Pattern Recognition is [not] the only potentially science-fictional element in the BIGEND TRILOGY" (282 n3); "Gibson's latest triptych as a whole lacks any of the motifs that would classify it as conventionally science-fictional [except for one]" (271); and "Gibson's later prose lacks conventional sf novums [except for one]" (273). Tomberg refuses to acknowledge the key alternate-present world clue first identified in Donald Morse's "Advertising and Calculators in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*" (*SFS* #93) and brilliantly elaborated in Neil Easterbrook's "Alternate Presents: The Ambivalent Historicism of *Pattern Recognition*" (*SFS* #100); it is referred to in wider or other contexts in my "The Present World in Other Terms" (*SFS* #101), "John Wyndham's *Chocky* (1968): The First Covert Alternate World?" (*SFS* #105), and "Locating Slipstream" (*Foundation* #111; for a corrected version of the Venn diagram please see the Italian translation in *Anarres* #2). In our world, in 1945, Curt Herzstark, the inventor of the Curta Calculator, made only three prototype models of his invention; in the alternate present of *Pattern Recognition*, a "fourth prototype" model exists (New York: Putnam, 2003, 249). (Of course, if Gibson were to respond to this note with a note of his own claiming that he had simply made a mistake, my position would be weakened.)

Tomberg's attempt to identify the BIGEND TRILOGY as a new form of sf realism depends finally on the overstated claim that "Unlike in slipstream ... it is not a case of adorning a realist setting with a few closely extrapolated science-fictional elements..." (263). But a reader can choose, as I have, to read the trilogy exactly as slipstream in which a realist setting is adorned with two sf elements (Cayce's special talent and the overriding alternate-present scenario).—**David Ketterer, University of Liverpool**

Author's Response. I am grateful to David Ketterer for his thorough consideration, useful comments, and constructive criticism on my article about Gibson's BIGEND TRILOGY.

I concede that I should have provided reasoning for the order of my epigraphs—simply listing them linearly by the thematic order in which I return to them in Section 3, for ease of the reader browsing back and forth—and I appreciate the suggestion that there could have been a more thorough way of systematizing them. I also agree that the further characterization of them through more specific dualities than organic/technological (immaterial/material, inner/outer, inanimate/animate, human/alien, as noted by Ketterer) could have led to interesting opportunities for subsequent analysis, although such specifics were not immediately relevant to my argument.

As to taking into account the "cynical alternative explanations" and "marketing considerations" of Gibson's turn to contemporary fiction—they may warrant a mention, but my analysis focused on the texture of Gibson's poetics and on the cultural and philosophical conditions of its (simultaneous) dislocation and "persistence" in the contemporary genre system. "Marketing considerations" would have constituted an altogether different approach—and

one where "he writes the way he writes" does not represent a sufficient depth of analysis.

Nevertheless, and my personal rhetorical idiosyncrasies aside, the notion, central to my argument, that Gibson's latest triptych as a whole lacks any of the motifs that would classify it conventionally as sf, is something that I couldn't have stressed enough, and something I stand by. If anything, it was a mistake on my part to surrender to one of Gibson's own statements (see "Interview: William Gibson" [*Newsweek* 141.8 (24 Feb 2003): 75]), and call Cayce's talent science fictional in the first place. This is where Ketterer's and my approaches to (science) fiction radically differ—and I consider it to be a difference in so-called "first principles" between which "a reader can choose." Neither is without its merits.

I propose that the question of whether to read Gibson's material either as "slipstream in which a realist setting is adorned with two sf elements" or as the convergence of science-fictional estrangement and realist plausibility comes down to whether one considers the *verisimilitude of a text* to be dependent on its correspondence to the facts "in our world" or independent from it (and in some cases even opposed to it).

If correspondence is accepted over verisimilitude to be of foremost importance, then the "realism" of the fictional world can be contested with numerous (or even countless) historical/scientific confirmations of the falsity of presented "fictional facts." In the case of any such confirmation, the fictional present (as in Gibson) is automatically converted to and confirmed to be an "alternate present" (which under certain circumstances could be designated sf). Ketterer, following Morse and Easterbrook (see my original article), bases his criticism on the well-documented argument that there is at least one alternate-present-world clue in *Pattern Recognition* that undermines its "realism": the fourth prototype of the Curta Calculator of which, "in our world," only three were made. But such a confirmatory mechanism, based on correspondence, is not without its hindrances—for example, it is too open to unintentional inconsistencies on the writer's part. Ketterer himself mentions that if "Gibson himself were to respond to this note with a note of his own claiming that he had simply made a mistake, [Ketterer's] position would be weakened." While I do not want to go too far down this road, there are already several documented examples where Gibson admitted such oversights: the previous non-existence of Buzz Rickson's *black* MA-1 is one such case (see Gibson's blog [1 Dec. 2005]; Rickson's made a black MA-1 only after *Pattern Recognition* came out). But one accidental deviance is sufficient to call into question the decisive subversion of others. (Why, for example, wasn't the black MA-1 considered the crucial "point of departure" to the alternative present—especially when Easterbrook concedes in his note 8 that "though the Curta is the catalyst that connects the novel's various threads, the fact that no fourth prototype exists is not fundamental to the narrative dynamics" [Easterbrook 500]. Does this confirm that the Curta is of almost as little importance as the Rickson's?)

