of visibility (Von Franz 1974:4). Anchored in the *unus mundus*, the archetypal world, Holdstock's mythopoetic forest is a "world of mind and earth, a realm outside the laws of space and time" where invisible archetypes are rendered visible (Holdstock 1984:213). In a wood that is "alive with eyes" (Holdstock 1992:30) the living archetypes (or mythagos) express "a sudden alteration in the relationship between the human conscious and its unconscious counterpart ... [they represent] a new magic emerging from the ancient mind-stratum" (Holdstock 1988:290).

In elucidating the emergence of new magic in the collective unconscious, based on a merger of the contemporary world-views in the conscious minds of his protagonists and the ancient world-views represented by the unconscious mythagos, Holdstock reaches back into an "ancient mind-stratum", striving to

merge the personal and the collective, the unconscious and the conscious, the rational and irrational as well as conceptions of past, present, and future. In this way, Holdstock explores primitive conceptions and mythologies in order to articulate their continued influence on modern-day humanity, utilizing mythic material "as a way of placing the emotive qualities of his characters' interior landscapes directly onto the stage" (De Lint 1994:30). By exploring the manner in which "myth resonates within the [collective] context of the modern world" (1994:30), Holdstock "intermingles elements of science, its paradigms and its myths to provide a modern context for the examination of mythology" (Brown 1993:159). "The world through which you are journeying ... consists of mind", remarks one of Holdstock's characters (1990:355), calling the reader's attention to the *Mythago* cycle's blending of fantasy and cognition, intuitive imagination and rational intellect. Holdstock's examination of mythologies and his emphasis on the relevance of unconscious explorations are by no means inappropriate. Our logic-driven technological era may, after all, retain pervasive irrational elements that could get the better of us whilst opening us to multidimensional planes and possibilities. Davis makes a similar point:

Though we long ago accustomed ourselves to the manic rhythms of modern life, it sometimes seems as if we have been captured by an even deeper and more violent undertow in the tides of time, a ferocious rip that threatens to pull us out to sea. (Davis 1998: 255)

Writing on the volatility of the technological present, Richard Stivers warns that technology and its transcendental promise have become a new form of magic "supplanting shared symbolic experience" and replacing it with the mono-myth of an engineered utopia in which "individual life is [reduced to] a matter of consumption ... [and] cultural meaning is [rendered] inherently unstable" (2001:39). In this scenario, humans are plunged headlong into a "foment of emotion and instinct" (2001:47), which are no longer expressed by the "shared symbolic" of myth but rather by the consumerist ploys of the media via "computer

and television" (2001:42). "The more technology demands of us in terms of regulations, schedules and coordination", writes Stivers, "the more we need to escape this excessive rationality by plunging into the irrational, into random sensations" by forging schizophrenic identities (2001:39). In a world dominated by advertising, the outlet for these emotions, however, does not lie in the production of new meaning, but rather in the "commodification of desire" and its subsequent implosion (Bey 1991:79). Bey continues: "and yet, out this abyss of meaning, desire still rises. ... The return of the repressed [the random and irrational] means the return of the Paleolithic – not a return to the old Stone Age, but a spiralling around on a new level of the gyre: Psychic Paleolithism" (1991:79).<sup>xii</sup> Holdstock's *Mythago* cycle explores this radical counter-rhythm, an undertow that has been prevalent in Western literature since the advent of industrialization and the notion of scientific progress.<sup>xiii</sup> Rallying against "technology's destruction of the human capacity to symbolize our milieu" (Stivers 2001:42), Holdstock reaches "deep into the wildwoods ... deep into the silent zones of the brain" (1986:47) in order to "study the earliest times ... [to] learn to communicate through those persistent memories of the past that are locked in every one of us" (1986:51). Repressed feelings are given vent in the unconscious landscape of the wildwood, where characters are brought face to face with "dreams, feelings, experiences that seem less related to [the human] than they do to the animal realm" (1992:21). By entering the untamed forest, humans are led into a direct confrontation with the irrational: "as if a more primordial aspect of [our] behaviour had been let out, dusted off, and set loose" (1992:22). This confrontation with primal emotion and the threat of dissolution that it represents to the rational and technical mindset of modernity has apocalyptic overtones, as Cohn notes:

The idea of apocalypse or dissolution [is] inherent in the structure of technical innovation ... it forms one of the boundary conditions under which technology develops. ... All apocalypses seem to share the notion of boundary collapse. (Cohn in Murghana 2003:1)

Perfused up by repressed unconscious powers, the modern world is "dissociated like a neurotic", writes Carl Jung (1964:85); "in spite of our proud [technological] domination over nature ... we have not yet learnt to control our own nature", he continues, asserting that the only way to avert the potential disasters of a world filled with increasingly "monstrous machines" is to explore the chaos of the unconscious in search of "meaningful symbols" (1964:101-2). These living symbols are, according to Jung, necessary in order to help humanity articulate its present technological trajectory and unify it with the irrational and seemingly random fluctuations of nature. The symbols cannot be fully understood because they represent both the primal source (namely, nature or the *unus mundus*) as well as the inchoate world of the future that lies beyond the dissolution of the present (Robertson 1995: 148-49). Fleshed out by Holdstock's "ghost wood", these living symbols or myth-images, clothed in organic material and derisive from forgotten history, embody the irrational and the instinctual. "In the chaos of transformation [heralded by our present age of technological upheaval], we re-create the image of the primordial man", avers Jung in *Civilisation in Transition* (in Grosso 1995:248). These primordial re-imaginings, declares Jung, represent more than mere nostalgia for a lost era; they could signify "radar echoes" from the future that prefigure "the end of an era" (1995:247-48).

