Thursday, February 7th, 2019
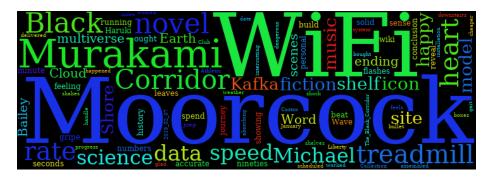

Figure 1: Word Cloud

The New Treadmill

The scheduled installation date kept changing, due to dangerous weather, but we did in fact have our treadmill delivered and assembled. I'm pretty happy with. So far I'm glad that I bit the bullet and bought a higher-end model, rather than a much cheaper model from Costco. This one seems to be able to handle my running gait without feeling like it is going to come apart. It shakes a bit, but it seems like the shock-absorbing system is doing its job, and it feels pretty solid. Perhaps not quite as solid as the models I used to use at Liberty Athletic Club, back in the nineties, but those probably cost ten grand.

I've only got a couple of gripes about the treadmill. The first is that the heart rate sensor function doesn't work very well. When it locks on and actually calculates a heart rate, it seems to be pretty accurate. But it sometimes takes thirty seconds or more, showing very inaccurate low rates, before it jumps up and shows some accurate numbers. Sometimes it takes much longer and I have to give up and try again in a minute or two. What's strange about this is that there's a little heart icon that flashes to indicate the heartbeats it is detecting, and that little icon will be flashing at about 120 (house house speed) or 130 (trance music speed) or 140 (dubstep music speed). Having been a DJ and spent time practicing beat-mixing these kinds of music, I have a feel for counting these beats per minute. But the calculated heart rate will spend tens of seconds showing numbers in the eighties or nineties (chill-out or old-school hip-hop speed). That

ain't right! And having written code that samples data, such as GPS position data and optical brightness data, to present a smooth running average, I know that it really ought to work better than this.

My other gripe is that it wants to be on the WiFi, and I don't want it on the WiFi. It constantly flashes a little WiFi icon. Apparently the WiFi is configured using an application, or web site, which must mean that out of the box the treadmill's WiFi is on and listening. I'm not happy about that. I'd like to find a way to disable it, but I'm not sure there is one, at least not a way that doesn't involve a soldering iron.

It also seems like there may not be a way to update the firmware without setting up an account on the manufacturer's web site, or via an app, and I'm not happy about that either. I really don't trust Internet of Things devices, and I don't want to deliver my personal data to some untrusted company's servers (and recent events should teach us that they **all** ought to be considered untrustworthy).

Kafka on the Shore by Haruki Murakami, Concluded

I finished *Kafka on the Shore.* The ending is largely a good ending, tying up pretty much every plot line, but also melancholy, and leaves me feeling a bit unsatisfied. This remains one of Murakami's stranger books. I enjoyed it more the second time. Murakami himself said that the key to understanding the novel was to read it multiple times. The second time, I feel like I have a better sense for the structure, and all the things Murakami set up, and how they interlocked with each other. Would a third reading make it suddenly seem much better? I don't know, and I'm not sure I feel up to the experiment.

The Black Corridor by Michael Moorcock, Continued

This is an odd novel by Moorcock. It partakes of some of the psychedelic nonsense that was commonplace in New Wave science fiction of the era, such as repeating phrases that permute as they go down the page, and typographical layout where words intersect as in crossword puzzles. I find most of this unimpressive and masturbatory in 2019, but the story itself is pretty fascinating, a psychological novel that develops an increasing sense of xenophobia and dread, as the narrator reveals more and more about his history and the failings and crimes he is not yet fully willing to acknowledge.

It's about, in part, the collapse of civilization, and about people who wind up increasingly isolated and afraid of others. It seems especially relevant given the political realities today, as Trump demands that we build a wall to keep out immigrants. A wealthy businessman takes a small group of friends and family off the Earth to colonize a distant planet, as Earth is falling into barbarism and nuclear war, just in time. He stays awake to manage the ship on the five-year

journey down the "black corridor" — that five years alone in interstellar space. We see him write in the official log, and also write in his personal journal. And we see him fall into madness and hallucinations and reveal just what he had to do in order to make the journey happen.

It's a short novel but it has quite a build-up to its conclusion. The conclusion, though, left me a bit puzzled as to what happened — what was real, and what wasn't, and whether the protagonist might still be hiding a yet more awful truth from himself. Moorcock has said that the ending was "deliberately ambiguous." That was kind of par for the course in some of the more "experimental" science fiction of the New Wave, but in this case I thought it worked pretty well. I might have to read this one again. But not immediately.

Interestingly, Moorcock's wife at the time, Hilary Bailey, contributed scenes from a work in progress. Her work in progress was a dystopian novel set on Earth, and Moorcock adapted scenes from it to intercut with scenes set in the "the black corridor." Either story might have been grim and interesting, but the intercutting, and juxtapositions that the intercutting produces, is what makes *The Black Corridor* stick in my mind. Bailey is not credited as a co-author. Moorcock, in the Multiverse web site, says that she didn't want the book to be presented as a collaboration, but that he "worked in acknowledgments in the dedication." I didn't find any mention of Bailey in the edition that I read. However her name happened to vanish, she should be remembered — erasure of women's contributions to science fiction and fantasy of that era was unfortunately common.

Rearranging Books

Last night I rearranged some books on my bedroom shelves, carrying an armload of books downstairs to file away in boxes, and moving a bunch of science fiction story collections to a separate shelf for Sam to read. He's been raiding my shelves a lot recently. I love to see him choosing new things to read, and I don't have any books on my shelf he's not allowed to read. But we still have some issues, because he doesn't always take care of them well, and he sometimes leaves books where his younger siblings can find them and damage them. So I am trying to get serious about some rules, like "you can take any book from this shelf, but at the end of the day, it has to go back on the shelf," and "leaving these books, some of which are old and fragile and were expensive or hard to find, sprawled on the floor in random parts of the house is not OK with me."

I'm not quite sure what I'm going to read next. I need to spend some time organizing books downstairs, and looking through the catalog of books in boxes, and maybe the next thing that wants to be read will jump out at me.

Media Discussed

This list does not include books, chapters of books, or other works that I only mentioned briefly in the text above.

- *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami
- *The Black Corridor* by Michael Moorcock, in *Traveling to Utopia* by Michael Moorcock, Edited by John Davey (Gollancz Michael Moorcock Collection)

Ypsilanti, Michigan
Thursday, January 17th and Sunday, January 20th, 2019