Chapter 3: Laboratory and the Laissez-Passer of Labyrinths: The Poetics and Politics of Science Fiction

In the field of contemporary theology, we have the example of Rudolph Bultmann, who attempts to apply scientific logic to the myth of Christianity and ends by "re-mythologizing" Christianity in the language of contemporary science rather than de-mythologizing it. An example of the reverse process is provided by science fiction in which the scientific mode of thought is intentionally mythologized.

~ C. Thomas Sutton and Marilyn Sutton, "Science Fiction as Mythology"

[Flying Saucers and UFOs are objects from the] outer space, which perhaps have long been visible to mankind, but otherwise have no recognizable connection with the earth or its inhabitants. In recent times, however, and just at the moment when the eyes of mankind are turned towards the heavens, partly on account of their fantasies about possible spaceships, and partly in a figurative sense because their earthly existence feels threatened, unconscious contents have projected themselves on these inexplicable heavenly phenomena and given them a significance they in no way deserve.


SF is a controlled way to think and dream about the future. An integration of the mood and attitude of science (the objective universe) with the fears and hopes that spring from the unconscious. Anything that turns you and your social context, the social you, inside out. Nightmares and visions, always outlined by the barely possible.


Fans are not passive consumers. Many of the letters I have read in prozines and fanzines constitute reading as creation, compulsion, consumption, and belonging.

~ Justine Larbalestier, The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction. p.27

But how does humanity become conscious of progress? By its concrete materialization, by those practical manifestations which are the only criteria and the only possible measure of it, that are normally perceptible. Progress, to the general public, is thus an essentially utilitarian notion. The public demands that science make discoveries that are applicable. All those branches of science which have sufficiently "produced" are viewed as being adequately developed: there is no need to pursue them further. In contrast, those which do not appear to produce an increase in our well-being or in our power over nature seem superfluous to us, and we tend to make fun of them—-as we sometimes do of poetry—even though it was not so long ago that astronomy itself was nothing more than the leisure musings of dreamers.

~ Maurice Renard, "On the Scientific-Marvelous Novel and Its Influence on the Understanding of Progress"

Science fiction is a very particular possession of just one tradition -- Western civilization.

~ Ziauddin Sardar and Sean Cubitt, Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema, p.2.

[Most science fiction] does not seriously attempt to imagine the 'real' future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come.

~ Frederic Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?" p.153
Science Fiction is a genre, initially and primarily a part of the popular culture, that engages with the issues of knowledge more than any other literary genres. In case of Phantom comics we have seen how the poetics of the comic-strip, i.e., its generic strategies and depictive stratagem are coupled with the gothic and melanc[hol]ie unknowability of Phantom that couches his colonial quasi-hauntology, and, Phantom's own management of knowledge through his library as a narratical site of privilege: in case of Disney's film, I have explored how the issues of knowing the Latin space were merged with the strategies of consumerism and the poetics of animation-live action hybrid art forms. In this chapter I would like to examine the poetics and politics of, to put it oxymoronically, the most crudite popular among children's texts, which ironically is also the most unempirical in its anachrony, and, as my interrogations would prove, the most entangled in "social dreaming"—a form that mimics the sagacious and enlightened scholarship and epistemological superiority of science itself, a genre that uses the issues, techniques and impacts of knowledge as its core subject, or the fantastic stuff that fills in the lack of empirical knowability of futures, a meta-epistemological kink so to say—the science fiction. Interestingly, while the political issues of modernity, machination and post-human conditions are addressed by the knowledge-centred poetics of Children's Science Fictions, these texts also emerge as the most speculative and cognizant of the ethics and politics of encountering Time, more acutely than the Phantom Comics and Disneyland[s] do in their own ways.

Science fiction was made possible only by the ascendancy and epistemic dominance of modern science itself, notably the revolutions in astronomy and physics. Apart from the age-old genre of fantasy literature, which does not qualify per se within and as what we have defined already as science fiction, there were major forerunners: imaginary voyages to the moon in the 17th century [first shown in Johannes Kepler's Somnium (The Dream, 1634), then in Cyrano de Bergerac's Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon (1656)], space travel in Voltaire's Micromégas (1752), alien cultures in Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726), and science-curious fantastic elements in the 19th-century stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Fitz-James O'Brien. In Romantic Poetry, too, the writers' imaginations leapt to esemplastik visions of alternative yet localizable worlds and futuristic anachronism such as in Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall'.

This is a thesis that writers like Delany Jr. and critics like Justine Larbalestier share. See J.Larbalestier, The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).
The European brand of science fiction proper began, however, toward the end of the 19th century with the scientific romances of Jules Verne, whose science was rather on the level of invention, as well as the science-oriented novels of social criticism by H.G. Wells. Although better known for other works, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle also wrote early science fiction.

The development of American science fiction as a self-conscious genre dates (in part) from 1926, when Hugo Gernsback founded Amazing Stories magazine, which was devoted exclusively to science fiction stories. With the advent in 1937 of a demanding editor, John W. Campbell, Jr, of Astounding Science Fiction (founded in 1930), and with the publication of stories and novels by such writers as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert Heinlein, science fiction emerged as a mode of serious fiction. Ventures into the genre by writers who were not devoted exclusively to science fiction, such as Karel Capek, Aldous Huxley, and C. S. Lewis and, later, Ray Bradbury and Kurt Vonnegut Jr., also supplied an osmotic potential to its generic porosities. Magazine covers of bug-eyed monsters and scantily-clad women preserved the sensational image for many, however. This peritextual genderedness and abject-ness, built upon the market-driven hypervisibilization of the sexed and sexualized body and the incitement of adult-world’s paranoid monstrification of its own fear of the Other, in forms of the pornographic and teratological signifiers respectively, would suggest why even on the surface science fiction is not necessarily children’s literature, even though apparently it seems natural that the relation between science and science fiction is interchangeable with the normative relation between the adult and the child, the former practising the hermeneutics of realism and the latter the hermeneutics of fancy and fantasy when the question of methodology of one’s comprehension/symbolization of the real emerges.

An explosion in the popularity of science fiction followed the ontologies of world war, especially the World War II. Some science fiction works became paperback best-sellers not just as entertainment but as the textuated mirroring of the events and discourses of the ethics of science and progress.

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2 Since he is renowned for having chosen the variant term scientifiction to define this nascent genre, the stage in the genre’s development, his name and the term "scientifiction" are often thought to be inextricably linked. Published in this and other pulp magazines with great and growing success, such scientifiction stories were not viewed as serious literature but as sensationalism.

3 Prior to the 1960s, explicit sexuality of any kind was not characteristic of science fiction and fantasy. Although the covers of some 1930s pulp magazines showed scantily clad women menaced by tentacled aliens, the covers were more lurid than the magazines’ contents. For many years, the editors who controlled what was published felt that they had to protect the adolescent male readership that they identified as their principal market.
especially the uneasy but widely taken-place cusp between pro-anthropic knowledge and anthropo-thantological conflict. The dystopic visions of technology and the rapid technologization of human’s biological and sociological features and actions in coalition gave science fiction the threshold of being acknowledged as probably the most ‘realistic’ documentations of a paradigm shift, just the way that the grossly sentimental and improbablistic novels of social reintegration of the deviant/marginal satisfied the demands of ‘realistic’ self-imaging of the eighteenth century bourgeoisie.

The modern era of science fiction began in the mid 1960’s with the popularization of the genre of soft science fiction. In literary terms it dates roughly from the publication of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* in 1965, a realism-dense systematization of fantasy regarding the political wiles and conflicts in a future galaxy, the defamiliarized telos of intriguing and mystic religious beliefs, and the eco-system of the desert planet Arrakis. Simulacrul omnipresence of science fiction began much later, and along with that the philosophico-political substrate of the writers’ engagement with the social has gradually been invisibilized from the reader/spectator. While in 1966 Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek* brought such science fiction to a mass television audience, the original *Star Trek* seems outmoded today because of its thin and first-degree mimesis. But to the contemporary readers it foregrounded liberalism and liberal humanism. It urged the universality and equality of essential humanity. It had an attractive black officer, the first black-white kiss, a Russian officer at the height of the Cold War, an Asian officer, and even an alien officer.

In the seventies, a second generation of original and popular science fiction films began to appear and generate a lingering craze about and around them, among the most significant of which were *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *THX 1138* (1969) *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, (1977), and *Star Wars*, (1977). Like we have seen in the case of Disney, the in-breedings and the tie-ins between two plateaus of commerce generated the moment of maximum circulation: the film industry and the books’ market simply inflated each other, thereby making the genre a superhit, a craze, a marker of cultural importance of writing, reading and even thinking science fiction. Eventually, cultural interest in science fiction wane declined somewhat with cultural fatigue, flooded markets, and competition from other entertainment avenues/venues [including the second or third degree virtuals and the cyber-massification of leisure] being a few of the reasons for this. Today, *pure* science fiction or fantasy books only occasionally make the bestseller lists, although, in overall numbers there are more science fiction or fantasy books published now than in the past.4

Science fantasies of different kinds, mostly hybrid in generic and intertextual a priori, like science fictional film noir or science fictional erotica have flooded the adult market now; in parallel science fictionalized computer games/animations and science fictional gothic have gathered recent popularities among the child-consumers. The science fantasies have a more intense occultation of the future, so much so that the enmeshing of the technological and progressive telos of science with its other of irrationality and the inexplicable is totalized, the transformative force of language is put into the extreme of naming the allegorical as the compulsory tomorrow, and the power of myth to organize experience is exploited to make a familiar chronotope out of the yet-to-arrive. *Star Wars* (1977) is the most classic example of this trend.

One of the unique features of the science fiction genre is its strong fan community, of which many authors are a firm part. Many people interested in science-fiction wish to interact with others who share the same interests; over time an entire culture of science fiction fandom has evolved, and like a Disney character derives its strength more from the puppet and the T-shirt bearing its logo than from the text he/she/it features in, or a Phantom derives his immortality more from the noospheric polysymy of his own mask, science fiction authors, characters and books/films derive more from a fandom zones, “multiplex” websites, fanzines and blogs organized around and through its own machines—the technologized, virtual, simulacral space of the cyber.

As far as the question of science fiction for children and young adults is concerned, they follow the basic rhythms and poetics of the adult texts. Interestingly, it is the “social dreaming” component that is minimized in case of the children’s science fictions and fantasies, and the innovative use of “hard” components like technological amplification and far-futurist asymmetries that are highlighted. Most of the science fiction classics, like *Frankenstein*, have been abridged, illustrated with fairy-tale pictures and re-tailored to act as the children’s texts. While on one hand such curtailment [aimed at the infantilization of the target reader] can be expected to operate through the reduction of social paranoia or political fantasies in their original contents, it becomes paradoxical that the technological mythification of the time yet-to-arrive is left strikingly highlighted and emphasized by such erasure, and the novum becomes all-the-more irreal and eccentric in the child-lit versions. For example, the withdrawal of the feminist components such as the laboratory/womb dialectic from *Frankenstein*’s child-lit reconfigurations actually leaves a large empty space in the abridged text against which the perils of malestream science and the genderedness of the teratological signifiers emerge more stunningly and conspicuously underscored.
Community and cognition in Science Fiction

[Science Fiction] deals with the effects of change on people in the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places. . . . it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community; often civilization or the race itself is in danger.5

As a measurement and a map of alternative times, i.e., the time which we cannot physically inhabit, science fiction offers a unique poetics, liminal between naturalization and ostranenie. Science fiction, as opposed to the a-temporal or timeless and distantiative hermeneutics of myth, helps us to read the political temporarily and approximately. In the language of Fred Saberhagen,

Science Fiction gives a chance to impose different coordinate systems upon the human condition and to try to see what will change and what will remain the same.6

This is the central motor of science fictional novum—an ironic motor no doubt, particularly if read against the fact that the two most obvious strategies of science fiction are anachrony, non-contemporaneity, durational impossibility of the reader’s evident and evidential experiencing on one hand, and, a schadenfreude of guiltless, hitherto unearned paranoia on the other hand. In spite of the reader’s insulation from any phlegmatic, scandalous footedness or any direct or culpable responsibility in the different événements of the plot [which are parenthesized in a time and a context inaccessible to the ontic and epistemic authenticity of the reader], the sci-fi texts engage the reader into their ethical and political contents by way of this ironical poetics, far more ardently and urgently than a myth [which is after all mostly a received narrative] or an allegory [which is after all an objective field of parallel field of signification, the reader being a distant observer with a critical sang-froid and not a franchise of the narrative]. In other words, beneath the poetics of defamiliarization, science fiction tends actually to proximate the remote by re-interpellating the reader within a far-translated but identifiable crisis, traceable to crises that name his/her political and ethical subject-positions contemporarily. For example, A Paradigm of Earth by Candas Jane Dorsey, hailed as a feminist science fiction that problematizes the issues of sexuality and maternity by the figuration of the alien as the recipient of the female hospitality of eros and matrix, is a post-

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9/11 text both in terms of publication and reader’s response, although it bespeaks a time yet to come when a probably bi-erotic mother can adopt a group of alien children and teach them into humanity. It is anachronic in its poetics because of its hauntological resurfacings of the future as the moral revenance of the past—the mansion where the adoptee-mother of aliens, Morgan, maternally welcomes, protects and schools the alien child Blue into earth’s hospitable ethics, is actually an unexpected inheritance from her dead mother and has been used as a school by her grandparents. Blue is one of the twelve alien children whose memories have been erased into a tabula rasa, to be filled in by the ideological state apparatus of twelve different governments. This is very much an inquiry into the ideological grooming of the child/citizen [a task that all the sectors of post-9/11 globe are busy in doing] through the narrative of an extra-terrestrial orphanhood and governancial asylum, fissuring through Morgan’s tale of alienation [she has lost her parents and broken up with her partner before inheriting the house/school] and intimacy. The aliens are yet to arrive, if they are to do so at all, on such a visible scale, but the crises named by the text are just what the post-9/11 communities are trying to resilve or resolve.

Besides the questions of community, it is the end of cognition, in all senses of the term “end”, that is the common science fictional concern. Attending to an elementary concern of the human nature, Haney II argues that the first-person experience of pure consciousness may soon be at risk of extinction from posthuman biotechnology.7 In exploiting the mind’s capacity for instrumental behavior, posthumanists seek to extend human experience by physically projecting and exteriorizing the mind through the machinic rhizomity of thought and the material-technical world, as through telepresence and other forms of prosthetic augmentations. Posthumanism envisages a bios/machine symbiosis that will promote this extension, arguably at the expense of the natural tendency of the mind to move inward. By over-extension of the neurophysiology of consciousness under duress, the posthuman condition could in the long term undermine human nature, defined as the effortless capacity for transcending the mind’s conceptual as well as euro-motor content. In Chapter 4 of his book Haney explores the bionic’s erasure of and simultaneous tracing of the “consciousness” in the short fictions, followed by Chapter 5 which examines the narrativization of the monster’s consciousness in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, and Chapter 7 interrogates the

upholding of the binarism between human beings and the machines run by artificial intelligence in Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*. Although not all of his samples are ever circulated as children’s texts or available in the modified format of children’s texts, the way I have read the inquiries of the author are relevant here:

- Do Science fiction texts foreground consciousness or do they negate it?