"If it is hard to accept that oft-repeated [historical or pre-historical] events leave a trail in the unconscious, it is clearly harder yet to accept that sometimes the archetype comes first and the objects or events it mirrors follows *afterward*", notes Jungian analyst Robin Robertson (1995:149). In the *Mythago* cycle, precognitive and fantastical archetypes take the shape of futuristic cities, hybrid creatures, and earth-guardians that combine elements of futurism and primitivism. One of these enigmatic myth-images is described as an incarnation of a technoutopia, a "future vision ... a city that glowed in the night ... alien ... unlike any city

of history" (1984:295). Elsewhere, one of Holdstock's characters reflects that these visions from humanity's shared future could be echoes of a pagan future that have reflected back into the excessive rationality of the present era; "Earth watchers exiled by Science" (1984:244).<sup>xiv</sup> Commenting on the nature of these collective racial memories that seem to originate not only from the past, but from the future as well, Carol Brown presents an idiosyncratic perspective: "in a realm where time is meaningless, and thus the differences between one age of civilization and another (which is to say the technological differences) are rendered moot, the essential disparity between science and mythology is seen to be merely a matter of terminology" (1993:170).

Like the unbounded regions of the unconscious, the ghost-wood crystallises around racial memories and dramatic events, sucking in a "confusion of time and ages" (Holdstock 1990:460). The psychomythic forest draws to itself "not just our space and time, but others too, similar times, alternatives, the stuff of fantasy, the stuff of wilder dreams" (1992:93). Its objective appears to be a desire to circumnavigate the source, a mystical confluence of past, present and future to which the earliest archetypes refer and towards which the future is heading. Throughout the *Mythago* cycle, Holdstock refers to this source as "Lavondyss" or "the first forest" (1986:278). This transcendent realm is also referred to as a place where "the transition from one state of being to another is accomplished" and forgotten wisdom is recovered (1990:203). "Shaman ... wizard, warlock, druid, scientist ... all mean one thing: *echo of a lost knowledge*", explains Holdstock, ruminating that "perhaps science will find its own way into the first forest" (1986:278). The idea of a future transcendental moment (or confluence of moments) casting back echoes into the past and influencing the human unconscious is not restricted to Holdstock's and Jung's imaginings. Terence McKenna refers to it as "the omega point of transcendence" and links it with concepts of "eternity" and "notions of the end of the world" (1992:1). Like

Holdstock, he speculates that such a future confluence could “throw off reflections of itself, which ricochet into the past ... and that out of these fragmentary glimpses of eternity we can build a kind of a map of not only the past ... but a map of the future” (1992:1). “This finding of the way is what lies at the core of legend”, confirms Holdstock (1986:279). As humans map their way through the imperceptible, fragmentary, chaotic and elemental signals bombarding us from our pasts and futures, they are transformed and distorted. En route to the future, humans may encounter strange tales and inexplicable alien frequencies from realms beyond the grasp of our scientific instruments, measurements and perceptions. Pearson confirms the dissolution of boundaries in creative liminal zones:

Becomings lead to zones of indiscernibility in which the points that connect and separate things are no longer discernable. It is within such a zone that we can productively situate a kind of nonhuman intelligence. (Pearson 1997:225)

Holdstock writes: “at the center of the wildwoods [lies] Lavondyss ... a place where time had no meaning at all” (1984:247). Humans and myth-images that voyage through the forest towards this “unknown region” relinquish their form and identity in progressive stages, finally undergoing a total transformation and becoming mythagos themselves (1988:389). This process of becoming imperceptible and vanishing into an alternate universe is akin to the shaman and sorcerer’s journey into realms beyond the physical. In his anthropological fictions, Carlos Castaneda describes a series of transformations analogous to those of Holdstock, metamorphoses “in which becomings molecular take over where becomings-animal leave off” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:248). Relating the mythological transformation of humans into animals to the molecular transformations of science fiction, Deleuze and Guattari place Castaneda’s writings on sorcery squarely in the realm of sf (1988:248). “Science fiction”, they write, “has gone through a whole evolution taking it from animal, vegetable, and mineral

becomings to becomings of bacteria, viruses, and other things imperceptible" (1988:247). Casteneda's world of sorcery and experimentation with psychoactive drugs involves voyages from the everyday world, defined as the "tonal", into a realm of complete formlessness and timelessness, termed the "nagual". William Burroughs explains: "the tonal universe is the everyday cause and effect universe ... the nagual is the unknown, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable" (in Jowers 1995:5-6).

Akin to Casteneda's conception of the nagual, Holdstock's notion of Lavondyss is simultaneously that of a primordial past, an uncertain present, and an amorphous future transcendent moment of transformation and unbounded potential. Within the mysterious, impenetrable, invisible, and timeless heartland of Lavondyss lies the nexus of the non-human intelligence that enlivens Rhyhope Wood. This mysterious centre seems to fit Deleuze and Guattari's notion of ultimate *becoming* or transformation, which Pearson defines as a movement towards "anti-memory" or the process whereby the "line frees itself from the point" (1998:294).

Lavondyss can be seen as a representation of "anti-memory" because, unlike human memory, which "has a punctual organization [and] refers back to the horizontal flow of time" (1998:294), the time-beyond-time of Lavondyss breaks the continuity of historical time, drawing on the cyclical time of myth and reworking linear notions of scale, form and memory.

Writing on the emergence of new forms of genre-blurring sf, Csicsery-Ronay asserts: "for an open future even to be conceivable at least two things are required from sf" (1991:395). He continues: "these are the dissolution of the myths of time that have informed western technology and mythology and the emergence of a conception of virtual timespace, where many possibilities might be realised" (1991:395). The notion of time that is most prevalent in Western culture is that of linear time, or time that moves like an arrow from the past via the

present into the future (Klarer 1992:112). In contrast is the archaic or primitive myth of cyclical time, which stresses the seasonal recurrence of phenomena in a type of spiral pattern (Klarer 1992:112). According to mathematician Ralph Abrahams, both archaic and contemporary cultures that adhere to notions of cyclical time generally have in common “a love of the planet, [a belief in] the integrity of life-forms, [and a recognition of] chaos as the essence of life” (1992:151). A conception of cyclical time and the re-sacralisation of chaos is central to a conception of embodied immanence in Hakim Bey’s notion of “Psychic Paleolithism” (see endnote xii) and has informed a wide range of sf by female authors, most notably that of Ursula le Guin, who typically fuses linear and circular notions of time in her sf, creating “polydimensional layers of meaning” (Klarer 1992:117). A similar fusion is to be found in Holdstock’s sf, which combines historical and quasi-scientific narratives with “environments [that] suffer [random] transfigurations through time shifts” (Clute 1999:578).

