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Douglas Armato
University of Minnesota Press
111 Third Avenue South
Suite 290
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Dear Mr. Armato,

I write to propose for publication a critical edition of essays by the magazine editor, inventor, and novelist Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967) titled *The Perversity of Things: Writings on Media, Technology, and Science Fiction.* This volume makes available texts foundational for both science fiction and the emergence of media studies: editorials, speculative blueprints, literary criticism, and media histories that have been out of print since their original publication in Gernsback's magazines from 1905-1933. The evolution of these publications from an electrical parts catalog into a fully-fledged literary genre is an untold story in American literary and media history.

While Gernsback is best remembered for launching the first science fiction magazine in 1926 (*Amazing Stories*), and his name adorns the award given out each year to the best works in the genre (the Hugo Award), he now receives little more than a brief mention in science fiction studies. The incredibly rich context of the genre's birth in Gernsback's fleet of technical publications for the amateur experimenter, as well as his work as a pioneer in media technologies and broadcasting techniques, have been entirely overlooked. In his illustrated magazines and compendiums of amateur designs, one could find a literary treatise on what the genre of "scientifiction" should look like alongside blueprints for a homebrewed television receiver well before its commercial possibility. Gernsback published profiles of new technologies used in cinema production and projection (a medium itself in

its infancy), commenting once those films were released on the depiction of new and often imaginary devices depicted on screen. Long before Gernsback founded *Amazing Stories,* these magazines used speculative fiction to find a language suited to the analysis of emerging media like radio, television, or the more exotic osophone and telegraphone.

The Perversity of Things, named after a Gernsback essay on the influence that objects exert on thought, seeks to provide a reappraisal of both the "hard" technical roots of American science fiction and the highly speculative orientation toward media technologies during this period. Science fiction in its early days wasn't just a literary form, it was a mode of interacting with new media.

The need for this volume has become apparent in recent years as we experience technological revolutions in the fabric of the everyday similar to those that brought readers to the Gernsback publications a century ago. The ability of Gernsback's ideas to speak to us today can be seen in the ways that images from his magazines circulate online through a wide variety of blogs and social image sharing sites. Gernsback's life and works are now beginning to receive a more formal treatment, with two major museum exhibits recently held, one at Luxembourg's National Center for Literature in 2011, and another in 2013 at the ZKM (Center for Art and Media Technology) in Karlsruhe, Germany. In addition, the visual artist Eric Schockmel is currently making an animated documentary film about Gernsback.

This volume has the potential for broad-based appeal to both academic and popular audiences. A scant few works of scholarship have been devoted to this period in the history of science fiction, and it is my hope that the availability of these texts can significantly revise our understanding of the genre's origins. Because Gernsback's writings explore many branching paths not taken in the history of media technologies, this book will be useful for media studies as well, a field increasingly interested in the "archaeology" of dead, hybrid, and imaginary media. In design studies, where "design fiction" and "speculative design" are becoming vibrant fields of inquiry, a book surveying the prehistory of rapid prototyping and tinkering would prove a valuable resource. These essays can find an audience outside of academia as well, as they were inherently meant to be read by a popular audience without sacrificing the sophistication of their ideas.

To offer you a sense of this material I have enclosed two sample articles, using a page layout mockup with wide footnote columns that can include

(public domain) images and blueprints. I have been in contact with members of Gernsback's family, who are very enthusiastic about this project and have assured me that the magazines and his writings remain in the public domain. I have previously published on Gernsback in *Grey Room* and *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media,* as well as presented material from this book at Columbia, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, the Winterthur Museum of American material culture, and Universit de Paris XIII, among other venues.

Drawing on extensive archival research from the collections at the Hugo Gernsback Papers at Syracuse University (research generously funded by the Princeton Program in American Studies), I propose a selected edition of roughly 80 essays ranging from 500 to 2,500 words each. This edition, including editorial apparatus and footnotes, would run approximately 100,000 words.

I am currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University, where I am developing my dissertation on the cultural history of the gadget into a book manuscript (see my enclosed CV). Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I have submitted this query to two other presses, and I will let you know immediately should I receive interest from one of them. In the meantime, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Grant R. Wythoff