- Do science fiction texts prefer the conflation of man and machine, or do they critique the fusion?

- Most importantly, do science fiction texts promote a consciousness that is out-of-joint?

In Pohl and Kornbluth’s *Wolfbane*, the under-nourished residues of a human community suffer on an earth long since alienated from its normative orbit by a group of extra-terrestrial, half-humanoid, half-automated Pyramids. The earth is frozen due to its separation from its natural solar system, its lack of a centre of heat and light and its loss of a natural star. However, the Earth has not been totally decentred as it is now revolving round an artificial star/sun which is weak and is sporadically re-kindled with artificial energy. This is a frequently used exposition scene of many science fictions: the “about to perish” earth—suspended between scientifically known natural rhythms and unnaturally designed scientific exploits, or rather hanging on the limits of scientific, physical rules and scientistic, super-physicist ruptures; the liminal zone between catastrophe and invention; the foretold Dooms-day doldrums whereby the post-overreaching ennui of humanism is hyperbolized against the apocalyptic ageing of collective human-life and sometimes the political economy of inter-galactic colonialism. Most of the earth’s anthropic and cosmic cadences are erased and supplanted by the rhythms of the alien’s home-planet, a feature that is the relation between the metropolis and the colony in the classical beats of colonialism. The protagonist, Glenn Tropile, is declared an outlawed “Wolf”, as opposed to “Sheep” [a term that has to be cognized in the plural sense]. The significance of “Wolf” is an individualist, an entity with own ideas and a spirit of self-assertion, or what Haney II calls ‘consciousness”, as opposed to the collective “sheep”, which is a community with induced amnesia and servility whose ritualized, ideologically pre-determined contemplations and actions are conducive to the Pyramidal totalitarianism. The contrary here is between cogitation and programmed cognition.

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The Pyramids seek to execute Tropile first as a rebel “Wolf”. But he runs off to a remote area where he discovers a pack of similar-minded Wolves. They have been since long surreptitiously retaining and guarding a technology of rebellion and sociology of individualism amidst their collective co-habitation. Tropile and the Wolves contract on an expedition against the Pyramids on the top of Mount Everest, but the Pyramids detect his mind while he has fallen into a meditative trance. He is dragged into the Alien’s planet and as part of a utilitarian punishment, is fitted into the intelligence of a gigantic, poly-nodal terata-computer, reducing him to an unwilling feeder component. This is also frequently seen in the science fictions dealing with the Earth’s capture by the aliens: the political strategy of enforced subscription crafted especially for the uncompromising, which is both a punitive measure and a profitable fascio. The dispositif of disciplining and punishing the fraying opponent into a systematic and appropriative subsumption is not seen in science fiction alone. Phantom has made red beard and his pirate friends, the worst opponents of Phantomic figure, into a Phantomic ingredient of his own system—the “Jungle Patrol”. Disney’s The Three Caballeros, we have seen, similarly converts the live Latina into a plethora of labial animation, followed by animation-flora [cacti], harnessing the otherness of the live body into the sameness of cartoon.

Till this point, the narrative follows a pattern of Earth’s occlusion into the territorial, biological, technological and semantic orders of the Pyramid planet, and of how such appropriation is totalized. But the captivity of the Wolf/human mind of Tropile within the artificial intelligence of the Pyramidal supercomputer does not last forever. Accidentally [accidents ironically too often act as a threshold of redemption or retrieval of humanism in science fictions] Tropile wakes up in a nutrient folder in which seven other mind-files of the Wolves are synchronized, and in tandem, neurologically linked with each other’s bodies. Tropile forms a collective consciousness with these files and bodies and an enormous mind-body named Snowflake is germinated as a consequence of this harmony. Both the captivity and re-awakening of Tropile and the birth of Snowflake need a detail semiotic analysis to comprehend the rhetoric within which the narrative of the reclamation of humanism is set in science fictions. First, within captivity and within Snowflake, both of which are events of becoming machines, the Cartesian dichotomy of ‘mind/body’ is dissolved into a ‘mind-body’, i.e., both mind and body. The cognitive network and the corporeal connective tissues, i.e., the Neurology and the cables and RAM of the literally megalo-maniac computer, are established beyond doubt as interchangeable and co-extensive formulae. By situating both incarceration
and proto-liberation as an integrated or conceptual [Concorde, *con cordis*, of the same heart, hence of the same body too, *concorporate*] predicament of first the mind and the body, and then of the machine too, science fictions generally highlight the cyborgian humanism free from the dictates of those post-enlightenment philosophical and political hierarchies built around their mutual incompatibilities.

Secondly, science fictions of this sort, i.e., narrating inter-galactic antagonisms usually locate the reclamation of humanism not as an external insurrection or fray, but as a vulnerability of the colonizer’s methodology or systems itself, which the humanist agent would exploit to undo the extraterrestrial’s or the machine’s grip over the homo sapiens. Had Tropile and seven other neurological resources of Wolves not been linked into the super-computer, the birth of Snowflake would not have been even a remote possibility. Science fiction, as opposed to other ideological critiques of totalitarian or oppressive regimes [such as historical novels or the realist political novel], and quite akin to the fantasy and the magic realist novel, narrates not the story of a well-built, chronologized and progressively intensified conflict, but a story of an abrupt bang, from the faint clue of dismantling in the master’s order of things, into a decisive rupture. In other words we may say that in science fiction revolution implies deconstruction, and not a movement.

The case of Snowflake is a case of mimicry as explosion: the wolves’ minds simply use for their synchronization the techniques, resources and networks which had been set up by the Pyramids and had been originally used to quarantine them: a chain of Wolf-intelligences joined by mind-body-machine simultaneity already accumulated within a colossal artificial intelligence as the erstwhile logos.

Snowflake prepares to challenge the Pyramids by rapidly importing or rather teleporting select human minds from the earth into the alien planet: minds that have somehow retained a sense of selfhood. Snowflake stimulates these scattered humanist potentials into a megalithic aggressiveness by manipulating their nutritional supplies [i.e., somatic inputs] and their mental frequencies [i.e., cognitive faculties]. This includes an exercise in recuperating hidden or suppressed information as Snowflake comes to know that this alien planet itself is not an originary metropolis but an earlier colony only. The Pyramids had settled in there by destroying the original inhabitants of that planet who were biotic, organic and humanoid. Now Snowflake spies upon the secret archive of that lost race and acquires knowledge about resistant technologies. If this sounds, operationally and motivationally, like a post-colonial
historiography, there is a more important implication to this archaeology too: the discovery of the impossibility of any original and originary metropolis, because the so-called home-planet of the Pyramids is a simulation of a metropolis but actually a colony itself.

In the battle that ensues between Snowflake and the Pyramids, the semi-robotic authority of the latter is destroyed but the former itself gets annihilated in the process. Tropile himself survives, both in body and mind, and although the collective mind-body is destroyed, he retains adequate memory and knowledge required for the restoration of the humans and their earth to its original or pre-colonial state. However, Tropile becomes discontent at the onset of earth's independence, as he diagnoses the reterritorialization of the same oppressions and hierarchies, which he has just fought against victoriously. The worldly human society fast re-accommodates the Wolf/sheep dichotomy as a political and cultural difference amongst its members, and the patterns and regulations of the Pyramid/Human hierarchy are now re-installed as social classifications in different names. The earth's relapse into the same type of coercive politics and the human knowledge's fast reversion into frozen, stale and ideologized thinking disappoint Tropile so much that he returns to the alien planet, partly to look after the artificial sun there and partly to pursue a vision for an advanced, expansive, unwalled potential of human consciousness which can transcend the barriers of tropographic and ideological fixities. His wife, who once was a ritualistic, meek, weak, timid 'Sheep', now decides to link all her cognitive and corporeal resources and fates with her husband's. This is significant in two ways: the symptomatic beginning of the collective individualism that Tropile had envisioned, and the end of the fantasy of the Other.

**Language and closure: poetics**

About *Wolfbane* Martin Jordin has mused:

> ...[what it] demonstrates with a particular force is a fundamental truth of even the most realist text: that literary works do not offer a simple reflection or picture of the real world but construct a fictional world with its own horizons of possibility and impossibility in which, potentially, anything can happen. But if the logic of this fictional world is not a reproduction of reality's logic, and if we can assume it is not wholly arbitrary (in which case it would be meaningless), according to what principles or system is this fictional world defined and its story constructed? 9

Jordin seems to answer his question with reference to the theorem that the definitions and architectural policies of SFs like *Wolfbane* and of any fictional text in general stem from a "selective" mechanism by which out of "anything which can be said" only "some things are said", and this mechanism, like the poetics of science itself, is symbolically sensitive to the contexts of the real and material world. They do and do not, in tandem, have any immediate external - existential-material referent in reality; they rather maintain a rule-bound resolution within the text-context cusp representable, through, and because of, an already validated symbolism of the reality, that is, they are not arbitrary but are not transparent as well. Jordin further states:

The meaning of any element in a fictional work is partly determined by the ideological or semantic content the term brings with it from outside, from its currency in the real world. But meaning is never fixed once and for all: each element is defined and redefined by the systematic relations it is given with the other elements of fiction. A recognition of that is particularly important in SF where, we commonly have to explain elements with no immediate referant in reality, like the Organic computers, group minds and the aliens of *Wolfbane*.

Lucid as this explanation might seem, it addresses a quite important issue in the poetics of science fiction. Jordin identifies the poetics in terms of "structural relationships within which elements are simultaneously opposed, defining the specific meaning of each term by their difference one from another, and combined, in order to generate a new common meaning at a level of generality beyond the concrete and unique particularity of the fictional world." In other words, the science fiction works out its fictive ingredients in the same ordering or generalizing machines through which we sort and define the reality for ourselves in the concrete world, encountering its diversity and trying to formulate patterns into it that can classify, group, assemble the known and the unknown into knowledge. So the correspondence or similarity between the science fiction and the familiar, everyday world [and its sciences] is their mutual resemblance of narrativizing experience into knowledge and particularities into

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10 The poetics of science may broadly be said to comprise of two processes: a gaze or observation which is attempted to be kept objective, and, an imagining [making formulae, hypothesis or theorems by significantly generalizing the results of such gaze]. But the gazing or observation done by the scientist need not focus on any comprehensive material-existential fact around us because the experimental environment need not be limited to the experiential. It is sufficient for the scientist to gaze at a construct that has rule-bound, i.e., Symbolic correspondences with the existential-experiential, and to make a discourse of the real through and within that Symbolic. Science's poetics is thus a matter of writing reality or textuating reality as knowable or known truth, so that the text is dia-contexted[ that is, both defining a context around us and transcending such contexts]. Science is thus a discourse like an allegory in the post-modern senses of that term.


12 Ibid.
pattern—a match of discursive maneuvers. The dissimilarity arises in the concentration of these formula-building, reality-making, knowledge-generating discursive machines. In our epistemological encounter with reality we tend to put them as together and proximately as possibly by the way of institutions and norms, ideologies and grammar. But in science fiction, there works a reverse contrivance of diverging and displacing this concentration as far as possible after the functions of reality-making have been accomplished through their inter-relational ordering. This is the significant difference between the poetics of classical science and the poetics of science fiction, too: while science tends to arrive at more precise, more universalizable, more concentrated and more pyramidally focused narratives that can relate logically with other such narratives derived from other instances, objects or events, the poetics of science fiction relies on the dispersion and disclamation of ever having been engaged in such economy of knowledge [ maintained and represented through convening and converging]. While the poetics of science is self-reflexive to the extent of self-applauding, the poetics of science fiction is auto-concealing to the point of self-disowning. An example of this poetics is the dissemination of the “Wolf/Sheep” differences along the text. In our immediate existential-ecological-biological context these two terms are opposed as the predator and the prey, which we sometimes map into the oppressor/oppressed anthropological binaries. But this binary is thoroughly diffused and scattered by the text of Wolfbane into other combinations—the difference between action and contemplation, between individualism and induced conformism, between the “pack” and the “flock” [signifying different sociologies of collective behavior] and between rebellion and acquiescence. While all of these connotations might be proximate, either literally or suggestively, to the readers’ ontic experiences in the real, concrete world manageably governed by the sciences and rhetorics, there are other orders, particularly in reference to the Pyramids. Firstly, the signifier Pyramid is used, far away from its Egyptian archaeological senses and associated architectural/geometric senses, to name the aliens. The superset of Wolves and Sheep is defined as humans, contra-distinguished from the semi-robotic Pyramids. The “Wolf” is defined both as rebel against the Pyramids, and a hegemonic exploiter of the Sheep. Wolves control the limited food-surplus, they plan to rule the Sheep. But they want also to sacrifice, in spite of their strong individualism, their safeties—for rescuing the Sheep from their slavery to the Pyramids and their conformist inductions. This feature attributed to the definition of a Wolf in Wolfbane differs significantly

from the readers' optic notions of Wolf:Sheep binary. The two exclusive attributes—those of
the heroic savior and the ruthless exploiter converge, only in the scope of a science fiction.
Such oxymoronic significance of sacrifice, a recurrent trope in the science fiction texts [even
though Sheep is, in our world, the approximate sacrificial animal], dissolves the knots of
knowledge and formulae about the exploitation that the same text has built with the binaries
and the conceptual models hitherto [such as that Wolves prey Sheep]. On a more fundamental
novel, this is like saying every text deconstructs itself; but this works excellently as a textual
strategy for splintering the pivots of the familiar, for the maximal effect of ostranenie, for the
prolepsis of the future as a fluid indeterminate crisis toward which the readers’ contemporary
ethics should be concerned.