Although the chaotic topography of Rhyhope and its timeless centre does not at first glance resemble the traditional sf trope of a technologically transformed future world, it nevertheless corresponds to Csicsery-Ronay’s requirement that sf presents a narrative of non-linearity and multiple possibilities. Holdstock’s fiction, moreover, also adheres to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of sf as an evolution of the idea of becoming itself (1988:540). Hence the *Mythago* cycle concerns itself not with techno-enhanced futures, as conventional views of sf would dictate, but rather with the invisible, fantastical, and strangely primitive and anarchic chaotic intensities that Deleuze and Guattari define as the essence of the genre (1988:247). These intensities correspond to the very forces that technology and science are beginning to uncover as they delve further into the quantum, the chaotic and the abstract. Aside from being a metaphor for the hidden unconscious, Rhyhope forest is also a virtual world that exists parallel to ours, a shadow of our civilized present powered by an alien awareness that appears on

the edges of human peripheral vision. Pearson writes: "the virtual is the realm of potential and of experimentation ... a paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce and connect" (1997:231).

All journeys into the *nagual*, according to Casteneda, involve initiatory shamanic ordeals - a succession of becomings, transformations, or shape-shiftings (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:161). Inspired by a similar cyclical ethos, the protagonist of Holdstock's *Lavondyss*, Tallis, enters the "unknown region" by literally splitting herself in half and "traveling in two directions at once", experiencing winter and summer, heaven and hell simultaneously, becoming animal, vegetable, hybrid, and finally forgotten memory itself (Holdstock 1990:457). "All so-called initiatory journeys include these thresholds and doors where becoming itself becomes, and where one changes becoming depending on the 'hour' of the world, the circles of hell, or the stages of a journey that sets scales, forms and cries in variation", write Deleuze and Guattari (1988:249). Beginning with "the howling of animals", our fictions are progressively moving us toward "the wailing of elements and particles" (1988:249).

Casteneda's world of shamanic initiation can, like Holdstock's *sf*, be seen as a cluster of metaphors to describe the strange transformations and hybridisations that come in the wake of contemporary technological developments. Such descriptions of the "changing coordinates of space and time" describe the world of the electron microscope, the Hubble Space telescope, hackers, quantum physicists, drug-users, and psychoanalysts as much as they do that of the ancient shaman. They are all magical worlds where the "inaudible makes itself heard and the imperceptible appears" (1988:248).

Despite the relative distance between our media-driven global village and the primal woodlands that Holdstock invokes, there are nevertheless uncanny

correspondences. Grosso writes: "when cave dwellers made marks on the cave walls that evoked images of animals, they created the first alternate space for the human imagination to inhabit ... cyberspace was born in the Paleolithic caves" (1995:270). Holdstock describes the rock art of the Paleolithic as boundary markers that denote the intersection of worlds, the blurring of the natural and the cultural, and the merger of the human and the inhuman: "odd, disturbing patterns ... spirit creatures ... bison, stag, horse, wolf ... hunters dressed in strange garb ... shapes that drew as much from the world of trees as from the world of human beings ... [all] reaching for unknown lands" (1994:116-17). Like shamanic cave painters reaching toward unknown lands, the modern founders of cyberspace, such as John Perry Barlow and members of the influential WELL electronic forum, have based their cyberspace mythology on the "libertarian imagination, with its primal identification of wilderness and freedom. ... The 'digital frontier' emerged from America's unconscious" (Davis 1988:108). Holdstock's sympathy with the myth of the frontier is made clear in the opening of *Lavondyss*, which is subtitled *Journey to an Unknown Region* and opens with Walt Whitman's famous poem *Darest Thou Now, O Soul*.<sup>xv</sup> This allusion to the great American bard indicates, despite frequent descriptions of Rhyhope wood as a "realm of mind", that Holdstock does not completely identify with the bodiless transcendence promised by the frontiersmen of cyberspace.<sup>xvi</sup> "For Whitman, electric life meant the erotic life, and his love of bodies, his desire to 'charge them full with the charge of the soul', only led him to embrace the most exuberant of heresies – that the body was the soul" (Davis 1998:52). The body plays a prominent role in Holdstock's fiction, as well as in the fiction of Zindell and Goonan, whose works will be explored in later chapters. Instead of espousing a transcendence of the body via virtual technologies or shamanic ecstasies, these authors privilege the body itself as the nexus of mind, spirit, and transformation.

In each of the books that make up the *Mythago* cycle, characters charge their bodies under the influence of an embodied shamanic ecstasy, undergoing extremes of temperature, deprivation, and physical rigour in order to access the spiritualised state of matter that is the unknown region. This allows them to “open the gate between ages and worlds, to cross the thresholds that have been the province of the Shaman since the great days of the hunter” (1990:357). As disembodied as the drive to reach transcendence may appear at first glance, the body throughout the *Mythago* cycle remains solidly grounded within the earth and becomes a powerful site of transformation. Moreover, unlike the disembodied entities who roam cyberspace, characters entering the “ghost-wood” do so in mind as well as body.

As a virtual yet embodied space of the imagination, Holdstock’s wildwood seems to echo French playwright Antonin Artaud’s concept of *la réalité virtuelle*; a visceral “transfusion of matter by mind” that lies at the heart of the “archetypal, primitive theatre” of the shaman and the alchemist, a spiritualised state of matter that beckons to us from the “incandescent edges of the future” (in Davis 1998:190). This future is one that we may already be partially experiencing in the high-tech theatre of our science-fictional present. Ballard explains the danger:

Science fiction has created a visual space for us to imagine (if not enact) our body as it flies through today’s temporal and spatial matrix, where subjectivity dis-connects and re-connects through various networks. While dissolving [into these networks], the body’s limits literally delaminate into...multiple surfaces and interfaces (Ballard 1998:1).