In other words, if we took the logic of correspondence to its extremes, we would have to engage ourselves in, on one hand, the endless (non)-confirmation of the correspondence of fictional to actual facts, and, on the other, the endless hesitation about whether a detected non-correspondence was a deliberate insertion or simply a mistake. And all of this overlooks the basic undermining insight, confirmed by both Easterbrook and Ketterer, that all fictional discourse "necessarily forms an 'alternative present' of the readerly now" (Easterbrook 504). This insight is too general in nature to be of dynamic use in the current discussion, although its narrow function of "attempt[ing] to distinguish the genre-specific ways in which sf does this" (see Ketterer's "The Present World in Other Terms" [part three of *New Worlds For Old* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1974)]) deserves at least a separate article. The question concerning the validity of my own argument is, rather, whether the "alterity" of the present in the BIGEND TRILOGY, supposedly based on the non-existence of the fourth Curta prototype, is in any specific way thematically "science fictional." I am inclined to say no, just as the one based on the previously non-existent Rickson's would also not be sf.

This is where I would like to counter (as I implicitly did in my article) correspondence with verisimilitude as the central aim and validating effect of a "realist" literary text. Since all fiction in any case forms an alternate present of the readerly now (that Cayce "exists altogether" is another minor counterfactual), its "fictional facts" needn't necessarily correspond to the actual scientific or historical facts "in our world" but "merely" constitute one of its plausible reflections. Far from being dependent on (scientific, historical) correspondence, verisimilitude is a more general and wider socio-cultural phenomenon, drawing its validity from notions (such as "cultural intuition") that are more vague, context-dependent, and not so easily confirmed by, say, strict scientific observation. In the cultural context that Gibson focuses on, there are a lot more things that are plausible but not correspondent than there are things that are correspondent and *therefore* plausible—just as the human imagination could come up with more things that could have been than things that actually are (possibility/potentiality is "larger" than necessity). What is *realist* needn't, to an extent, correspond to what is *real*. (And this, in the final instance, is also true about science in sf; as Carl Freedman notes in *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Wesleyan UP, 2000), what's at stake is "not any epistemological judgment external to the text itself on the rationality or irrationality of the latter's imaginings, but rather ... the attitude *of the text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed" (18; emphasis in original). In other words, what matters is not the fictional science's correspondence to actual science but the *cognition effect* of the text taking its science seriously.)

The fact that there was no fourth Curta prototype doesn't compromise the overall realist plausibility of Gibson's fictional world, where such a thing exists, for most readers. The same goes for Buzz Rickson's black MA-1; the same goes for all the brand names, to which these texts are "prone" to the extent that, as Jameson notes, they "work" even if they're made up; and the same goes for Cayce's peculiar "talent"—I am tempted to say that for a contemporary cultural subject, immersed in advertising and commerce, such an anxiety is entirely plausible, even if not (yet) scientifically confirmed. There is, of course, an extent to this plausibility, and this is why the "minor counterfactuals" in Gibson's text are *realist* rather than science-fictional: a fourth Curta prototype is nowhere nearly as cognitively estranging as (say) a fully communicating artificial intelligence with human features (even if a specialist came up and said that conceiving such an entity is likely in the near future, making it a possibility—whereas the retrospective existence of the fourth prototype in the past is impossible).

One could take the incongruence of correspondence and verisimilitude a step further and claim that in contemporary western technoculture, as well as in its corresponding sf, there are things that are "perfectly real" or "correspondent" but utterly implausible: isn't the Large Hadron Collider in CERN such an (almost sf, cognitively estranging) phenomenon for a common person? And couldn't one say the same about a large part of "hard" sf written and validated by authors in possession of the necessary scientific expertise, like much of Vernor Vinge's work? There are many potential readers who would deem some of the constructs in his novels almost incomprehensible, and therefore *a priori* implausible, even if such extrapolations followed very closely and truthfully the current status of research. Scientific reality and cultural realism are, therefore, different things—and Gibson, I argue, has always cared more for the plausibility of the latter rather than his work's correspondence to the former.

Nevertheless, correspondence should not be underestimated in favor of verisimilitude—and this is especially true concerning sf with its traditionally distinct, science-minded readership. The final preference between correspondence and verisimilitude—and here I agree with and concede to Ketterer—depends upon the choice of "readerly distance." Simply put, it depends upon whether one reads sf as "genre fiction" (which requires a "shorter distance" to the subject matter and where plausibility depends directly upon correct correspondence) or as "belles lettres," as literature as such (where the subject matter can be approached from a "greater distance" and where plausibility has much more autonomy). It might have something to do with the increasingly techn(olog)ical nature of contemporary western culture that the sf market has opened up to larger audiences, with sf being considered, more and more, *as literature in general*, read by "common readers" and integrated, step by step, into the sphere of autonomous verisimilitude where realism has long resided. Nevertheless, I don't think that in this case it has anything to do with conscious cynical "marketing decisions" since these don't explain the persistence of Gibson's poetics amid the shift in cultural conditions. Rather, this case recognizes that, for Gibson, the present can no longer be reflected on through *plausible* temporal detour to the future: the representational energy that was once spent reaching out to some "world to come" is now spent on "merely" plausibly reaching out to the present itself.—**Jaak Tomberg, Estonian Literary Museum**