The radical play of language, an epistemological concern per se, can be reagrded as one of
the most frequent strategies as well as foci of postmodern science fictions. In Frank Russell’s
“Allamagoosa”, language, typographical errors, miscommunication and mixed-bag lexemes
oscillating between scientific jargon and trivial daily parlance are the constituents of the
conflict or the crisis, instead of science being at the causative centre of them. It is a space -
avoyage, far-futurist short story for children, and comically the majority of the space ship’s
catalogue of props is kitchen paraphernalia. However, most of them are scientized, like “zee
electronic oven”. The space ship undergoes a routine supervision by the disciplinary inter-
gallactic officer, and the crew find their “offog” missing. The name “offog” is actually a
signifier, a stray orphan lexeme, without any signified waiting to fill it up with presence.
The “offog” is absent, but the spaceshipmen manage to convince the authorities that it had
exploded in the space and the split remnants left behind. To their utter shock, the letter from
the headquarters order every ship to be grounded for nuclear poisoning of biotic entities, as
the “offog” that never was, was a trace of the “off Dog”, implying the captain’s official dog.
The whole narrative is built upon legal, hygienic and behavioral sciences being made of a
“nothing”, a typographical error without a semantic presence behind it, and the
spaceshipmen, in order to hide the absence, has generated a panic of catastrophes that have
not taken place. At the end of the story, the captain of the grounded spaceship start biting his
nails, notlapsing into an oral fixation, but trying to reach a stability of meaning: “[he]
examined them for nearness to the flesh”.

16 Ibid. 13.
Epic and mythical “closures”? Allusive motifs in science fiction:

Many of us know SF mainly from our children's comics, in which, for example, the inhabitants of the planet Phantoms, tall purple bipeds with the heads of cows, led by the Super-Phant Gogol, are invading the planet Cryptos, whose inhabitants are a kind of dun biped sheep. Repulsion guns, aqua-detectors, artificial suns, and the suspension of gravity abound. Yet the literary bearings, here, are easy, for the space-gun is just a new kind of tomahawk, and the Super-Phant is our old friend the sheriff of Nottingham. If this were the whole of SF, it would not call for comment.

~ Raymond Williams, “Science Fiction”.

Science fiction as a genre has been labeled by Albert B. Friedman as “mythology for our times.” The generic porosities between mythology and science-related fibula are not new to be reflected upon by critics. Fontanelle in The Origin of the Fables (1724) postulated that myth is fundamentally a primeval mode of science, the inadequate product of a cognizant hunt for the origins and explanation of observable events. Levi-Strauss also suggests that both myth and science be considered as modes of structuring the universe; in fact, he goes so far as to posit a mathematical logic in the structural formation of myth. He also suggested that science and myth are mutually exclusive, as binary opposites, and therefore they do have autonomy from each other. It is in this structuralist conjecture regarding the mutual insulation between myth and science that the aporia of science fiction emerges unnamely—the possibility of a cusp, between the two exclusives, has to negate and derive from each and the seam is already always an improper. If we move with the working definitions of Science fiction as a symbolization of modern technology anachronized, i.e., situated amidst the technological encounters with questions of origin [nevertheless the origins of science fictions are too often overdetermined by posterior scientific knowledge] or the destiny[ironically destiny is the telos that is defamiliarized and displaced into a yet-to-arrive, already-knowable unknown object of scientific knowledge and technical prowess],

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the genre appears as a *fabulation* of science and scientific discursive formations. Besides in a science fiction, the narratives of science [unified with reference to the myth of absolute truth] and the narratives of fiction [unified with reference to the myth of the secondary imagination] are readily merged into a single narrative. Wherever the contingencies of the objective world are recognized in its relatedness to an unconditioned transcendent, the unity of the mythic is restored through the symbols, whether religious and scientific. In this way science becomes *myth* despite its rational autonomy.

However, the possibility and inevitability of the *poetics* based on mythological closure in science fiction are debatable issues, because of several in-built paradoxes of the genre:

1. Myth and science are mutually invert discourses [of the fictional as well as the epistemological].

2. Science itself is an object of mythification, and in science fictions an interrogations of the good and evil of anything related to science as such results in an interrogations of this concomitant myth also

3. The allusive muse of the science fictions does not often normalize or *naturalize* any event into a fact, but test it normatively before its enactment, and shocks the readers with the statementation or expression of the mytheme before its context of [re]emergence can be historicized, or, symbolized within the narrative of the “happened”; that is, unlike most of the myths, science fictions are less allusive and more futuristic in their contingencies, and the mythopoetic visions in science fictions are less explicatory about facts and more preparatory for an impact. The science fictional mythopoeia *traces* not the erased or the bygone but the arrivant or the awaited.

Yet, it is undeniable that the gesture of allusion is one of the most effective textual strategies of the science fictional films and novels. It is not only a poetic strategy but a necessity or inevitability—the demand of myth is also because of what Jameson calls the dramatization of “our incapacity to imagine the future.”

The abundance of the mythological in theses texts carry out twin-tasks:

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20 Frederic Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies*, 9 (1982): 147-58, p.153
1. Neutralizing the *ostranenies'* excesses
2. Managing the infinite possibilities of change within a coherent sense of diachrony
3. Naturalizing the cryptomimetic\textsuperscript{21} tendencies of the futuristic énoncés, because dystopic science fictions are notorious for locking the abject in the [non]place of the crypt which cannot be re-integrated into the writtenness of the contemporary archive without the omni-chronos of mythematic information.

Let us see a few examples of the mythematic *poetics* in science fictions for children and young adults. Tropile in *Wolfbane* is as dissatisfied with the human society following its independence from the Pyramids' rule as Ulysses had been with a "savage race" and "barren crags" after the completion of his voyage. For the target reader, i.e., the juvenile reader, the analogy might not be so prominent or sometimes not detectable at all; but given the erudite and often a "mass esoteric" nature of scholarship literally and figurally required by the "narrative of/on science", and given the centrality of knowledge in science fiction's *poetics* and *politics*, such allusions cannot be overlooked.

Like an Oedipal allusion as well as a dramatization of Oedipal castration, *Minority Report* is a film which gives undue and rather repellant protuberance to eyes, eyeballs and the removal of eyeballs from eye-sockets. The citizens of Spielberg's 2054 Washington DC are identified by a futuristic retinal-scan equipment when they go by an advertisement or go into a shop, never mind when the law enforcement wants to arrest them. It is the necessity to shun this dinky new technology that incites Anderton (Tom Cruise) to have his own eyeballs eradicated and substituted with a new set. More than the fact of his carrying the eyeballs unrefrigerated for days and then trialing them in the eyeball-scanning technology, what is more intriguing is that the eyes induce the *irrealism* in several ways.

In the film's *Novum*, a new branch of the Justice Department called PreCrime has all-but purged homicide in the course of an experimental tryout of a new and secret type of monitoring. Their top secret is a group of three mutant 'precog' humans, kept floating in a tank in the middle of the PreCrime building, who have the aptitude to foretell murder. Tom Cruise's character John

\textsuperscript{21}The term cryptomimesis is coined by, Jody Castricano, in *Cryptomimesis* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001). The crypt is an intentional extortion of the other from the vestiges of the self, because the resistance to the introjections of the dead other would safeguard and sustain the purity of the self. If science fiction is a social dreaming, [then] the act of the cryption would immune the "dreamer" from the immediacy of the alien that can only be mourned off in future and till then can gnaw as the spectre of alienness. The novum, then, is the crypt of the contemporaneous, but myth would gloss over and apparently pre-cook this difference.
Anderton, the chief of the new police force, decodes the images downloaded from the precogs' minds and leads his team to the crime scene before the crime is committed. Both the name PreCrime and the preventive methodology of the city's sleuths refer to the essential anachrony of this notion. Assistance are aided in advance of the fact, and because nobody can so much as commit a murder, let alone get away with one, the crime has ceased to be a part of society in the DC area. The system's architect and PreCrime's director, Lamar Burgess (Max von Sydow) is looking forward to PreCrime 'going national' in the near future. The plot of the film turns on a precog vision of Anderton himself killing a man called Leo Crow - a man Anderton has never heard of. Believing in his own innocence Anderton goes on the run, trying to dodge recapture and planning to uncover skullduggery in the heart of PreCrime itself. He suspects the boyish faced Danny Witwer (Colin Farrell), an FBI agent investigating the workings of the organisation; but it transpires that Lamar Burgess is the guilty party; he had assassinated a woman called Anne Lively long before, and was concealing his crime. Cruise is captured, but escapes with his wife's help to expose Burgess, and following the old man's suicide PreCrime is dismantled.

The story turns, in other words, upon the power of prophecy, with the incipient element of irony propelling its motor in action. The ironies are multiple, namely, the criminologically motivated invention of a crime-busting technology as a ruse for the criminal past of a murderer. the authority [here Lamar is the father of the technology, and its discursive and executive guardian] as both the name-of-the-father and the forbidding figure in the symbolic of this technology, the fact of the diagnostic and the punitive collapsing into one a-historic a priori system of crime-busting [ a-historic because the events do not take place under the cannibalization of the crime by the law], the sublimated redemption of future as the consequence of the sin and guilt of the past [ the hypothesis that forecast will correct history, and Lama's personal attempt to cleanse his homicidal past with the professional utilities of prediction], and the nearly happened case of conflation of the vigilant self[ Anderton, who is the vector of law] and the supervised [ seen beforehand in the precog eyes] other [the possibility of a criminal/murderer]. It is this irony embedded in prophecy\textsuperscript{22}, as much as the

\textsuperscript{22}The future is predicted: Anderton will slay Leo Crow, and will exterminate him despite the obvious improbability of this - Anderton, though burdened with a drug habit and still grieving the loss of his young son years before, is patently Our Good Guy and not a murderer; in addition to which he has never even heard of Crow. In fact Crow is a set-up: at Burgess's instigation he has pretended to be the abductor and murderer of Anderton's son, hoping to be killed by the policeman so that his family can collect the insurance money. But Anderton sees through this scam at the last minute, so that he has neither motive nor the character to go through with the killing. Nevertheless Anderton does end up killing Crow; the divination is confirmed accurate.
blindings and intra-familial anxieties, that tag the sci-fi movie as a version of the Oedipal myth. Certainly, the components of the original Greek myth are hodgepoded in the Hollywood remake; but even this re-ordering has its logic. Discovering what he had done, Oedipus tore out his own eyes in dismay and self-repugnance. In Minority Report Anderton has his own eyes removed before fulfilling the prophecy rather than afterwards. His struggle is with a father-figure—Burgess—the conflict does lead eventually to a parricidal resolution of crisis.\textsuperscript{23}

An approach like this issue has to ask a question: how is 'prophecy' outlined in this movie? The answer gives us insight into some of the originality of Scott Frank and Jon Cohen's screenplay (since this issue is not addressed nearly as sharply in Philip Dick's original story). We can contrast it with the conviction of much contemporary SF is that prophetic knowledge of the future would be a positive Good: for instance, Asimov's Foundation, or his compassionate scientist-timelords from The End of Eternity (1955); the characters in Terminator II: Judgment Day using their information to avert nuclear Armageddon, Dr Who's humanist adventures or the 'time police' from later Trek.\textsuperscript{24} Minority Report presents an atypical perspective on prophesy. It is not that foreknowledge ushers in ruin in the strict sense - PreCrime, after all, forestalls murder competently and adeptly. It is nonetheless a catastrophic rather than a progressive prolepsis, because of the castration anxiety linked to and caused by foreknowledge: it curtails the choice, the bargaining power, the sovereignty of the agent; the future-knowing man becomes mono-dimensional, flaccid, unintuitive. The filmic signifiers of prophecy are also parapraxis of a castration: the wooden balls, the odd living creepers, like autonomous phalluses, surrounding the home of Dr Iris Hineman, the metallic spider-robots that PreCrime sends into the apartment looking for Anderton etcetera. The arachnophobic image of the metallic spheres running here and there in a random, chaotic fiasco, read in terms of the Oedipal drama of the text, could easily illustrate severed testes scattered unruly. In all three cases the severed symbolic-testes force Anderton into passive, choiceless enduring: stung into a coma by the genetically engineered creepers; cowering in his ice-bath

\textsuperscript{23} In Minority Reports the violation of the incest taboo is transferred onto a more generalised anxiety about child-abuse. There are two strands to this: firstly, Anderton's young son, abducted from a swimming pool; and secondly the institutionalized abuse of 'Agatha', the young female precog, (played with voluptuous innocence by Samantha Morton as an infantilised, hairless child-woman)\textsuperscript{24}, whom Anderton abducts from PreCrime to try and prove his innocence.

\textsuperscript{24} The attitude to prophesy we come across in ancient myth, of course, is much less optimistic; Ancient Greek culture was steeped in oracles and oracle-users, but when Pandora opened her box and let-out all manner of plagues and evils the one thing that she managed to keep inside was knowledge of the future. For Greek myth prophesy is something like a curse, something that will plague us.
in the face of the metallic spiders. The scene in which a seedy back-street surgeon removes Anderton's eyeballs acts out this terror of passivity; with the anaesthetic taking effect and unable to move, Anderton listens in terror to the surgeon reveals that he has every reason to hate (and blind, or kill?) the former policeman. As in the scene of *The Three Caballeros* where Donald Duck is castrated by engulfing labia and then by the phallic cacti, this scene has served its purpose: to underline the point that castration is the psychodrama of the policeman's passive powerlessness, even in the clinic. His [eye]balls are removed, rolling free from his body, like the testicle-sized wooden-balls that roll down their chutes to indicate that the precogs have seen another future murder.

When Anderton's eyeballs are out, separated from his body, he carries them around in a little bag. In terms of quasi-realist 'plausibility' it is absurd that Cruise can use his surgically excised and mangled eyeballs to access PreCrime's inner sanctum; but in terms of the myth these 'castrated testicles' do just that, precisely because PreCrime itself is the locus of disempowerment ('castration') in the movie. Castrated testicles are the magic token, the golden bough, allowing access to this place because they encapsulate the principle of PreCrime.

It is as a Freudian Oedipal drama, staging symbolic castration and neurotic anxieties about the violation of taboo that the film works. PreCrime is a child, produced by the now aged figures of its father, Burgess, and its mother, Dr Iris Hineman. Its foetalised precogs, swimming in their womb-like fluid space, are also as Felperin notes sexualised. The movie uncovers the violence that is the secret of PreCrime's 'conception'; and it is only by overcoming his own anxieties (castration, loss of power, of his son and so on) that Anderton can 'solve' the psychopathological omphallic knot between the knowledge of future and the history of castration. When PreCrime turns on Anderton he becomes a victim of this symbolic castration itself. His phantasmagoric pursuit surrounds him with icons of castration: his own eyeballs, the spider-robots, serpentine plants. But, as Freud realised a century ago, this particular anxiety has at its root the fear of parricide/punishment cusp. Having his son 'taken away' from him leaves Anderton disempowered, addicted to drugs, wifeless. But it is in

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25 Freud's commentary upon the Oedipus myth, with the removal of eyeballs standing-in for the removal of testicles, is too famous to need repetition here. But there are other Freud observations that illuminate the movie. His 1927 paper 'Fetishism' observes that a cutting of a woman's hair functions as a symbolic acting-out of castration, to allay the male anxiety on the subject. Agatha, the precog, with her close-shaven scalp, is subject to this sort of control by PreCrime itself.

the psychic conflict with the strong figure of Max von Sydow's patriarchal, patrician Burgess that the movie finds its psychodynamic core. Anderton uncovers, painfully, traumatically, that Burgess has a secret; that he has inflicted violence upon 'the mother' (Ann Lively, Agatha's mother), and that his own power and prestige depends upon this secret act. The movie plots out the psychopathological trajectory of Anderton's conflict with this father-figure, which ends inevitably with the father-figure dying. That the movie presents this as Burgess's suicide rather than Anderton's slaying is, perhaps, a slightly false-step, but it does not defuse the emotional potency of the encounter. Indeed, the central premise of the movie lacks meaning unless we understand that it has this oedipal anxiety behind it. Anderton hurries through his world haunted with the anxiety that he will kill a man he has never met—a predicament that can be best explained by the oedipal rationale. What is behind the neurotic fear that an otherwise good man will kill a complete stranger? In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud recalls "obtaining a deep insight into the unconscious mind of a young man whose life was made almost impossible by an obsessional neurosis."