The body involved in the visceral theatre of the virtual is the Body without Organs (BwO).<sup>xvii</sup> Not an organized body in any sense, but rather a “machine” that moves across and is populated by intensities, feelings, and sensations, the BwO is an unfolding experiment (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:161). “A BwO is made in such a way that it can only be occupied, populated only by intensities ... it is

nonstratified, unformed intense matter, the matrix of intensity ... [where] matter equals energy", write Deleuze and Guattari (1988:153). This is the body of sf, a body in the process of becoming; it is receptive to "waves and vibrations, thresholds and gradients ... The BwO is the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency specific to desire" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:154), it is the absolute transfusion of matter by desire. This is the true Body that the shaman forms in his or her journeys through planetary information spaces, "a space between becomings, between particles", a phase of pure experimentation (Pearson 1997:227), the stuff of cyborgism and sf. Described as being "continuously self-constructing", the BwO is an egg of "destratified matter ... a fundamental convergence between science and myth, embryology and mythology, the biological egg and the psychic or cosmic egg" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:164).

Continuously impregnated by unconscious forces, Holdstock's ghost-wood appears to manifest as a type of BwO, a psychic egg, hatching myth images that encapsulate intensities of desire, fear, and pain. The mythagos it hatches can be likened to psychic probe heads that are sent out to explore spaces of abstract and visceral possibility.<sup>xviii</sup> Filled with mythagos ("the dying-down and the being-born" [1994:102]), the forest is like Artaud's BwO "intensity map", a continuous field of experimentation and immanence. "A BwO intensity map ... is not just a map of geography ... [it] designates thresholds ... waves or flows" of energy and experimentation (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:164). Having no fixed coordinates in space and time, Rhyhope wood is a psychogeography of intensities that marks the crossing of thresholds between the human and the inhuman, as well as the desire to journey into the unknown region that lies beyond the culturally defined 'real'. Animated by psychic energy, the "ghost-wood" fashions experiments in becoming (mythagos) that are transformative agents, giving rise to new cycles of regeneration in the woodland. Constituting BwOs, they are short-lived and fiery, drawn to "[all] that lives, claws, devours, desires, [and] surges" (1992:54).

Accompanied by “vibrancy ... tension ... adrenalin surging” (1994:91-2) their genesis represents a “bring[ing] into existence [of] the living earth” (1990:354).

All zones of mythogenesis within Ryhope wood are constituted by dreams of hate and fear that the forest draws from humans. The sylvan mind samples memory and desire as it continually refashions itself: “when an outsider enters the wood, change runs through the canopy like fire. The wood sucks at the mind, it sucks out the dreams” (Holdstock 1990:280). Like a vast abstract machine, Rhyhope dismantles bodies and histories in search of novel organizations (see endnote xviii). It is motivated by a desire without climax. It is “a component of passage ... a plateau in communication with other plateaus” (Deleuze and Guattari 1992:164).<sup>xix</sup> Humans who enter Holdstock’s forest and wish to journey to the unknown region(s) need, like shamans, to fashion their own BwOs in a literal sense. Accordingly Tallis, penetrates into the forest’s zone of primal genesis by “releasing the ghost from her bones” (1990:405) and undergoing a series of intensified transformations in which she loses her organs, changes into a tree, a flame, and eventually into a charged myth image of forgotten memory itself (a ghost). Losing her organs (1990:426), and becoming a tree (1990:427), a totem-mask (1990:426), a “smouldering fire” (1990:440), “a small fragment of coal”, and eventually “Holly-Tallis”, a hybrid human-vegetable mythago that is suffused with ancient memory (1990:445), Tallis changes in form, substance, and organisation as she crosses thresholds, foregoes the fixed and stable tonal reality and enters the unknown region. Tallis’s body is a site of becoming and, like her, each of Holdstock’s characters experience a foment of time, memory and speed as they travel further into the forest’s many mythogenic zones, driven by intensities of love, hate, cold and desire.

As they tear into the forest, it tears into them, stripping them of their organs (both physically and psychologically) until eventually they become emptied and

wrecked BwOs, lost and trapped, unable to return to the real world. "There are several ways of botching the BwO", warn Deleuze and Guattari: "if you free it [i.e. if you 'liberate' the body, transforming it into a BwO, through a radical action such as the ingestion of hallucinogens] with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane [of consistency] you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe" (1988:160). By giving in to their unconscious motivations and surrendering to the intensities of the nague without taking the necessary precautions, nearly every character that enters Holdstock's ghost wood finds him or herself ensnared. "I am trapped in this wood by something in my own mind as surely as if I were a mythago myself", warns one of Holdstock's failed heroes, who is locked into the forest by his own unresolved anger, endlessly pursued by a self-empowered Oedipal demon (1986:64-5). Unable to return from their journeys into the wilderness and chaos, Holdstock's characters bear witness to the fate of those who try to synthesise dangerous oppositions without the benefit of wisdom. Their failure is not restricted to fiction: unless we (in the real world) properly take charge of our irrational needs and desires, "assuring their continuous connections and transversal tie-ins ... emptied [BwO] doubles will triumph", caution Deleuze and Guattari, citing numerous examples of the "cancerous BwOs" that are liable to flourish in the wake of careless experimentation in our "schizophrenic" modern world (1988:166). Our technological milieu finds us "steeped in a view of the body as subordinated to consciousness and [of] 'natural' organic organization [as being] radically distinguishable from an 'outer' material order", confirm Peter Jowers and Sean Watson (1995:2), warning that "BwOs can easily be frozen into stasis by the 'lack/need/want at the heart of the modern subject" (1995:2-3). As a way out of the impasse of "limited connectivity" brought about by the "freezing" and "schizophrenic" effects of rationalism and capitalism, Jowers and Watson point towards the BwOs formulated by the "schizo heroine" of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972): "we must become perfectly random connectors ... randomly

connecting signs, symbols, energy flows, data, knowledge, fantasy, and bodies in new flows of desiring production" (1995:2-3). It is only by abandoning all rationality and by making random connections, by erratically sampling across the spectrum of myth and childhood memory, that Tallis manages to escape Lavondyss.

Blame for the numerous botched BwOs who remain trapped within the folds and curvatures of the forest cannot be laid on the trickster sylvan mind. Rather, the fault lies with the human voyagers who have allowed themselves to become ensnared in their own schizophrenic projections. The forest and its mythagos "are like dreams ... and [like dreams] they behave in the manner of the dream according to the memory [and desire] of the dreamer" (1990:279). "Drawing on the mind [and] fusing to generate myth" (1990:280), the forest mind attempts to make connections and transversal tie-ins between conflicting human desires in its creation of multiple virtual worlds of visceral possibility. Brimming with unformed and unstructured flows to which the human unconscious gives shape, the forest can be likened to Deleuze and Guattari's "cosmic egg": "an unformed body of energetic and mineral materials having the potential to give rise to a variety of organs once it is fertilized" (De Landa 2000:262). Impregnated by "madness", the egg hatches an empty BwO, "a barren world, a place of death, of cold" (1990:343). It is towards this static "Otherworld" that those who enter the forest are inextricably drawn (1990:343).<sup>xx</sup>Jowers describes the effect of arrested or malformed BwOs as follows:

William Burroughs' most regularly used metaphor for the physicality of social control is the stasis of junk addiction – locked metabolically into static repetitive parasitic patterns of affect, ultimately tending toward suspension of affect altogether. Dried out, sucked dry, dead husks of bodies, zombies, make endless appearances in Burrough's work. These are ... 'empty BwOs' (Jowers 1995:4)

Deleuze and Guattari begin their treatise on the *Body without Organs* (1988:149-66) with examples of the BwOs of the masochist and the “junkie”, botched BwOs that reflect the “lack/need/want of the [modern] subject” (Jowers 1995:3). “The masochist is looking for a type of BwO that only pain can fill, or travel over. ... The same goes for the drugged body and intensities of cold, *refrigerator waves*”, write Deleuze and Guattari (1988:152). Driven by a desire to transverse intensities of pain, fear, and cold, the humans that enter Rhyhope fashion BwOs filled by “refrigerator waves” from the “world of the nineteen-forties” (1990:343), a world devastated by war (see endnote xxi).

In a psychic premonition before World War I, Jung experienced eschatological refrigerator waves coming from a future manned by “monstrous machines” and it is not inconceivable that these visions of Europe in the grip of an icy hell inspired Holdstock’s notion of an ancient tomorrow-land in the grip of a deadly ice-age.<sup>xxi</sup> Conceived in the mind of someone who was searching for “a future vision of all people”, namely Harry Keeton, one of the protagonists of *Mythago Wood* (1986:294), Lavondyss echoes Jung in its embodiment of Keeton’s deepest fear, that of a devastated world locked in an eternal icy winter. It is an empty BwO intensity map, a rotten psychic egg impregnated by concentrations of unresolved brutality, wounded egos, and psychoses that reflect icy-cold blasts from an apocalyptic immanence conjured on the battle-fields of Europe. Holdstock seems to imply that if humans want to experience transcendence differently, we need to be able to imagine our symbols and ourselves differently, or face a deadly nightfall.

We are in the twilight of our cerebral fantasies. The symbol has lost all power, the accumulation of information has lost all purpose. Memory results in mimicry, reflection will not suffice. (Stelarc 1997:241).

Challenging Stelarc’s notion that humanity’s symbols have lost their potency, Holdstock’s *Mythago* cycle implies that our very survival depends on how we relate to our myths and our fantasies. Rather than discarding myth as anti-rational,

humans should explore the symbols of the forgotten past and learn to fashion better BWOs; ones that forgo the icy intensities of apocalyptic immanence, the media-saturated numbness of the addict and the pain waves of the masochist. *Mythago Wood* and *Lavondyss*, in particular, deal with the ramifications of a journey towards the cold embrace of an icy Otherworld that has been shaped by an interaction between the sylvan mind and the dreams that it sucks from the minds of those that voyage through it. The sylvan landscape of *Bone Forest*, *Mythago Wood*, and *Lavondyss* are all shaped by "minds ... from the world of the nineteen-forties" (1990:343), a world recently devastated by terrible wars that saw civilization overrun by its own monstrous machines.

Humans who voyage into Holdstock's forest invariably become frozen into stasis, trapped, or sucked dry because they are unable to embrace contradictions (such as those between random and calculated, capricious and conscientious, imagination and reality). Enduring the ambiguities of the unknown region depends on each protagonist's to integrate the "two faces of the Green Knight ... Trickster and Conscience", writes Holdstock (1994:362). These inner qualities, which we have projected onto nature (as the Trickster) and culture (as Conscience or Control), are extrapolated in *The Hollowing* (1994):

Trickster [is] the shadow ... the manifestation of our first consciousness ... Conscience [is] the part of us that sees danger in trusting our own needs [or instincts]. ... It's a primary quality ... a gatekeeper between states of mind, and it is very deeply buried. Like dark and light, Trickster and Conscience cannot exist separately ... these aspects ... are free in the wood and fighting each other. (1994:307-08)

Nature, the faery forest, and the "Green Monster" or "Green Knight" represent not only our own intuition and instinct, but also the other, the Trickster, the unknown need or shadow that lies outside our comprehension (Holdstock 1994:308).

Holdstock seems to imply that our Conscience needs to re-integrate the unconscious and acknowledge its own primal nature, the Trickster, before we can

“let old dreams pass out and [let] new dreams enter” (1994:352-53). BwOs that are no longer are trapped in glacial deposits from a forgotten past are able to traverse other intensities and possibilities, conceiving of a better world. The real Lavondyss, implies Holdstock, remains inchoate and unknown. An icy hell is only one of many possible worlds that lie beyond the threshold of history; alternately what awaits us could be “a wonderful land ... lit by the earth’s light” (1990:452). We cannot reach an integrated future by blowing up history, and the cultural, biological, and mythological organization of our organs (whether these organs are corporeal or metaphysical). At the same time, it is useless for humanity to become frozen by negative unconscious fantasies. We need to learn from the imagery of our shared symbolic order to become more fluid and adaptable: “the way home [lies] down through the dead”, through our fears and compulsions to an understanding of the nebulous and forgotten into “a new world ... a brightly blossoming world ... [where we must] add our voices and dreams to the dreams and voices that are striving so hard to make their vision and courage known” (1994:364-65).

The replacement of the icy Lavondyss, conceived by minds from the 1940s, with the Green Chapel, an alternative Otherworld conjured by an adolescent mind of the 1960s, implies that the cultural imagination of an era is a critical springboard for the building of new and more fruitful BwOs. The verdant Otherworld of the chapel, animated by the psychedelic explorations and global movements for gender and racial equality that animated the 1960s, is described as a place of “healing” (1994:354) that lies between the world of history and the freedoms of instinct and dreaming. The chapel is a “passing place” where the juvenile and potentially destructive technological fictions of humanity are capable of reintegrating with the rhythms of the natural world (1994:352-53).