He was unable to go out into the street because he was tortured by the fear that he would kill everyone he met. He spent his days preparing his alibi in case he might be charged with one of the murders committed in the town. It is unnecessary to add that he was a man of equally high morals and education. 27

Freud's explanation for this eminently neurotic behavior is simple: "the basis of this distressing obsession was an impulse to murder his somewhat over-severe father." 28 The trope of knowledge of the future as a form of castration is the more telling. Robert Silverberg's superb novel *The Stochastic Man* (1975) is one of the few (and one of the best) SF texts to explore the effective powerlessness that necessarily attends complete knowledge of the future; Silverberg makes plain that the more knowledge of the future one has, the less powerful one becomes, left with the fewer choices. The determinism of prophecy, the reductionism of foreknowledge makes the epistemic subject passive, vulnerable before the inescapable inevitability of events: not even a handgun (that ubiquitous, and mendacious,


28 This latent hostility towards 'the father' has been a feature of Spielberg throughout his career: we remember the multitudinous absent-fathers, and struggling single-mothers, from *Close Encounters* of the Third Kind, *ET, Jurassic Park*; we remember how many Spielberg kids find comfort under the protection of symbolic Dads, father-figures who are prepared to look after orphaned street-kids like Indiana Jones in *Temple of Doom*, or Sam Neill and Jeff Goldblum in the two *Jurassic Park* movies; or who occupy paternal positions without the blood-tie, like Tom Hanks's platoon captain in *Saving Private Ryan*. It is a simple matter to read Schindler's List as a symbolic clash between a good father-figure and a bad for the lives of the (necessarily therefore infantilised) Jews.
American symbol of individual liberty and choice) can prevent the insecurity of the subject of fore-knowledge at the face of the inevitable non-happening. As Anderton confronts Crow, holding his gun pointlessly before him—pointlessly because to pull the trigger would be to lose in this scenario - Agatha crouches on the floor, gibbering "you have a choice! You have a choice!" But the movie understands that 'choice' can only be reclaimed for and by the characters of its world if PreCrime, and its castrating prophetic power, is dismantled. In other words, the 'father' who must be slain by the film is not a threat to developing identity or sexuality as such; he is a threat to agentic choice itself. He is the figure who renders guns pointless; the good patriarch who makes the world run too smoothly. So it is that Burgess's death frees the movie for its startling happy ending.

Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 is at once articulate and representative of the mythic framing of future/contemporary interface. The fireman hero starts reading and secreting books, has his own house burned down, kills while resisting arrest, and is chased through the city by an electronic Hound. He gets away to the country, where he meets a band of scholars turned tramps, who preserve literature by committing it to memory. Meanwhile, behind him, the city is bombed.

According to Raymond Williams,

_Fahrenheit 451_ is characteristic of books of...[the] type in that, under the emblem of a story of the future, it presents not so much an observation, but a current form of feeling, related primarily to contemporary society. Here the "myth" is the defense of culture, by a minority, against the new barbarians.

Yet, at a more meta-textual level, the novel _Fahrenheit 451_ is about the fear of the "end of book": the title indicates the temperature at which book-paper will burn, and the central character is a member of the Fire Brigade charged with setting fire to all houses in which books are found. The most frequently surfaced anxiety in the book is about the destruction and the preservation of culture, signified by the burning and safeguarding of the monographs. The myth is also self-reflexive if we read it in reference to the fact that the genre of science fiction is fictional intortion of epistemics: books are the metonyms of knowledge, their simultaneous burning and reading/hoarding suggest the nihilation and accumulation of knowledge in a _novum_ that dramatizes the tensions between amnesia and epistemic residue in the liminal of archival dislodge.

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In 1984, the "myth" is the struggle between clean and unclean intellectuals, who determine the future without reference to the dumb "proles." Williams comments that the "form of feeling which dominates this putropian thinking is, basically, that of the isolated intellectual and of the "masses" who are at best brutish, at worst brutal." Tropile's Promethean oddness amongst the Sheep/Wolf demography in *Wolfbane* is one instance.

However, the mythic cannot be said to have enclosed or monopolized the allusive and/or chronotopic muse of the science fiction. Ebert's thesis of co-extensivity between the *poetics* of science fiction and the "dominant episteme and aesthetics of advanced technological societies" challenges the notion of mythical "closure" in science fictional texts. Ebert's consideration of science fiction as one of the "modes of expression of the postmodern consciousness" is partially true: the advanced technological communities operate and represent through increasing diversification/pluralization of noumena and extreme polarization of phenomena at the same time, which is a pertinent context to the narrative techniques and rhetorical tactics of the science fiction genre itself. Ebert classifies three broad types of science fictions:

1. The mimetic and the causal *poetics* of the conventional science fiction, deriving from the "politics of the form" of the bourgeois novel, which extrapolates a predictable and credible vision of the future from the current givens of science and technology.

2. The instrumental, object-relations, *poetics* of the pop science fictions and parascience fictions, accommodating and updating the familiar middle-class fantasies of newer gadgets

3. The aesthetic celebration of the fabulatory human imagination in-and-for itself, which offers a *poetics* of self-reflection to "fictivity" and to science both, like the nanotechnological or astronomical future studies. This Ebert names metascience fictions.

According to Ebert, the metascience fictions do not "totalize" human experience and expression like the post-war mainstream novels do; they rather "celebrate either unadorned

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30 Ibid.
human experience or the shapefulness of the fable-making human imagination. The third category can also be called a "transfiction" because the empirical transcription of real developments in knowledge and technology and their inductive excess as fiction cannot be taxonomized into a background/foreground binary. Ebert's following observation is significant, although the examples are from science fictions that are not marked or marketed as "children's literature":

Regardless of whether one examines the dysfunctional and inexplicably erratic technology of failed postindustrial society in Dhalgren or the hyper-efficient and omnipresent technology of Triton, the technology is largely unspecified and taken for granted; technology functions in both as the matrix of "things" through which the characters move. In the novels of Barth or Pynchon, on the other hand, rocketships, computers, cyborgs and gyroscopes and endlessly enumerated objects and hardware motivate the plot and characters... The forces behind the change in the function of technology and the consequent shift in the thematic and aesthetic concerns of recent science fiction become more evident when we examine the primary modes of thought in forming Delany's work. The traditional ideational influence on science fiction, namely physics, specific technologies and psychology, are replaced (although not dispensed with) in Delany's writing, by linguistics, symbolic logic, mathematics, cybernetics, biology (particularly neurology and genetics), ecology and sociology. Among these linguistics, mathematics and symbolic logic assume a privileged position and overshadow the science of substances. Delany's epistemology, in other words, is largely a "structuralist" one, in which the relationships between things, whether synapses, phonemes or organic/inorganic systems subsume the individual or the unique. Above all, Delany is concerned with the relationships and patterns generated by words and language as a whole.

The language-turn in the science fictions is not just a substitution of the substantial and substantive science by the linguistic and communicative sciences, but poses a greater shift for the nature and scope of the management of knowledge in Science Fiction—in traditional science fictions it is the certitude of science in producing material wonders that was exploited in the crafting of the ostranenie, while in the contemporary science fictions it is the radical slipperiness and playfulness of language that is used as the most viable model of the fluidity of future[s]. This has an ethical correlative as well: the changes in the level of objects and characters, gadgets and equipments, processes and systems do not project a dilemma of possible future as such, provided the ideational and the ideological frameworks remain manageable and neatly organized. But the fluidity of the construction of future realities, energized by the slippage and the fluidity of the language that names them, would make a much more fundamental ethical as well as utilitarian dilemma regarding the alternative, un-fixed, un-anchored, yet-to-become-defined futures, and then the entire novum becomes just a

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32 Ibid. 95.
33 Ibid., 96
politico-moral hypothesis to be tested a priori against other equally possible hypotheses. In other words, the conventional science fictions would use the concrete technological objects of science as the symbols of a future, and technology-driven objects would create the tensions in plot or character. But in the post-linguistic-turn science fictions, the naming and the fabrication of futures themselves are made open, infinite and therefore undefined and unsolvable into any given. For example, a text formatted in terms of slippage, i.e., its pages not being numbered in a fixed syntagm but assembled with the potential of being re-made anew into a different hermeneutic sequence with each different reading, fabricating a different narrative every time and therefore naming a different future with every reading-variation, would necessarily defer the precise moral resolutions [say regarding human action in a robotic future], since the upcoming itself is unlocked to a unbridled plurality of narrative and linguistic “makings”. The text that I have chosen for the detailed analysis of the poetics of science fiction, R. L. Stine’s The Creepy Creations of Professor Shock, lays itself open to such indeterminacy by generic, semiotic and narrative un-closures, deconstructing its own syuzhet again and again and ever. The task of narrativizing the ethical dilemmas, prospects and threats of the contemporaneous regarding the un-happened is thus deferred from arriving at a closure because nothing happens with guarantee of to have happened in the text.

Another significant development in the so-called “postmodern” science fictions, apart from their foregrounding of the linguistic play of their construction and their self-reflexive highlighting of the knowledge-questions, is the breaking away from the nationalizing of the future as a “presence”—assured although in what configuration not known, waiting out there although not directly accessible to today’s knowing subjects, and definitely singularly established after the above two constraints will have been selected. A remark by Greg Grewell will clarify the metaphysics of presence dramatizable as the future, or the space, or the inner space of man’s clinical body:

Despite - or perhaps in spite of - scientific and technological advances, in the morning of the 21st century the universe registers in the popular imagination much as it did in Wilson’s 19th-century mind. While orthodox Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and people of other creeds may profess to believe otherwise, to many the universe is a “place” habited and inhabitable, by friendly and hostile beings, a place where, sooner or later, humans will dare to travel, point camcorders, and plant flags. This is, after all, the fantasy of the science fiction literature and film industry - not to mention NASA - and of the many spaceminded people whose web sites mean to enable galactic colonization.

The more relevant element in this observation is not the religious and fantastic belief in the
demography of the unknown outer space, but the taken-for-grantedness of the existence of the
unknown as a thing, or substance, or presence; the universe as a "place" in Grewell's
observation seems to be an anthropocentric cartography of the unknown, but in my reading
its conceptualization as a "place" would imply the refusal to see it as a "non-place", like a
"crypt" where the alterity, or the dead or absent other, of humanity's world-view of the
presence can be locked without being assigned any signified. The space/ the universe/ the
future as a matter, as a transcendental signified acknowledged in the scientific and science
fictional imagination is the logos of the galactic colonialism and/or temporal futurism and/or
 technological novum. But in the postmodern science fictions, even for children, like the
sample text I will analyze below, the future possibilities of being are radically dismantled
from any ontic presence to a "ju" of signifiers—by an excess of too many alternatives
without any concentration or centrality of certitude, the future, or the matter of space, or the
anatomical nano-space are simply not there but called into entity by the playfulness of
language. In other words, postmodern science fictions deconstruct the metaphysics of
presence around which the science fictional novums are built, and in doing so, offer us the
radical indeterminacy of "future places". They also deconstruct the mythical closures in the
process, through which commonsensical fancy about the future and conventional novum of
the science fiction operate.

Science Fiction, ethnicity and sexuality: The Politics

Science fiction implies that the knots of terrestrial racism will eventually loosen
because Terrans will have to unite against the aliens, androids, or BEMs [Bug-Eyed
Monsters] of the galaxy. Under these circumstances, humans become remarkable for
their humanity, not their ethnicity. Robert Scholes seems to have this concept in mind
when he remarks that science fiction as a form "has been a bit advanced in its treatment
of race and race relations. Because of their orientation toward the future, science fiction
writers frequently assumed that America's major problem in this area—black/white
relations—would improve or even wither away.35

We have seen already in our analysis of Wolfbane that the plot of the science fiction, in spite
of its anachronic tangentiality to the contemporary political crises and ideologies, re-treats
the political even at the vanishing point of politics or the a-political moment of an impossible

35 Sandra Govan, "The Insistent Presence of Black Folk in the Novels of Samuel R. Delany." Black
future. The community’s prognostic resilience, or communitarian *politics* so to say, often lies in the assertion of that which inscribes the negation of the contemporary *political*, such as the invisibilization of the international relations by the intergalactic disputes, *retreating* from and re-treating the *political* of neo-imperialisms [as in the film *The Independence Day*], or the dissolution of the scattering/gathering binary by making the most individualistic monad the core-impetus of an assemblage fit to retrieve the community’s unity [the Sheep’s flock was not a community but an aggregation of impotence and compromise, while the Wolves combine their individualistic urges to affirm the emergence of Snowflake; in other words, the stronger the individualist’s denial of compromise, the stronger he re-treats the congression].

The parameters of stratification of the communal order, therefore, are not *absent* from the *novum* but heightened in it: they emerge only by the gesture of their withdrawal. Race and ethnic stratifications, for example, appear in science fiction as “disappearing appearing” in two different ways:

1. By the inscription of the *novum* as a universal or global human moment of future crisis or prospect, a universality whose interior is reterritorialized as one without visible or taxonomized racial differences, and whose exteriority is the formed by the extra-terrestrial or epidemic or catastrophic intruder-forces. This displaced antagonism, budged from intra-species to inter-species, glosses over the fissures in the species itself. The rewriting of the *politics* of race into the *absence* of race traces the *politics* of dis-acknowledging ethnic differences in the *novum’s* postulation.

2. The conflicts and dissents between the humans and aliens, in themselves, dramatize the racial conflicts between different communities. Whether the aliens resemble the racial other more or whether the extraterrestrial hegemon stands for the dominant race in its colonial power or knowledge depends on the narrative’s particulars and perspectives. Never-the-less, the point is that the clash/contact between united humans and united aliens, in spite of, and, at the instance of, disclaiming inbuilt racial features within each respective aggregation, re-invokes the issue of racial *politics*. In other words, only while race is *absented* in the *novum* or the new world-order of future, it is re-emerged or *traced*.