In the following chapter I will move from the wildwood into imagined extraterrestrial environments conceived of by sf author David Zindell. Despite the apparent differences between these fictional landscapes, Zindell's technologically advanced interstellar humans and cyborg deities share a commonality with Holdstock's sylvan voyagers and archaic mythagos. Both authors are unified in their exploration of new narrative spaces where technology and shamanism can coalesce, producing new hybridisations between science and fantasy, emotion and cognition. Like Holdstock, Zindell fuses oppositions, crafting new science-fictional BwOs that can traverse the unknown regions beyond the stable and fixed boundaries that separate nature and culture, mind and body, human and machine.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Although Holdstock does not directly allude to the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, the *Mythago* cycle, as I will argue, chronicles the formulation of what Deleuze and Guattari have termed the Body without Organs or BwO, namely a shamanic body that is not fixed, stable or rational, but rather constantly exploring and adapting, teeming with "forces, essences, substances, elements [and] remissions" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:159). For Deleuze and Guattari, the process of becoming, experimenting and distortion that are central to the formation of BwOs forms the cornerstone of the literary genre of science fiction (see 1988:248).

<sup>ii</sup> Alexander Porteous's delightful *The Lore of the Forest* describes in exquisite detail the numerous mythologies surrounding trees and forests. "Almost all the Semitic and Aryan races inherited the tradition of humankind having originated from trees" (1986:156). To this the abundant groves of Palestine, ancient Gaul, Greece, Rome, and Britain stand as testament.

<sup>iii</sup> In *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* (2000), contemporary historian and post-modern philosopher Manuel De Landa explores the connection between the evolution of human technological, cultural and historical lineages and that of plants, genes, viruses, and geological activities. De Landa writes: "our individual bodies and minds are mere coagulations or decelerations in flows of biomass, genes, memes and norms. ... We might be defined both by the materials we are temporarily binding or chaining to our organic bodies and cultural minds and the timescale of the binding operation. Over the millennia, it is the flow of biomass through food webs, as well as the flow of genes through generations that matter. ... Our languages may also be seen over time as momentary slowing downs or thickenings in a flow of norms that gives rise to a multitude of different structures" (2000:258-59). De Landa furthermore explores "the flow of solar energy through ecosystems (flesh circulating in natural food webs) which have escaped urbanization, particularly animal and vegetable weeds", and examines how organic flows that have escaped domestication have, in turn, influenced and been bound up in human cultures and technologies (262). One instance of this type of undomesticated flow which human culture taps into and appears to mimic is that of the untamed wildwood or forest, a subject that Robert Harrison explores from the perspective of mythology in *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (1992). Although Harrison and De Landa (in certain instances) explore similar territory to that of Holdstock, Holdstock's unique angle on the 'lore of the forest' seems to have preceded both De Landa's and Harrison's analyses (the publication of *Mythago Wood*

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[1984] and its sequel *Lavondyss* [1986] significantly predate both Harrison's *Forests* [1992] and De Landa's *A Thousand Years* [2000]).

<sup>iv</sup> Artist Alex Grey reflects a dark vision of technology in his painting *Gaia*. Divided into two halves, this painting provides a “vision of a world poised on the brink of either self-destruction or self-preservation” (Grey 1990:29). Whereas the self-preserving half reflects the nurturing womb of the *petra-genetrix*, the darker half reflects a potentially destructive and capital-driven technological culture, a dark version of the *techo-genetrix* that could easily escape human custodianship and poison all organic planetary life. In describing the subject-matter of his painting, Grey writes: “Gaia was the tree of life or web of life with her root in the subatomic, atomic, molecular, and cellular levels of matter (mater/mother) reaching upward through oceans, stones, soil, grass, forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, air and atmosphere to nurture all plants and creatures. ... Gaia's body was being ravaged and destroyed. ... A diseased and demonic phallus had erected (machine) structures all over the earth to suck dry Gaia's milk and turn it into power and money. The wasteland of disposable culture was piled high and was seeping into the microgenetic pool causing diseases and defects in the great chain of life” (1990:84).

<sup>v</sup> Examples of runaway Artificial Intelligences (AI's) are rife in science fiction – these include *HAL* in Arthur C. Clarke's seminal *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Ship* in Frank Herbert's *Destination Void* (1966), *Jill* in Greg Bear's *Queen of Angels* (1990), and *Ganesh* in Tricia Sullivan's *Dreamers In Smoke* (1997).

<sup>vi</sup> William Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy consists of *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mono Lisa Overdrive* (1988).

<sup>vii</sup> Holdstock refers to elves and faeries, the more traditional inhabitants of the greenwood, as primary myth-images of the ubiquitous trickster archetype: “A fairy is something ... so old that the flesh of myth has withered from its bones ... [they] come from the first of times, the worst of times, the time of the first forests, the first fires, the first language that consisted of more than simple signals ... The time of first insight, first irrational fear, first nightmare. ... ‘Shape-memories’ from the earliest time of human consciousness. They are all we have left of the savannah, of the great lake cultures around Olduvai, of the long walks out of Africa. But because they are so old, they are tenacious. ... They have lingered in our minds, as unshakeable as our shadows on a bright day” (1994:124). Originating from the time of the first great cultural upheavals, the ‘shape-memories’ that inhabit Rhyhope Wood seem to share a bond with the ‘primitive’ trickster-like voodoo-like entities that spontaneously arise to populate the science-fictional digital ‘forest’ of Gibson's matrix. Arising from the cultural displacements of the slave trade, Gibson's use of voodoo metaphors represents a “spiritual collage” of archetypes – some indescribably archaic, and some new (Olsen 1991:285). Like Holdstock's “shape-memories”, Gibson's voodoo-like digital deities can also be seen as “construct[s] through which to describe an [historical] event” (Olsen 1991:285-286).