Kali Tal observes while talking about the racial rétrait offered by the science fictions that very often a myopic vision and an a priori ignorance about the contemporary racial substrates
leads to the non-recognition of the racial trace in the novum, as well as an overlooking of the ethnic motives of black science fiction authors and their writings:

The failure to see what is, literally, right before our eyes has everything to do with how we see what we see. In order to recognize and evaluate African American works of science fiction, readers and critics need first to be familiar with the traditions of African American literature and culture.36

Critics like Gregory Rutledge admonish the myopia of infamiliarization of the 'other' cultures—we fail to "evaluate the creative efforts of black futurist fiction authors without a cultural predicate grounded in the black experience".37 A quick example will be the vraisemblance of the novum vis-a-vis the art of naturalistic observations of contemporary existence: that which would become mastery of realism in case of a white science fiction author will be considered a paranoid, self-serving exaggeration for a black science fiction writer. In the novum of the subgenre of "Black militant near future fiction", for example, the insinuations of a distinguishable yet submerged "kill-the-white-folks" motor of African American folk and oral literary energy can be experienced; the novum of violence appears naturalist to a reader aware of the folk rétraits of African Americanness, but seems to be exaggerated to a reader not aware of such historical and folk traditions or their paraproximate allusions. "Disappearing appearing" of African Americanness can be inscribed and read within and through the apparently universalistic novums, such as the detailing of conditions of exploitation, alienation, resistance and insurrection. Through apparently unmarked events in the fabula, "the poverty, sickness, discrimination and sometimes joys" of being black in America can be retreated.38

Another potential differend in the science fiction conventions vis-a-vis race is that the African American futurist fictions address the issues of technology but they are not led by it—the epistemological transom is not super-loaded with machines, laboratories and technological gibberish but firmly encased within a mythopoeic and/or folklorish African American vision whereby the resourcefulness and grandeur of the soul and the shamanistic

expansiveness of the human mind, body and communicability are more emphasized than the machine, the matter, and, the hieros-eikon of the equipmental. African American historian Leonard Bennett emphasizes that the African American accentuation of the soul is "very definitely nonmachine, but it is not antimachine; it simply recognizes that machines are generative power and not soul, instruments and not ends." In fact, the relation between the poetics of science fiction and the politics of being black in a largely Euro-American country is uneasy and complex in different ways:

1. Blackness as otherness has been, among other things, a product of the history of fiction masquerading as scientific discourse (e.g., Dr. Samuel George Morton's 19th-century cranium-size studies). Many studies have registered the suspicion that African Americans bear toward science, medicine and machines [like the print and the electronic media] for their historical roles in stereotyping, epidermalizing and stigmatizing blackness.

2. Besides, the scientific discourse is much less resourceful for the black mind than the traditional visions and mystic queries of his/her own culture. This has to do as much with the black communities' resourcefulness as with the inadequacies of Western science. Pierre Bourdieu, finding scientific methodology wanting, has advanced the notion of the theorization effect in The Logic of Practice to characterize the fallacious reasoning of various scientific disciplines. Bourdieu disapproves of the propensity of the presumably objective-scientific method to shrink the complexity of the habitus, or our perceptual world, as well as our organic oikos, to graphs and synoptic or formulaic utterances, a phenomenon that always privileges and serves the observer. The philosophy of the hard SF writers and their fans/readers, which stand for more normative and conventional perceptions of the sciences and autonomy of scientific thought, would perhaps clash with the spiritual, interdependence-based science of the Black community. The devotion the hard sciences and hard SF entail might be

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particularly incompatible to the Black theology, anthropology and cosmology. Kathryn Cramer notes the paradox hard SF presents for Black religion—science's co-option as a new religion world-over [this Cramer calls the "replacement principle of science fictions"] on one hand and science's surface frictions with the Black umwelts and Black world-views, including black theology on the other, create a paradoxical interface between science fiction and blackness.

3. On the contrary, science fiction being the mythification of science and technology, and science and myth being contraries in a Blakean sense, it is all the more natural that the African American mind would mystically affiliate itself more to the FFF genres than the neatly scientism-atic post-enlightenment Western minds.

4. The black aesthetics emphasizes the tradition and the roots of the black community living and community-ethics, which frequently form the morale that the sci-fi texts apparently promote. However, a specifically black community sense of living and a black ethics of living together are not reflected in the universalistic and essentialist versions of "community" we find in most of the science fictions, which valorize the aggregate by suppressing the realities of racial difference. The emergence and composition of the community in any of the mainstream science fiction's concluding chapters gloss over the differences and thus invisibilizes the differend; the "community" that the black aesthetics highlights is erased from white-washed communities.

5. Science fiction employs the particular constellations of Western thought and history and projects these Western perspectives on a pan-galactic or nano-corporeal scale. For example, the human unity against aliens from outer space in Independence Day synchronizes with American military and cultural hegemony. The two facts, of alienhood is a form of otherness and the human-alien conflicts often are symbolized like the Frontier conflicts, would suggest that in the genre of science fictions, the future is the [chronotopic repetition of] old Western frontier: all that does not submit will be destroyed. When the Other is eradicated insularity becomes total.

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That is why the African American science fictions, even when intended for the children as its readers, centralize themselves on the anthropology of organizing communication and reconfiguring the differential identity of being the "other" rather than the cosmology of technology—its novum is less concerned with elaborate, cutting age changes in the props and the high-end gadgets than with the question of difference and justice. Parallel to this is the African American community's expertise of recycling and innovative reemployment of old and obsolete or commonplace technologies and maneuvers for hitherto unthought of "future" use. The point lies in the fact that the African American vision of "future" is chronotopic and not chrological as such, and futurity emerges in the African American science fictions not as a telos [of hypertechnologized presence] but as a differend, inscribed at the instance of its supposed withdrawal. Chester Himes's Plan B, for instance, rifles and their disguised delivery to the militants form the technological novum. In contrast to the majoritarian "hard sci-fi" texts, the artillery technology and the communications technology both look extremely gauche, shabby and unimpressive, in fact, almost null-technology. The withdrawal of the "myth of science" is so striking in the text that it looks doubtful if we can classify it as science fiction at all. But in terms of the poetics of African American futurist vision and art, the technological novum is quite sophisticated—it is a renovated use of the rose-delivery postal technique for the dissemination of the armoury [the rifles of the revolutionaries]. The whole sophisticated social mechanism for door-to-door delivery in 1960s Harlem is re-engaged in a new-fangled and radical cause.

Hampton and Brooks argue that the issues of racial discrimination and resistance are immanent in the genre of science fiction. They argue that, the African American existence and the alienation of/in the dystopic novum are similar in terms of estrangement and unfamiliar otherness:

African American Literature has always had elements of what many would refer to as science fiction. As is common in a significant number of books written by and about African Americans, science fiction has historically been focused on narratives of the alienated and/or marginalized "other." In African American literature for children and adults, many authors approach the themes of alienation and "otherness" through the genres of historical and realistic fiction as well as biography. The genre of science fiction, acting as a voice that reminds humanity of the depth of alienation experienced by countless people of colour, is less often chosen. In the minds of many, it appears that science fiction is equated with robots and distant planets inhabited by aliens. Despite the lack of black characters in books of this sort, the association is a straightforward one; where there is a discussion of alienation, the unknown and "otherness," there is an analogous link to the African American experience.

43 Tal, Op. Cit., p.69
This connection, however, has not proven to be a momentum for the publication of science fiction novels written about and/or by African Americans. There is a paucity of published sci-fi texts traditionally classified for adult readers, and there are even fewer such texts for teenagers and children. Hampton and Brooks name Butler and Hamilton for their exploration of the "connections between the stories of a culture and the genre of science fiction." Butler is an author who writes primary for a more general audience although most of her texts can be read by the young adults and teenagers, while Hamilton is renowned as a children's writer. Butler's prose is remarkably free from the cryptic techno-twaddle that many other sci-fi writers use, and we find the robustness of the natural, simple, spoken language of the Black American community. Hamilton problematizes the temporal situation of her novum by intermingling it with the historic pasts of African American community, and often situates the plot in a diachronic polyphony of voices: populated with characters from multiple time-periods, and the memory of earned heritage as well as the haunt of unearned pasts permeating the synchrony of each individual's actions and being, the texts upset the positivistic notion of "future". Besides, such haunt also enables the reclamation of the community's earned and unearned memories:

The time motif goes through many of my books. I have been trying to find ways to say that we carry our past with us wherever we go, even though we are not aware of it.

In a twist to the conventional time-travel and alien "other" formulae of science fictions, the two African American female writers allow time-leaps and the unknown "other" to be imagined as a community's history, much like Toni Morrison's adult fiction Beloved. They also create a novum where alienation exists, mostly, in the psyche of the individual characters than merely in galactic differences. Moreover, some of their science fiction characters show the potential to turn into beings who "celebrate and explore, rather than distancing, the other".

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45 Ibid.
46 Octavia Butler has written many novels appropriate for high school readers: Patternmaster, Survivor, Mind of My Mind, Parable of Sower and Clay's Arc being the most prominent among these, and a collection of short stories, Bloodchild and Other Storks. She has received both the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award, the highest honors in the genre of science fiction, in addition to establishing herself as a must-read in the libraries of sci-fi fanatics all over the world. Virginia Hamilton has till date published three science fiction novels [namely, Justice and Her Brothers, Dustland and The Gathering] although in other genres of children's literature she has equal or more reputation. Her texts target the elementary school to lower grades of middle school children as potential readers.
Hamilton’s *Justice Trilogy* is an intriguing collection of African American children’s literature because it inscribes black children into a *novum* that does not seem to be fissured with the racial differences of the twentieth century. Justice Douglass and her twin brothers, Thomas and Levi, along with a neighbour named Dorian, form the rhizomatic coalescence or what is referred to as the "unit." But as opposed to Snowflake’s rhizome of individualistic brainpowers, the “Unit” is communitarian. Partly conscious of their own "otherness" and feeling somewhat at odds with their friends and family, the three adolescents, beyond their epidermalized physical bodies to an apocalyptic Earth on an undertaking to resuscitate vanishing humanity with their special cooperative knack. Like the East African proverb "I am because we are; we are because I am", collective entity plays a significant role in the thematic and ethical structure of the *Justice* series. Eleven year-old Justice is the "watcher" and person in charge of the Unit. As the supervising participant, she holds the ability and the responsibility to initiate the hauling of the Unit from the present to the future. Side by side, she functions as the literal “watcher”, i.e., observer and historiographer of the events of the enterprise. Justice’s skill to monitor the present and chronicle the past enables her to manifest the future as a chronotopic virtual of the real past. In certain ways it has the similarity with Beloved’s hauntological excesses in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. As the unit gathers around an old buckeye tree [firmly rooted in the past], the individuals are transported beyond their corporeal presences into a fast-forward (re)memory navigated by Justice.

Justice’s older brothers, Thomas and Levi, at thirteen, further the communitarian metaphor of the series in that they are psychically bonded twins. Thomas is an insistent telepathist with a speech impediment, while Levi is a hyper-sentimental who feels and bears the pain for the entire Unit. However, the rhizome does not stay deterritorial for long. In most of the science fiction this rhetoric of the inner fissure and hidden dilemmas in the collective entity is foregrounded, as a cautionary note toward the ecstasy of unanimity—the psychoanalytic, or gendered, or material contentions beneath the concord of the super-human, non-corporeal assortment of cognitive powers. Levi is exploited and hegemonized to weaken the Unit by Thomas, who is filled with an unwarranted sibling rivalry toward his younger sister, Justice.

Dorian, the “healer” for the unit is not a biological family member and serves as a seemingly mature sibling in the congress. When there is injury in the unit, Dorian gives the optimum clinical aid. Dorian completes a family unit that is not traditionally Western in its structure.

49 Ibid., 72
As Justice is the leader and consequently the most powerful member of the unit, the Unit's primary reterritorialization is matriarchal and familial. The familiality of the mega-human Unit, and its community-like resilience in spite of the inbuilt contentions, inscribe African Americanness in the phenomenon of the Unit.

Justice and her brother Thomas act as foils to one another throughout the series. In *Justice and Her Brothers* Thomas' is a cynical mind. He is literally incomplete without his brother Levi and functionally cipher without his sister Justice, but he has not yet realized the nature and scope of the Unit as a shared belonging. He conflates his location in the Unit and his cognitive skills with an instrument of individuation of power. The unripe and green-eyed Thomas takes every opportunity to use his abilities to gain all the power a little black boy can handle in his neighborhood, even to the point of terrorizing his brother Levi through mental manipulation. Because he can permeate, interpret and direct the mind of anyone he chooses, Thomas suffers from a bit of megalomania, and a superiority complex. Levi becomes a trickster's mask that Thomas wears to veil his aphasic tendencies and any other drawbacks or diffidence that might limit his power. Justice ultimately establishes herself as the most powerful and clever of the two by winning 'The Great Snake Race,' utilizing, symbolically, fertility and maternity as a tool that Thomas did not consider. The snake that Justice captures for the race is pregnant and consequently gives birth to the largest number of snakes in the contest. Through the tropes motherhood and mother-wit, Justice outwits her would-be enslaver and misguided older brother.

The rivalry between Justice and Thomas continues throughout the series until their encounter with the machines and "Slakers" of the Dustlands of the future. In both *Dustland* and *The Gathering*, Hamilton's references to the African American experience and issues of alienation and 'otherness' are subtle. The Unit is constructed of gifted but marginalized characters that are dependent on the survival of their family. Each member plays an integral role in the triumph or collapse of their mission to pledge the existence of extended family, a metonym for humanity in the speculative future.

For Hamilton the telos for humanity is *survival with the ethics of difference*, that is, the respect for difference without any hierachization in or around the rhizoid differends. The monolithization of humanity is impossibility not worthy of pursuit in the *Justice* Trilogy, primarily because the profusion of ipseity is not favoured as a *novum* by Hamilton. As the three books seem to suggest, similitude and/or compliance do not/does not confirm the
survival of humanity in a hostile environment. In fact her novels solicit that the ability to respect and federate differences is the aspiration proper for the mankind.

In case of Hamilton’s mingling of ethnic [African American] concerns with the questions of otherness and the assemblage of the other’s redemptive potentials into a new form of collectivity [such as the ‘Unit’ comprised of the special faculties of the four black American adolescent participants in it—Justice’s power of ‘watching’, Thomas’ telepathic capacity, Levi’s emotional responsivities and Dorian’s “healing” powers], gender is equally significant as race and racial otherness. In feminist science fictions, the gendered other is foregrounded or examined through the novum. Jenny Wolmark, in her Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism focuses on four types of Otherness in feminist science fiction. She examines questions of identity and Otherness raised by the aliens of Octavia Butler and Gwyneth Jones. She addresses the difficulty Vonda McIntyre and C. J. Cherryh have—even when using strong female characters—in challenging androcratic assumptions about gender embedded in the conventional narrative structure of science fiction itself. She questions the female utopias, and even the female-all dystopias, of Sheri Tepper and Pamek Sargent because the separation of female communities leaves patriarchy fundamentally undisturbed, as evidenced also by the frame story of Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale. Finally, while she admits that few women, with the exception of Pat Cadigan, have ventured to write Cyberpunk, she charges that the influence of feminist science fiction is unacknowledged in this area. She points out that the Cyborgs created by feminist science fiction writers like Rebecca Ore, Marge Piercy, and Elisabeth Vonarburg, by interrogating the ‘human’, unleash a number of alternative becomings in-betwixt the gendered and un-gendered/quasi-gendered/allo-gendered humans and animals and machines and virtualities, thereby destabilizing the cultural dimorphism of gender in the process.

Since science fiction relates to the issues of knowledge and the power generated by the possession and the exercising capacity of such knowledge more directly than any other genre of literature, we can expect that the issues of the gendered power-equations and inequations would be more intensely treated in them even if the texts may not be centralized on the questions of gender. Larbalestier provides us with an interesting thesis regarding the expectancy of gender-politics in the novum as well as the fandom of science fiction: these

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futurist texts make available non-traditional or even non-existent societies or situations in front of us, all of which have a yet-to-arrive plausibility for the time being: in terms of these non-traditional or non-empirical societies or situations, science fiction presents us with non-traditional cross-sections of gendered human existence, action and ideologies. Thus, by virtue of naming what it seeks to exclude, "these texts offer the possibility . . . of being something other than a proper man or woman, and thus they problematize the notion of a true sex.  

In *Alien to Femininity* (1987), Barr delineated the connection between feminist theory and feminist speculative fiction—science fiction, fantasy, and utopian/dystopian fiction. In *Feminist Fabulation*, she charges that "the postmodern canon has systematically excluded a wide range of important feminist writing by dismissing it as genre fiction". Barr demands that the masculinist postmodern canon make room for "a new supergenre" of écriture feminine, namely, "feminist fabulation". Science fictions written for children and young adults by gender-sensitized women and men fall under this supergenre, as well as the utopian and supernatural fantasies and cyberpunks do. Barr moves from considering the "canonical space" to redefining the gendered space" and "reconceiving narrative space." She argues that what is majorly packaged, advertised, and regarded as SF is not really is not really science fiction—for, like much feminist meta-fiction, feminist fabulation or the feminist speculative fiction uses language in a new way "to unmask the fictionality of patriarchal world-order itself, devoid of any ontic or rational justification or foundation for it. Feminist fabulation, including the feminist science fiction written for children, projects through its *novum* a "world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way". In the chapter "Redefining Gendered Space", Barr examines various spaces which are configured in terms of gendered presence, shape, expanse or movement through them—the domestic interior, the social space as well as the outer space or the astronautical field. She discovers the same gendered negotiations through these diverse spaces. Building her argument on the semiotics of "flight" through these spaces, Barr infers that the gesture as well the motility of the flight is already cut by the discourses of gender, yet, "flight" in the sense of emancipation, elevation and achieving

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53 Ibid.8.
54 Ibid.10
altitude signifies major ways of breaking through these spaces or crossing over from one space to another [such as from the domestic interior to the outer space in case of a female astronaut]. “Flight” of the cosmonautical gendered body, therefore, just like we have seen in cases of the walking of Mr. Walker or the Phantom in and out of the hauntologized jungle-space of Phantom comics [inside jungle he gallops but in the urban outside, he walks], or the animation-animated movements of a meta-filmic Donald Duck in the live-action Latin space in the Disney film The Three Caballeors [Donald moves partly by the animation’s technological movement, and partly by imperially appropriating the magic serape of the “other” culture], becomes a metaphor for both spatial interpellation and agentic negotiation of the space itself. The flight of the other, through the space determined and managed by the self, is a site of political contestation, like a female warplane pilot in men’s war, or an extraterrestrial other flying through the space defined in terms of anthropocentric earth.

Spaces, whether real or hypothesized, do posit themselves as already and always gendered; that is, spaces which are knowable and representable through discourse cannot be neutral in themselves. Barr challenges in her treatment of the gendered space the iconography of gender-divided house [conventionally an architectural, and, in the structuralist sense of the term, anthropological separation between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the feminine domestics and the masculine arrivals and departures] and the geography of power in the utopias [defined primarily by the separation of the majoritarian outside from the reverse-territorialized inside] as equally misogynist in effect. In the final parts of her thesis, Barr upholds the different story-telling mode used in feminist fabulations as a reclamation of authentic difference at the level of poetics, which is reflexive of/toward the celebration of difference at the level of the real society’s politics. In "Reconceiving Narrative Space," Barr compares women's and men's specific methods of retelling ancient myths and pre-telling future visions; illustrating how women rupture the patriarchal contours, norms and formulae of narration and create a wild zone that expands and transforms literary boundaries, Barr affirms without uttering so that the true triadic merger amongst postmodern storytelling, feminist fabulation and science fiction takes place in zones of de-hierarchal differences: the woman astronaut out of her kitchen and out into the open space, the rememorial body of the future woman amongst robotic partners, or the porous limits between the residual humans and the dominant machines. The postmodern canon should therefore centralize and not omit female fabulations as its instances.
If we accept the definition of politics as the formalization and/or resolution of conflicts, contacts and collusions between the self and the other, it is easy to note that even the most flatly built sci-fi texts contain a conflict in its poetics which can be read as a political confrontation between the more privileged and the less, and both parties would participate through submission, resistance, interrogation, acceptance, challenge, hegemony, rebellion et al in the network of power-positions. Race or gender is a mega-parameter of enframing the narratives of such participations and/or their textual representations/erasures/traces. Grewell classifies the politics of science fictions into three broad categories:

1. External invasions into earth or human community [ where the aliens are the embodiment of what Zizek would call a racial fantasy or “che vou” of the alien as the inscrutable or menacing other who steals the jouissance of the self, such as The Invaders from Mars or Mars Needs Women]

2. The interstellar domain of earthlings in conflict with the denizens of outer space, dramatized in the outer space, either in the terra firma or in the space stations/colonies [ where the aliens are the racial others to be discovered, encountered and conquered/combated/ domesticated by the colonially expansive humanist earthlings, such as Star Trek, Robinson Crusoe on Mars or The Forbidden Planet]

3. The not so fantastic realities of the humans mean to control and “other” humans [ where the humans are ethically and politically divided into the superior and inferior races, such as in 1984, Fahrenheit 451, The Handmaid’s Tale or Wolfbane]

But the classification, to Grewell’s own acknowledgement, is not so unique or exhaustive as it seems because the different configurations of “racial” alien vis-à-vis the genders of earthlings and aliens involved would resist any straightforward reading of racial politics in the texts, as we have seen above in case of Hamilton’s African American feminist science fictions for children like the Justice Trilogy. If the different configurations and situations of sexuality are also taken into account, the “politics” of science fiction seems extremely complex. In The Handmaid’s Tale, for example, the all-too-familiar trope of a white female in need of masculine protection is highlighted. Sometimes it is not humans, however, but aliens who desire to mate with and control the female of the species.55 This type of texts highlight

the fear of miscegenation, the alien/other as a figure of threat to the white female body, the alien/other as a sexual rival [much like Donald's encounter with the Latino males in *The Three Caballeros*], the alien/other as a malign interruption/violence to the normative heterosexual romances between two earthlings etcetera. Films like *I Married a Monster from the Outer Space* (1958) or *Mars Needs Women* (1959) carry these stereotypes to an extreme.

The sexuality of the movie *Minority Report* is curiously inchoate. Certainly, Agatha's otherwise mysterious pregnancy in the movie's final shot (coupled with Anderton's distanced wife, who is shown at the end back with her husband and heavy with child again) suggests that sex has been going on somewhere; but the who's and how's are not fleshed out. In all probability this has something to do with a desire to stress fertility at the end of the movie - something implicitly impossible under the effective but sterilizing regime of PreCrime - but the effective separation of fertility from sex leaves a peculiar impression. Sex is one of the things hidden in the movie, making its claim as a science fiction for "young adults" more viable and validated. Sex, taboo-ridden, is one of the secrets of the movie. This fact is thrown into relief, as it were, by the fact that Spielberg's 2054 Washington DC is precisely that place in which nothing is allowed to be secret. Panopticon, surveillance technology means that every niche and cleft can be observed by the police including the bodily crevices and angles; and PreCrime's technological gain means that even the future is not hidden from the discernment of the authorities. So the only two possible functions of this evasion of or rather absenting of sexuality might be that of an ellipsis, or of an irony. If treated as an irony, i.e., a gap between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated, the desire of the camera [of not showing the seen, thus not showing itself as seeing the seen, which can be manifested or shown in representation only by filling the void with further void, i.e., showing the actually seen as the unseen and the unseeable] can be read as that of a cautionary one. Things that are institutionally glanced at might not be offered for the audience/spectators to gaze at, i.e., stabilizing the biopolitics of the panopticon at the cost of the economy of scopophilia. Pre-Crime might be always observing the bodily processes of the citizens, but the filmic representation of Pre-Crime is somehow weaker in its scope that it alertly will shut the views like classified data. In other words, here we have the form of the science fiction blending in with the purpose of the ideological state apparatus on one hand, and sublimating its closure as an aesthetic secret, i.e., as its generic charm or strategic appeal itself. But psychologically speaking, this is also the formulaic algebra of the birth of a taboo.
In other words, the movie leaves the audience with a nauseous sense, without actually stating it, that sex itself is a hidden, taboo thing, a thing ineluctable associated with violence and thanatos. The twofold secret discovered at the end of the movie seems to confirm this—both that the murdered woman, Anne Lively, was Agatha’s mother, and that Burgess, Anderton’s father-figure, was the murderer. This hazy conflation between the creation of Agatha and secrecy, violence, death enacts the thanatological imperative to conceal and absent the eros and the philos as a moral dilemma, i.e., an injunction that is an injunction only as far as it is meant to be transgressed, i.e., a taboo.

Indeed, at the beginning of the movie, it is Anderton himself who fills the role of castrator, chopping and slicing with his fingers and the blades of his hands through 3D images of the crime-to-come as he orchestrates the arrest of the not-yet-criminal. It is not coincidental, I think, that the crime we are shown in this sequence is motivated by sexual jealousy and possessiveness. On the manifest level of the text this is explicable by the fact that only an unpreameditated murder, such as a crime passionelle, can effectively take PreCrime by surprise and so enable the exciting chase of the opening set-piece. But in the latent, symbolic part of the film-text, the crime is sexually motivated to underline the sexual 'content' of the neuroses it is exploring. The dangerous male must be made powerless, be symbolically castrated—if the disciplinary and punitive ego of the novum is to sustain.

Science Fiction and the Bios-techné: The growth of the future clinic

The novum of Science fiction is not only an occasion for imagination, discovery, and invention, but also an approach to the ethics and politics of the upshots of science and technology, including their mental, material and corporeal ramifications. The body, cut by the discourses of the race and gender is further permeated by the nanotechnological imaginary of the futurist fictions, along with becoming the site of collusions and collisions between the implosive clinical/medical discourses and explosive ethical/political discourses, i.e., the two most significant templates of the contemporary utterances of the body. Recent works of science fiction and contemporary scientific research agree that nanotechnology will significantly influence our future. Tony Miksanek, a practicing physician as well as the coeditor of the Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database sponsored by New York University, comments:
Science fiction has already written a new prescription for medicine in the twenty-first century, and its name is nanotechnology. It does not appear that it will be very long before scientists begin delivering it.\footnote{Tony Miksanek, "Microscopic Doctors and Molecular Black Bags: Science Fiction's Prescription for Nanotechnology and Medicine", in Literature and Medicine 20.1 (2001) pp.55-70, p 50.}

Literary and scientific estimations differ first and foremost in reference to when nanotechnology arrives, how great an impact it brings into being, and whether or not it is the locus of a panacea or an irrepressible and horrendous dystopia. But the ethico-political analogue of nanotechnological imagery is definitely encouraging for the postmoderns; we know that Nanotechnology can best be described as "the art and science of building complex, practical devices with atomic precision."\footnote{B. C. Crandall (ed.), Nanotechnology: Molecular Speculations on Global Abundance (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p.1.} It is a type of molecular technology in contrast to our current bulk or molar technology. The warrant of altering structures by deconstruction of the smallest presences, i.e., atoms and molecules, is the promise of nanotechnology, which involves the fabrication of materials and devices so minuscule that they are measured in nanometers or a scale of $10^9$. Nanotechnology has been embraced by many recent writings as a paradigm shift of both our ontological and narrative actions:

In science fiction...nanotechnology is already here, an accepted part of the consensus vision among sf writers as to what the future is going to be like—to the point where, if your future society doesn't feature the use of nanotech, you have to explain why it doesn't in order to give your future world any credibility at all.\footnote{Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois (Eds), Nanotech (New York: Ace Books, 1998), p. x.}

The idea of molecular manipulation and miniaturization seems firmly entrenched in contemporary science fiction, but the nanotechnological novum can be traced in older science fiction texts as well, suggestive of the fact the scientific imagination is not only about the exteriority of the knowable world [such as outer space] but the chasms and the inner narratives of the material or physical bodies—a will to introject, implode, milliprobe, incurve the epistemic query, a will to de-construct the moles, a will to master the inscape of things.\footnote{However, it was the musings of a mathematician, John von Neumann, in 1945, and a physicist, Richard P. Feynman, in 1959, along with a work of nonfiction, Engines of Creation, by K. Eric Drexler, in 1986, that truly stoked the imagination of science-fiction writers and scientists, enticing both groups to consider and examine the unlimited potential of a technology able to control atoms themselves. Engines of Creation is the first book that seriously explored the vast possibilities of a technology based upon the ability to arrange and rearrange atoms. Equally important, Drexler not only considers the likelihood and feasibility of such a powerful future technology but also ponders its consequences. He argues that the most important development in this burgeoning field will be the creation of assemblers. These nanomachines would be capable of organizing atoms into any arrangement and configuration allowed by the forces of nature. With this ability, assemblers could construct virtually anything human beings can design or postulate. Drexler predicts that the development of assemblers is inevitable. His only question seems to be when.}

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"Waldo," a story published in 1942 by Robert Heinlein (under the pseudonym Anson MacDonald), foreshadows science fiction's current infatuation with the possibility of microscopic technology. This story describes robotic doohickeys minute enough to refurbish the inner structure of the body's tissues.