<sup>viii</sup> German writer Ernst Jünger, in his logbook of personal drug experimentation, referred to himself as a *psychonaut* – an inner voyager who employs hallucinogenic drugs as his vehicle. The term has also been utilised by chaos magician Peter Carroll to refer to a mental voyager who embarks on shamanic odysseys of discovery into the universes of the mind (Ott 2001:1). Carol Brown describes the experiences of Holdstock's characters in the Rhyhope Wood as explorations of a “psychomythic landscape”, an inner landscape of the imagination (1993:163). In *The Hollowing*, the author alludes to the hallucinogenic properties of the forest by comparing its effects to that of “LSD ... [or] magic mushrooms” (1994:91). Like the cerebral effects of a hallucinogenic drug, the forest in *Lavondyss* is described as unlocking “concealed places of the mind ... forbidden and forgotten places” (1990: 341).

<sup>ix</sup> The journey, flight, and descent undertaken by the shaman is discussed in chapter 1.

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<sup>x</sup> “Cyborgs employ oxymoronic language to deal with the paradoxes that provide their reason for existence: the entangled contradictions of technology and organicity, culture and nature, death and life, destruction and creation” (Van Loon 1996:240). The trickster world that Haraway’s cyborgs must learn to navigate is similar to Holdstock’s wildwood, a zone where boundaries overlap and where characters need to engage in novel forms of embodiment and confront a contradictory realm where a myth could originate in a future science and the past in a future event (see endnote xiv). In describing the constantly shifting psychic landscape of the forest, Holdstock does not demonise the mode of thought associated with its seeming opposite – the world of science and technology. Instead, “Holdstock succeeds in wedding the analytical/critical mode of thought usually associated with science to [that of] the mystical [and] visionary” (Brown 1993:171). Similarly, despite the “perverse shifts of perspective”, undertaken by Haraway’s cyborgs (Haraway 1991:154), her hybrid creatures are nonetheless construed as creatures of “technologically mediated societies” (1991:154) that never lose sight of science, but merge it with its seeming opposite, myth, in their search for a better world (1991:164). Her cyborg politics, like Holdstock’s science-fictional mythopoesis, is grounded in “ether [and] quintessence” (1991:153) as much as it is in “social reality” (1991:149).

<sup>xi</sup> Caroll Brown writes: “The foundation from which Holdstock builds his narrative [in the *Mythago* cycle] is predicated upon the existence of the Jungian archetype as a genuine force in human psychological history, extrapolating only its corporeal manifestation. ... If we are in doubt as to Holdstock’s mythopoetic intentions, we need simply turn to Joseph Cambell’s *Hero With a Thousand Faces* as a map. Cambell’s Jungian-based interpretation of world mythological motifs provides [Holdstock with] his mytho-narrative” (1993:160-161).

<sup>xii</sup> Hakim Bey’s seminal *TAZ: The Temporary Automous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (1991) is a collection of manifestos that rally against the commodification of desire and call for the onset of “Psychic Paleolithism”. Bey avers that all modern cultural industries (from the media through to academia) appear to be working towards the trivialization and nullification of meaning (1991:75) and calls for a liberation of the “*peak experience* on the social as well as individual scale ... a real science of psychotopography ... driftworks, webworks [and] psychic nomadism” (1991:134) Bey’s “creative evolutionism” invokes a form of shamanic “experimentation” that involves an exploration of the “irrational” and the “chaos of the unconscious;” a quest for the “*possible*”, which is “rooted in a sense of the magnificent overabundance of reality” (Bey 1991:136-37). Calling upon a “combination of information and desire”, Bey invokes a futuristic technology that embraces the senses and the imagination (1991:115-16).

<sup>xiii</sup> Industrialism and the rapid advancement of the sciences in the Victorian era, for example, led to a romantic counteraction that explored the Cartesian opposite of reason, namely supernaturalism. The tension that arose between manifestations of scientific progress (order, morality, and the notion that humans were perfectible) and its romantic counterbalance (an imaginary return to the primitive, imperfect, and amoral condition of nature) led to a certain degree of anxiousness in the Victorian psyche (Gedhuld 1983:109). In the realm of literature, this tension found an outlet in the reinvention of the gothic horror novel (1983:109). These novels, called “penny-dreadfuls”, and “shilling shockers”, which explored the co-existence of the rational and the irrational as well as the primitive and the modern, resonated powerfully with Victorian audiences who were expected to uphold a public façade of civilised behaviour but were self conscious regarding their own duality and unable to deny their own bestial or irrational natures. (Gedhuld 1983:109). Amongst these novels ranked Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which has been called alternately “the most definitive novel of the gothic genre ... [and] the first genuine sf novel” (Clute 99:1099). “Like Shelley’s earlier work, *Mythago Wood* is a story of myth told in a scientific mode. ... Although Frankenstein is based on physics and medicine, Holdstock’s *Mythago* cycle extrapolates on the “science of psychology” (Brown 1993:159). Although psychology may be construed by some as being far removed from the logical discourses of physics and medicine, it still forms part of the scientific world-view, which operates in an analytical and critical mode (Brown 1993:159). Physicist Edward Wilson calls

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psychology a “science of the mind”, classifying it under the umbrella of “scientific culture” (Wilson 1998:44). Wilson avers, for example, that like many other scientific discourses, including contemporary biology, “modern psychology is dominated by the metaphor of human beings as machines” (1998:44). By merging psychology and primitive spirituality, “Holdstock succeeds in wedding the analytical/critical mode of thought usually associated with science and technology to [that of] the mystical [and] visionary”, writes Brown (1993:171).

<sup>xiv</sup> “Names, words, half remembered. Ursh. Sion. Earth Perhaps. Science, perhaps. Earth watchers expelled by Science? Do the earliest of folk heroes, or legendary characters, come not from the past but from [the future]” (Holdstock 1986:284). Clarifying this excerpt from *Mythago Wood*, Carroll Brown writes: “Does mythology [perhaps] originate in science? With the boundaries between the two obfuscated by our changing ontological notions and the increasingly ephemeral nature of our understanding of physical reality, original nature can be difficult to locate. ... Arthur C Clarke explores a similar question in *Childhood's End*, in which, in the final revelation of the alien Overlord's identities, we learn that the Christian conception of Satan stems from a collective race memory from the future” (1993:170-171).

<sup>xv</sup> “Darest thou now, O Soul, / Walk out with me toward the unknown region, / Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?” (1990:i).

<sup>xvi</sup> “Nothing could be more disembodied or insensate than cyberspace. It's like having had your everything amputated”, reads an extract from a leading cyber-culture magazine, *Mondo 2000* (in Sobchack 1993:577). Donna Haraway derides this type of “negative cyborgism” as an “escape velocity ... a deadly fantasy” (in Sobchack 1993:577), a futile and ungrounded transcendentalist impulse that has more to do with the “god-trick” of history than it does with any type of realizable and realistic embodied future.

<sup>xvii</sup> “On November 28, 1947, Artaud declares war on the organs” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:150). Recoiling against the “organic organization of the organism”, Artaud's conception of the Body without Organs (BwO) had “done with the Judgement of God ... the Trinity ... three great strata that concern us: the organism, significance, and subjectification ... you will be organized ... you will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted ... you will be a subject, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into the subject of a statement” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:158-59). “The organism”, he declares, “is not at all the body, [the true body is] the BwO” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:158). Resisting attempts at being concretized, the true body is a shaman's body, a virtual entity – a pure immanence, an ongoing experiment (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:150). Taking their cue from Artaud, and inspired by Spinoza and Nietzsche, “Deleuze and Guattari write of a human body [in the context of a technological milieu], which is capable of being affected, of having feelings, passions and sensations. Affects are pure flows of chemical, electrical, thermal and kinetic energy, and flows between these energy states. These energy states of the material body are linked to those outside it. There are connective flows between the body, other bodies, objects, matter. ... Their technical term for the affective material body is the Body without Organs or BwO. The combination of the of the BwO and its energies with the limitless resources of linguistic and other cultural codes is the key to the special kind of creativity and mutation of which human beings are potentially capable. The creative sign-body, engaged in ‘lines of flight’ across the codes, they call the full BwO” (Jowers 1995:2-3).

<sup>xviii</sup> Manuel De Landa re-interprets Deleuze and Guattari's notions concerning the BwO. He explains: “The BwO was created in an effort to conceive the genesis of form (in geological, biological, and cultural structures) as related exclusively to immanent capabilities of the flows of matter-energy information ... Their theory of abstract machines ... explains this inherent morphogenetic potential ... [these are] engineering diagrams defining the structure-generating processes that give rise to more or less permanent forms but are not unique to those forms. Attractors [or ‘sorting devices’] are the simplest type of abstract machine, operating at the level of non-linear, destratified flows. Attractors represent patterns of stability and becoming that are inherent in abstract dynamical systems and may be ‘incarnated’ in a variety of actual physical

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systems. ... If and when the materials on which a sorting device operates acquire the ability to replicate with variation, a new abstract machine emerges, in the form of a probe head capable of exploring a space of possible forms" (2000:263-264). In the above quote, De Landa summarises the general manner in which BwOs operate in and across geological, biological, cultural, and many other potential milieus. Because they represent "intense, destratified matter-energy", BwOs are free to act as probe heads or exploratory agents that scan "abstract spaces of possibility" to retrieve or discover new arrangements, or processes of organisation that can be grafted onto existing bodies (whether cultural, physical, or even symbolic/mythic bodies). In such a manner, a shaman may be seen, alternately, as a sorting device or a probe-head, traversing planetary information spaces in search of novel forms of symbolic, cultural, linguistic, social and technical organisation. Similarly, the process of mythogenesis carried out by Holdstock's sylvan mind can be seen as a process whereby it generates probe-heads that are sent out to explore abstract (and visceral) spaces of possibility and accumulate new organizational material whereby the sylvan psychogeography can refashion or enrich itself. The channels of exploration (*hollowings* or *geist-zones* as they are referred to throughout the *Mythago* cycle) left by its myth-images become access-routes to the different strata in the organisation of the forest's "body": "Lytton unfurled a map of Rhyhope ... entrances into Rhyhope are 'hollowings', which run into different planes and different times ... Otherworlds [that can be accessed] through hollowings. ... One drops to a lake-filled land ... probably from Slavonian legend. ... [Another leads] to a valley filled with stone tombs. ... So far we've detected more than five layers of underworlds. ... You'll get used to the dreams. ... That's just part of the process of generation. ... You're creating life, although you don't know it. Out there the wood is listening to you, feeding off you, enriching both itself and its underworlds from you. It's drawing out your dreams, your memories, your fears" (1994:130-32).

<sup>xix</sup> Deleuze and Guattari draw their conception of plateaus from Gregory Bateson who is cited as using the term to describe continuous regions of intensity that are constituted in such a way so as not to allow themselves to be interrupted by any external termination or climax (1992:158). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they explore and expand on Bateson's concept in full.

<sup>xx</sup> "Lavondyss ... is a place of snow, of ice, of winter (1990:343), the earliest human memory dating from the Interglacial period when ice covered most of Europe. "Why this should be of such importance in the minds of you and me, and all the others from the world of the nineteen-forties I do not know", remarks one of Holdstock's protagonists, Wynne-Jones (1990:343).

<sup>xxi</sup> Jung writes: "In the spring and summer of 1914, I had a thrice repeated dream that in the middle of summer, an Artic cold-wave descended and froze the land to ice ... All green things were killed by frost. ... At the end of July 1914 I was invited by the British Medical Association to deliver a lecture. ... In my state of mind just then, with the fears that were pursuing me, it seemed fateful that I should have to talk on the importance of the unconscious at such a time! On 1<sup>st</sup> August the world war broke out. Now my task was clear: I had to try to understand what happened and to what extent my own experience coincided with that of [hu]mankind in general" (1995:200). It is significant for Holdstock's fiction that the great world wars ended with another premonition of a deadly apocalyptic winter - this time it was nuclear in origin. The atomic technologies that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki (and the subsequent stockpiling of these weapons of mass destruction by the world's superpowers) inspired the infamous cold-war, a potentially deadly socio-economic and political standoff between the world's superpowers that left a massive imprint on the modern imagination. "UFO's ... faeries ... spectral critters ...the motif of a twilight zone where the borders between phantasm and fact are not so tightly policed ... [These are] manifestations of nuclear anxiety", avers Erik Davis (1998:228).