As early as the 1950s, science fiction already postulated one key element of nanotechnology—the technological auto-reproductive potential of the signifier, and its slippery, ethical problems posed to the notions of the body's signified, namely, the human subject. Philip K. Dick's "Second Variety" depicts robotic devices that self-replicate. Unfortunately, these same robotic appliances also exterminate the human beings. Isaac Asimov popularized the concept of miniaturization of the human agent itself, by man-made technologies, with his novel Fantastic Voyage. Published in 1966, it chronicles the miniaturization of a crew of scientists and their nuclear-powered ship, which are injected into the body of a man. Their mission—to destroy a blood clot in his brain—was as successful as the novel, which was made into a motion picture. Fantastic Voyage proposed the idea that miniaturization represented a unique technology capable of navigating, knowing, revamping, restoring and engineering the human body internally, especially in situations where conventional gross and clumsy surgery was ineffective or risky. The novum of this text is framed in terms of an interiorization of the object of knowledge, and the epistemicization of the concrete corporeal object—a reciprocal totality of spatial and clinical knowledge of the body, as well as the emergence of the body as a open text of scientological hermeneutics.

Perhaps inspired by Asimov's early vision of a microscopic technology capable of performing medical miracles, recent works of science fiction have further elaborated on the promise of nanotechnology. Some contemporary authors imagine a future where self-replicating, molecular machines cruise through the human bloodstream, patrolling our bodies for signs of disease. The panopticon is shifted from the phallic erection of the exterior and political-administrative surveillance tower to the phallically penetrative and spermoidly disseminative clinical interior-regulation. The ostranenie of this medico-technological uncanny has a double politics to perform: the fixation of our unhomely in the scientific logos, and the preparation of future bodies as open to technological, routinized glances. The instance of the

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withdrawal of the macro-political and its recession into the microbiological is also the moment of body becoming all the more a site or rather retrait of power; more interestingly, the shudder of the nanotechnological catharsis prolepsizes a new ideology of body as the ontology of scientific miracle, in which we become the subscribers to a response of awe, wonder and reliance only:

These microscopic devices would have the ability to enter cells and detect structural, degenerative, infectious, and malignant changes. Such microscopic machines might be capable of neutralizing or destroying offenders such as parasites, bacteria, viruses, and cancerous cells. Genetic mutations could be repaired inside the cell nucleus. Even more astonishingly, these nanodevices would be able to recycle atoms to create new molecular machines and provide construction materials for normal cells and the process of healing. If the notion of billions of microscopic robots circulating throughout your body doesn't give you the shivers, then surely the idea that these same subcellular inventions might one day have the power to eradicate cancer, cure infections, and even reverse aging will give you goose bumps.62

The nonotechnological ideology, again, like any ideology whose mimetic or narrative contours are accessible to literary texts, is not an uncontested one. Science fictions like "Blood Music," The Diamond Age, and The First Immortal all interrogate the incentives and prices of a technology that can literally create or destroy not merely human beings but an entire world, atom by atom. All of these fictional works agree that nanotechnology will not only profoundly alter the way in which humans live, but generate an entirely different archive in which the corporeal territorialities are already dissolved into anatomic-atomic rhizomes and the acts and gizmos of miniscular dissemination of technology serve as the substitute logos.

Since it is generally accepted by both writers and scientists that medicine is positioned to be one of the greatest beneficiaries of nanotechnology, it comes as no surprise that most works of this type of science fiction have protagonists who are physicians. "Blood Music" by Greg Bear, might just be the first story to inscribe nanotechnology proper, even though he did not use that term.63 Edward, the obstetrician-gynecologist narrator renews an old friendship with a college pal named Vergil Ulam. Ulam is a scientist who has recently been terminated from Genetron Corp., where he was working on a project with Medically Applicable Biochips or MABs. MABs are prototypical nanotech rhizomes: machines—nucleoproteins with biochips that can interrelate with human cells. Ulam has discovered a method of constructing large molecules into electrochemical computers that are capable of teaching themselves. Like other

mad scientists in literature, Ulam takes matters into his own hands and self-experiments—the figure of the scientist as humanist in excess. He selects his own white blood cells, introduces biochips into them, and then injects the leukocytes back into his blood. Initially he is elated about the results. It is as if he is "being rebuilt from the inside out." 64 He informs Edward that these biochips can not only amend incipient illness but also transform the human body. The advantages of these MABs include decreased weight due to an improved fat metabolism, a much stronger back as a result of a rebuilt spine, and the potential of preventing and curing skin cancer. But they pose a greater hazard than their potentials can outweigh—theihilation of the human subject's epistemological and ontological authority over the nanotechnical biochips. Unfortunately and perhaps inevitably, Vergil cannot control his molecular tenants. When it appears obvious that Vergil is going to release them into the general public, Edward, in spite of their friendship, must destroy him. Unfortunately, Edward is also already infested with the MABs. He and his wife undergo a horrendous transmogrification, and the MABs become the emergent creators, and not merely engines, in the narrative of such metamorphosis of the residual human bodies.

"Blood Music" is an alarming short story that resonates with both the promises and catastrophes that are engendered by the nanotechnological cut upon the "natural" molar body. Similarly, Bear's tale continues the legacy of scientists in literature, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll (1886) and Griffin in H. G. Wells's The Invisible Man (1897)—the figure of the scientist as the doomed self-experimenters. 65 "Blood Music" also raises the anthropological dilemma regarding the expansion of nanotechnology: how can the creations of science be controlled by science itself, and if science is the mythification of the epistemological Subject, how to fantasize a novum without the erosion of that creative Subject-ness? Miksnek comments:

This story also speculates as to how nanomachines might evolve with or without us. Will these creations survive as servants, symbionts, parasites, or conquerors? The collective consciousness and intelligence that these molecular machines might develop by networking to human brains and other sites in the nervous system give rise to the title "Blood Music" and culminate in the unsettling ending of the story. The unusual title suggests a mixture of disparate elements: Music evokes human achievement and culture but when modified by the adjective blood, the term connotes something tainted or injured. 66

64 Ibid. 7.


66 Ibid. 59.
A technology that is capable of self-replication and sustenance by picking apart the very atoms of matter and then reassembling them would surely represent the greatest threat imaginable to the stratified and stratificatory Subject of knowledge. Just as nanomachines can assemble virtually anything from the signifiers that constitute the corporeal or material anchorage, they might also be capable of disassembling all matter (humans included) and utilizing the atoms to replicate themselves in an endless diffusion and profusion—an epidemic, unrestrained, omnipresent microscopic machination devouring the very cogitative subjects that called them into being, action and representation. Re-producing at an exponential tempo, a bevy of machines, each one just billionths of a meter in size, could plausibly cannibalize the entire planet in only days.

Unlike "Blood Music," Neal Stephenson's novel *The Diamond Age* envisions nanotechnology not as a possibility but a reality. Originally published in 1995, *The Diamond Age* depicts a near future based on the everyday use of nanotechnology and fueled by an unquenchable will to knowledge. Stephenson's book was honored with the Hugo Award in 1996 as science fiction's best novel. Although *The Diamond Age* portrays a civilization that is technologically more advanced than any before, many of the inhabitants of this twenty-first-century world have sculpted their society on the steadiness of the nineteenth-century world and particularly on Victorian England. In *The Diamond Age*, almost anything can be created from the atoms of common materials. Nanotechnology provides all the basics of life—food, building materials, and even diamonds—by large-scale manipulation of all matter on an atomic scale the title *Diamond Age* is ironic: the new episteme is much more metamorphic in its knowledge-praxis than the alchemic episteme it alludes to. Besides, like Phantom's library or the Caballero's birthday-gift books, a meta-textual apparatus is placed as the locus of the knowledge/power nexus, making the nano-novum self-reflexive in its textuation.

In *The Diamond Age*, Lord Alexander Chung-Sik Finkle-McGraw, an affluent neo-Victorian and former pioneer of the nanotechnological revolution, hires a gifted engineer, John Percival Hackworth, to devise a one-of-a-kind appliance capable of educating his granddaughter. The result of Hackworth's labor is a next text: the *Young Lady's Illustrated Primer*. More than a book or even a computer, the Primer is an interactive, multimedia device powered by artificial intelligence that uniquely bonds to its owner/reader. It not only coaches and moulds

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67 The threat of molecular machines unleashed without control either accidentally or deliberately has come to be known as the "gray goo problem." the term is popularized by Drexler. See K. Eric Drexler, *Engines of Creation: The Coming Era of Nanotechnology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), especially p. 7.

its pupil but also seemingly offers *proleptic* statements.\(^6^9\) When Hackworth makes a copy for his own daughter, it is stolen by a boy who gives it to his younger sister, Nell. She is a poor girl whose future is irrevocably altered and enhanced by possessing the Primer.

At the same time, self-reflexivity of the nano-\textit{novum} itself is textualized within the Primer as well as in the mother-novel:

> Now nanotechnology had made nearly anything possible, and so the cultural role in deciding what \textit{should} be done with it had become far more important than imaging what \textit{could} be done with it.\(^7^0\)

The novel does not make present the wisdom to apply this magnificent technology. Scientific advancement has not unified the world but perhaps further splintered it. Although it is a technology that at a minimum should guarantee food and shelter to every inhabitant of the planet, nanotechnology still is unable to make people equal. The world remains divided into the haves and have-nots. An important message of this complex novel is that nanotechnology, like all other technologies, has no conscience. We will be required to guide it as human agents of cogitation and ethics. One of the essential truths of the diamond age is its maxim, "Ordering matter \textit{is} the sole endeavor of Life".\(^7^1\) Yet the fractured society of Stephenson's future appears anything but ordered. The pursuit of happiness is not so much enhanced by nanotechnology as it is threatened and submerged. Although nanotechnology can provide for basic human needs like food, water, and shelter, the novel also offers other gruesome possibilities for its misuse in the future. "Cookie-cutters," also known as "Red Death" or "the Seven Minute Special," is/are nanotech formation(s) that flow(s) through a victim's connective tissues and organs. When exploded, these mechanisms turn the victim's body into pulp or "a big leaky sack of undifferentiated gore".\(^7^2\) The riot of nanotechnological signifiers has dislodged the transcendental centers like God or human subject. No less an authority than the Roman Catholic Church grudgingly accepts the pervasive necessity of nanotechnology: "The Vatican had a number of serious ethical concerns about nanotech but had eventually decided that it was okay as long as it didn't mess about with DNA or create direct interfaces with the human brain". \(^7^3\)

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\(^6^9\) The Primer occupies a central role in this novel, providing instruction, friendship, moral support, and even survival training. It anticipates and shapes its owner's future.

\(^7^0\) Ibid.37.

\(^7^1\) Ibid. 64

\(^7^2\) Ibid., p. 58.

\(^7^3\) Ibid., p. 333
Nanotechnology also provides an innovative and insidious method of discipline and punish in The Diamond Age. The book refers to "nanotech warfare" and recounts an incident where, in a single night, fifteen thousand men were wiped out by an infestation of nanosites. The air in the twenty-first century is "infested with immunocules-microscopic aerostats designed to seek and destroy invaders". 74 In this civilization people tend to bow rather than shake hands since "nowadays some amazing things could be transferred through skin-to-skin contact". 75 The forced unwelt of the inhabitants of the "Diamond Age" is therefore a paranoid and cognitively inert one.

The novel concludes in the stark and bleak depiction of the hospitalities and intimacies of the human community being cannibalized by the information-exchanging machine of the nano-entities in the human bodies—any contact just reinforces the mating of the nanomachines in the respective bodies. These machines function like intelligent units of information forming a worldwide network of communication by mating with other nanomachines in the bloodstream. Global communication and networking take on a whole new meaning by the conclusion of this novel: a machinic polyphony devoid of any human dialogic and a monstrous totalization of nano-collusions devoid of human wills to jouissance.

On the contrary, there is a utopian novum in many nanotechnological science fictions, too. The First Immortal by James Halperin anticipates a twenty-first century essentially devoid of death, in which corporeal imperishability becomes a factum. Only suicide and accidental disasters can prevent the omnience of infinity-longivities. The poetics of this novum is complex: devoid of divine logos, the nanotechnical novum of immortality basically reinscribes the divine even as mortal humanity itself disappears. Time also becomes an un-positive and un-linear as aging is banished by the innovative refinement of cryonics and nanotechnology. The body becomes the site, not of gerontological and eschatological discourses but of ewigkeit, like Phantom’s hauntological perpetuity in Lee Falk’s comics. The protagonist of the novel, Benjamin Franklin Smith, is a sixty-three-year-old physician who opts in for cryogenic suspension of his post-mortem body after he suffers a massive myocardial infarction. Ironically, the post-mortem body would retreat the nascence of the healthier and livelier body, thanks to the premature opting in for virtual death by Smith. With his death imminent, Smith gambles that medical science sometime in the future will discover a method of repairing

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74 Ibid., p 59
75 Ibid., p. 300.
his heart and rejuvenating his body. His biggest threat is the potentially irreversible damage that cryogenic suspension would have on his hitherto alive body. So Smith chooses to nihilate his yet-to-die body's remanant vitals and go into the liquid nitrogen like a corpse, only on the prolepsis of a nanotechnological resurrection in an undefined future. But the humanist risk-taking pays its fruits more satisfactorily than in the case of Dr. Faustus or Tithonus for example. His great grandson, Trip Crane, becomes a pioneer of the new field of nanotechnology. As an assistant professor of nanotechnology at MIT in 2033, Crane invents respirocytes—computerized nano-machines that are more refined and efficient connective cells than the ordinary RBCs. In 2043, the first replicating assemblers are created and nano-repair becomes possible. This development permanently changes the scope of medical science and allows, among other things, frozen bodies to be thawed and repaired—to be made younger and healthier than before. Benjamin Franklin Smith is revived after being frozen for eighty-three years. He has the renascence in the form of the body of a man in his twenties. Many of his relatives are also revived from their cryogenic suspensions. The novel ends with his retro-extended family in future celebrating his 200th birthday. Of course, time by now has ceased to be what it has been before—the ravisher of beauty and youth, the limiting structure of humanism and scarce resource of duration of the self. He warns his clan that the only things that can trouble immortality are unwariness, panic, suicide, and tedium of longevity. This is not only a matter of different or progressive miracle of science—the ideology professed and preached by the renascent nano-man shows a clear and decisive cut from the archive of 19th century ["Release me, and restore me to the ground" of Tennyson's 'Tithonus']—the moral thrust of Smith's birthday speech is the charter of responsibilities in the age of imperishability. When Smith awakens in the future society, he quickly realizes that his skills as a gastroenterologist are no longer marketable. This is therefore not enclosed by the allusive muse: Smith is no Rip Van Winkle. Instead, he acquires new skills, hitherto absent in the pre-cryogenic body and mind: he finds employment as a counselor. Clearly there will always be a need for human compassion, understanding, and good listeners—but the archive and its ethical contingencies have changed irreversibly and totally.

Smith's nano-revived renascent body also raises interesting questions concerning the mind-body dichotomy and the concept of the soul. Halperin's future society is hungry for information, and the book postulates that "Information constitutes identity." 76 The novel also

offers what is in effect a Bill of Rights for individuals cryogenically suspended. They must retain legal control over the disposition of their frozen bodies and brains. Their estates must be preserved to provide for them when they are revived. Suspended individuals cannot be prematurely "thawed" if their private insurers or storage facilities become financially insolvent. All these would suggest a re-territorialization of the new nano-men’s emergence into the same economics and hierarchies that were there in the pre-cryogenic pre-nonrevival episteme; only the ethics and the perspectives have changed paradigmatically.

The Poetics and Politics of The Creepy Creations of Professor Shock:
Something That is to Come, Perhaps:

Stacey suggests to the twin, Jason, “Let’s go someplace new”, and “Soon you’re in a part of the town you’ve never seen before.”77 The narrative thus augurs well in an assertion of the will to novum, the desire to arrive at “someplace new”, definitively uncanny as it is marked by the unknowness of “someplace” and the determinacy of “new” juxtaposed in the vague direction to the destination. What is interesting is that this “someplace new” is a figural other of the known and canny place, a “part” of the town yet mapped outside past [“never”]. The kids ride their bicycles to the place through the wide boulevard, so it is not yet determined, at this introductory part of the narrative, whether they are reaching a novum or whether it is just the backstreet kids rummaging the realistic latitudes as part of a canny experiential bildung. Jason conflates the “new” with a revenance of the past: “I heard this is the oldest part of the city”, an utterance that triggers off the uncanniness of the new. Jason further observes that the houses thereof “go back” to “pioneer days”. Go back—recall, trace, the retrogressive urge at the heart of the inquiry of the new—instead of a simple “belong” or “date back” evokes a spectral anxiety underneath Jason’s kiddish sense of history [“pioneer days” refer to the installation of “America” in the place of nullity, if we may acknowledge that America itself is the novum of dialectical history of the West]. But the revenance does not stop at history, it recalls the pre-historic beyond of the inscription of the past, a retrogressive joke carried too far backwards, at the appearance of the “new”:

"That one looks like it goes back to dinosaurs," you joke. You point at a high, crumbling brick wall. All you can see of the house behind it is a rotting roof.78

The architecture of the exposition of the *novum*, which is also the *revenant*, is stunning. The object of the kids’ gaze is not an architecture as such but *anarchitecture*, the text, textus, texture, structure of anarchy, of *disclosure*, if the wall is meant to act as an *enclosure*, because the bricks [i.e., constituent molecules] of the "wall" are crumbling—ready to dissolve the fascio of the wall, limit, closure, boundary. Yet it is the crumbling and rotten *limit* that defines the opsis of the building: a wall and a roof are all that is offered to the scopic inquiry. In other words, the exposition of the place of the new, of Stacey’s "someplace new", is really an *ex-position*, stripped of history, architecture and even stability in synchronic time.

The *novum-revenant* is, however, a gesticulation of welcome: “A sign by the front gate says PLEASE COME IN”—the readiness for transportation, the new/oldest opening up; but only momentarily, because “the sign now says DANGER!” The entry of the un-homely wall-and-roof ramshackle new-oldest space, the destination of Stacey’s will to *novum*, is not only uncanny, but indeterminate in its "signs", betwixt an invitation to hospitality and a forbidding insulation. The language of the text now refers to the radical indeterminacy and playful flux of language itself, and also to the dictum that every act of reading is a de Man-esque "misreading":

You rub your eyes. Did you read the sign correctly?

Then you see it’s *loose*. It turns slowly in the wind—back to the side that says PLEASE COME IN.79

The sign becomes the hymenograph of *novum* and past—the separation of welcome and banishment, the indeterminate relation and tissuing of the separation and its abolition, the cusp between inside and *outside*. The sign exceeds and splits itself. As the curious twins enter the premises, they find an impending spectral at the place of the new: ‘It looks haunted’”, cries out Jason, and Stacey insists that the space is literally un-homely, “But I’ll bet no one’s lived here in a long time”.80

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78 Ibid. 1.
79 Ibid. 2.
80 Ibid. 2.
The initiation of the children into the novum follows the sudden transportation trope, as abruptly Professor Shock surfaces, and without any context and explanation, asks them to work as per the in-built routine and schedule of the new place:

It's about time you got here! I've been waiting all morning. I'm Professor Shock," the old man says, “are you ready to start work?"\(^{81}\)

It turns up to be a case of mistaken identities, a trope not very distant from the radical identity swaps and identity-excesses of the futuristic sci-fi texts as both operations would be a différence of the proper. Professor Shock thinks that they are from Acme Cleanup, and the kids agree to clean up his backyard and the garage, lured in by money. The garage just looks like the space of unearned memories, a chaotic museum of “junks—old furniture, rotting cardboard boxes, piles of rags, a rusted out car, heaps of old dailies and so on and so forth. They ponder over the fact whether the remuneration promised suits the task, apparently because of the density of junks, but the poetics of ghostly disjunctions can be read—they have to eradicate memories from the past upon which they have no moral purchase. While the work has just begun, the displacement of the old newspapers, i.e., statements of/about the past has just taken place, Stacey’s finger-ring drops and vanishes into the forbidden back-room, behind the “front” of the garbage. This could be read as a mere accidental interruption or divine intervention, but it can also mean retreating the screen memory, as with the disappearance of the ring, the back room’s invisibility recedes.

From this moment in the syntagm of the narrative, a textual unrest is energized. The directives below the margins of the printed words suddenly change from the canny and complacent linearity to imperatives of page-jumps. The reader has to fast forward and rewind the act of reading the pages—with multiple options of re-configuring the alternative paradigms of the tale. The novum and its narration thus suddenly becomes a jeu, with several permutations and combinations of the ensembles emerging as imminent, and no particular calculus for the aleatory narrative can be steadied. After page 4, where Stacey’s ring vanishes, the reader can go to page 33, where the kids pass into the forbidden back-room through the green door, and discover a profusion of electronic gadgets and networks—the sudden revelation of the science fictional uncanny, the machinic. The passage through the impassable brings the human agents face to face with another/an other anarchitecture—a wall plastered with diagrams of machines, and a decision to attempt:

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p.3.
You're studying two huge switches on the back wall. One's red, one's white. From the red switch, a red wire leads to the back of an eight-foot tall copper robot. A white cable from the white switch leads to a high-tech pinball machine. It looks like the coolest game you've ever seen.

You already know you're going to pull one of the switches. The only question is—-which switch?

The sudden technological emergence, triggered off by the simple act of a ring disappearing, offers an optionality of "switches"—switch designating not only the electric object, but change, deterritorialization, lines of flight, and even narratological "switch" or tropological uncertainty. As if this is not enough, the bottom-of-the-page directives urge to try both the options at different instances, the robotic red switch on page 35, which would generate a completely different narrative plateau from the machinic white switch that can be tried on page 15. The reader becomes suddenly apprenticed into too much of scriptibility, of encountering the spectral-novum, with the pass-port/passe-partout of the place of the oldest, new, machinic multiplicities and as we would see, humanist agencies. As the robot is tried with the red switch, the kids can decide to appropriate it to the plateau of labour, thinking to take its service in the cleaning tasks. But the robot's control mechanism unknown to the kids, it spins round and holds Jason's throat. The robot goes out of control, and Professor Shock arrives to switch off the robot amid a chaotized roomscape, a space of science deterritorialized by childish experimentation and machinic violence. The human response is, utterly, that of a Lyotardian inhuman, "Trying not to draw attention to yourself...." The target reader of the novel, the figure of the "you", has again two optional courses of action: run out with the twins through the door on page 54, or apologize and readjust the room on page 26.

If the reader-protagonist "You" chooses to dash out of the place, the crisis is generated by the fact that it has already pocketed the black box of the backroom which has been split into two during the robotic frenzy. If it stays in the room and apologizes to Professor, it has to pay with his work in the house the cost of the damage, especially the black box [robot's remote]. In the first case, "You" joins the remote accidentally, and the laser emanating from it shoots at him/her, and his/her walkman. The walkman suddenly becomes monstrous, with no switches on it working, and the sonorous buzz dizzies the human self into a machinic frenzy, with the man-machine cusp difficult to delink:

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82 Ibid. p.33.
You switch the Walkman off.

The music plays on! It blares in your ears, so loud you think your brain will fry!

Dropping the remote, you try to yank the earphones off your head. But they won’t budge. It’s as if they’re glued in place.

The music is so loud that your whole head is vibrating. Your eyes feel as if they are about to pop out. 83

The rhizome of the human and the machine causes a disintegration or rupture in the wholeness of the human subject and perception. To save oneself, “You” has two options again — to destroy the machine [Walkman] or to use the machine [the remote] experimentally, on page 80 and page 31 respectively. The origamic narrative takes over the organic self, by already always fissuring the “You” as the insecure, indecisive reader, and now also by a rhizomatic deterritorialization in the machinic novum. The cogito is overpowered by the machinic in an ironical, indomitable surplus of the sensuous, and this strand of the story ends there — the remote being broken on page 80, a spectral energy in the form of a yellow spark enters the remote and it starts to grow into a monstrous, gargantuan parody of the self’s desire, leaving “you” in an excess of the fantasy object. To quote from the text:

Somehow, when the spark hit the Walkman, it made it start growing. You don’t know how. Or why.[...] Soon the portable player is bigger than you are! And it’s still growing.

You cower on your bed, watching in horror as the Walkman looms over you. It bulges [...] . You always wanted to fill your room with music. Unfortunately, this isn’t what you had in mind.

Unfortunately, this is

THE END. 84

The end of this strand of the narrative plays upon an ambivalence: the anagnorisis of “this is”, i.e., the ironical volta of being or happening in the novum; followed by the usual “the end” para-text. Or it can be a syntagm complete and cautionary in itself, that “the end” [apocalypse brought in by unbridled technological excess] is, unfortunately, like “this” only—science and technology running riot in the future of mankind, the thanatological anticipation with the future of the technologized civilization.

83 Ibid., p. 57.

84 Ibid., p.80, italics mine.
Instead, if the appropriation of the remote’s technological utility is chosen by “You”, the story takes him/her into an effective use of the machine itself. But the “You” is baffled with what the other buttons in the remote can do, and the narrative takes us to Page 91. On this page, the “You” faces again two ethical alternatives—to return the super-remote to Professor Shock, or to show it to the twins. This way the multiplicitous narrative unfolds itself, disseminates its plots and closures, and defers the identity of the novum. In the course of the different narratological peregrinations of “You”, the novum poses a near infinity of possibilities, only a sample of which are cited by me below:

1. Machines have become self-sovereign automatons, and the canny space of daily life has become unhomely, with no people in the sight—“They must all be inside. Hiding from the machines.”85

2. The bike suddenly becomes a menacing other, attacking the “You”; the only way “You” can save himself/herself is by enacting a rhizome between the human and the machine—he/she jumps on the bike, and clutches its gear-handles, but the rhizome cannot be quickly reterritorialized into what the subject intended. It becomes turbo-velocity, and gain poses two undecided options of delinking and retrieving the human/machine binary segregation, or to stay on with the hybridized kinetic predicament.

3. If the “You” reaches the Profesor’s house on the bike, he/she reports him that the remote must have gone wrong since the machines have been uncomfortably autonomous, Professor Shock explains that it is not wrong but “right” as it is the first principle of the stage one of the novum that his technologies would be constructing/suturing.

4. In one of the “as if” nodes of the oceanic narrative, the hymen betwixt the self and the other is split as the kids’ mirror reflections play fugitive, allowing them to chase and make their imago “come back”, and in the attempt, their bodies transport through the mirror to the other side, thus defeating the narcissistic phallogos of the moment of specular recognition. They pass through the impassable [for the looking glass is compulsorily opaque in order to reflect], only to have an un-homely, shadowless, reflectionless recession

85 Ibid., p.77.
into their home through the aporia of the mirror who stole their self-identifiable others [or the suspicious other which stole the self's narcissistic fantasies and the jouissance of self]. This strand ends with the kids passing to and fro through the specula, mirrors, looking glasses and any glass surface that is supposed to reflect, to try retrieve their reflections, co-ordinate their selves on some anchorage and be themselves back again, but the chiasmatic déjà vu is endless: “All you know is, you've got to keep after your reflection until you catch it. Even if it takes the rest of your lives…” In another variant, “You” is trapped in a hall of mirrors, with an excess of other or imago, an anarchy of isomorphs, so that selfhood becomes meaningless altogether, devoid of narcissism.

5. In another variant, the narrative concludes in Jason and Stacey disclosing it to You/reader that they are cyborgs who have just used “You” as an instrument for stealing the remote from Professor Shock, and they propose “You”/the human reader to become a “mutant machine monster” as a reward for his instrumental service. The ethical pragmatics is clear enough: “If you cannot beat them, join them. After all, they won, in THE END.” The thematics of the loss or dissolution or disclosure of the self into a schizoid or rhizomatic deterritorialization is continued from the split imago of the narrative strand named above.

It is interesting to note that the totality of all the possibilities of the novum basically encompass almost all the basic tropes of science fiction. The narrator describes “You” in second person, thus destabilizing the identity of the reader with a polyvalent, unsure, irreducible energetics that encase him/her, and thereby downplaying or undermining the human subject at the face of the machinic explosions. In a narrative strand that makes “You” and Professor Shock both “fast forwarded” to robotic entity with metallic skin, the message is the clearest—it is not an eccentric or private accident, but a teleologized onward grafting of the present unto the future, not an individual fate, but a demographic novum. The novum may be bleak, with the rubbish being made of the social and not the material wastage: “You” becomes dumped by his/her own but now disowned bike in an animate junk heap, of people who are eliminated by machines from their intrinsic values.

86 Ibid., p. 67.
and literally reified them from the social. Interestingly, in all such permutations, the meiosis that discharges the different forms of the *novum* or the new is not any other technology, but the "remote control"—a gadget of regulating the nomadic becomings of machines, a manual device after all implying human-corporeal grip [ironically], a distantiation between the self and its *objet*, and of course, the temporal and spatial sense of the far away, the yet to come.