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SCIENCE FICTION AS TRIVIAL LITERATURE:  
SOME ONTOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

0. A diachronical analysis of the social systems of human activity, particularly of those denoting esthetical expressions, requires a fundamental change in the study of the interrelations between society and its inherent, communicational manifestations. It is necessary to develop a new methodology which, say, political history has barely discovered, and which has two aspects: a new definition—including a set of re-thought objectives—should characterize the studied object so as to allow the scientific field treated to reconsider its often petrified ontological denotation; and secondly, the application of a synchronic, abstract and objective method of classificatory description.<sup>1</sup> The philosophy of literature, at least when texts are considered a means of social communication on the one hand, and as functional ethical-didactic systems (or responses to them) on the other, should go further and include explanatory hypotheses resulting from statistical and textanalytical data. However, these readjustments would be largely ineffectual when no radical change in attitudinal approach of any esthetical expression or any artifact (picture, statue, literary work of art, ...) is aimed at. Indeed, although for example a literary work of art shows structural and ideal self-referential patterns, its transparency towards the society in which it was generated has too long been neglected.<sup>2</sup> Due to a still very strong (because commercially relevant) tendency towards individualizing and to a persistent independence of each field of scientific research—which led e.g. to a completely detached history of literature misconceptions have only strengthened the isolated

<sup>1</sup> „Wir dürfen keinerlei Theorie aufstellen. Es darf nichts Hypothetisches in unsern Betrachtungen sein. Alle Erklärung muss fort, und nur Beschreibung an ihre Stelle treten” (L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1971, pp. 66). We ourselves do not exclude inductive hypotheses. See also A. Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, Het Spectrum, Utrecht /Antwerpen 1974, esp. p. 223–224.

<sup>2</sup> Only very recently influential critical movements like Genetic Structuralism (L. Goldmann, H. Lefèbre) and the Materialistic Theory of Literature (W. Benjamin, B. Brecht, T.W. Adorno, G. Lukács) have tried to outbalance the leading text-bound or biobibliographically interested critics (Close Reading Method, German “Geistesgeschichte”, Tel Quel Movement, even Russian Formalism), or non-integrational, endocentric theories like Phenomenology (R. Ingarden), “Introvertism” (S. Sontag) and Logico-Positivism (L. Wittgenstein, R. Wollheim). For a critical outline, see V. Žmegač and Z. Škreb, *Zur Kritik literaturwissenschaftlicher Methodologie*, Athenäum Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1973.

and a-social position of art and, thus, of literature in modern society. The sociology of literature, social psychology, comparative literature and interdisciplinary research, however, may soon reduce the monopoly of traditional methods of analysis to their true proportions.

1.0. Nevertheless, one might easily be tempted to assume the self-evidence of current traditions, which are not recognized as preliminary problems (such as, for example, the choice of the object or the material to be treated), but which imply a falsification in certain respects, especially with respect to their social relevance.<sup>3</sup> It is not so much the *subject-an-sich* which needs to be criticized but rather its representation and, consequently, the selectional rules and the patterns of evaluation which deform reality to a mechanistic succession of culminations, denying at least two important systemic notions: dialectics and cyclical development. At the same time, several risks endanger the coherence and exactness of such an approach: lack of logical process-forming, oversimplification, description without either causal basis or applicable interpretation, and especially incompleteness and partiality. There is no better example than general history: traditional history is resultative history, not explicative history; it describes facts but does not explain tendencies. Traditional scientific analysis, always concentrated on an aristocratic and schematic-synthetical representation of progressive evolution (considered as a linear conception), logically generated 'ex-clusive' studies only. A system linking mere relations between striking events, when projected against its social background, utterly represents the products and realizations of the upper classes. It is not hard to recognize this alienating world-vision by its extreme grade of abstraction, reification and concentration; practically, by considering the patterns of individual achievements and the casuistic importance attributed to personalities, scholars and artists.

1.1. Our approach aims precisely at restoring the value of the spans between the piers. Feats of arms are to be substituted by socio-economic fluctuations and the cyclical evolution of the social classes. The history of society is a history of the masses, not of the leaders.<sup>4</sup> The history of literature, formerly a study of Nobel

<sup>3</sup> Subjectivism can also take other forms: see e.g. M. Coulson and C. Riddell's criticism on Functionalistic theories for introducing hypothetic pre-suppositions in history (*Approaching Sociology. A Critical Introduction*, Routledge & Kegan, London 1970); see also R. Dahrendorf, *Out of Utopia*, [in:] L. Coser and B. Rosenberg, *Sociological Theory*, Collier-Macmillan, London 1964.

<sup>4</sup> One should avoid, none the less, the danger of reification; 'the mass', 'the people', 'the bourgeoisie' etc. are projected generalizations, not object-like abstractions. Only a dynamic interpretation of too often idealized notions can really relativate the normative superficiality of traditional analysis. Or, as R. Williams postulates: "To rid oneself of the illusion of the objective existence of 'the masses', and to move towards a more actual and more active conception of human beings and relationships, is in fact to realize a new freedom. Where this can be experienced, the whole substance of one's thinking is transformed" (*Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1971 p. 321). Proportionally, reification intensifies when objectivity—a relative notion in itself—is less realized. It might even be better to replace objectivity by 'structuring': "L'objectivité n'existe pas, il n'y a toujours que la structuration de l'objet par le sujet" (L. Goldmann, *Lukács et Heidegger*, Denoël-Gonthier, Paris 1973, p. 95).

Prize winners and would be masters, actually becomes or should become an analysis of popular culture in the first place, of *Trivialliteratur*; consequently, the immanent structures of beliefs, ideology, 'leitmotive', and of reality itself are to be revealed. Great authors who, according to Goldmann, have a "world-vision", are then reduced to their real social value<sup>5</sup> and elucidated from their models, from their social situation and commitments, rather than from tracing different periods in their one-dimensional and megalomaniac literary context.

Immer wieder wird man versuchen, die Geschichte der einzelnen Wissenschaften im Zuge einer in sich geschlossenen Entwicklung vorzutragen [...] Wenn [...] die Literaturgeschichte mitten in einer Kurve steht, so ist diese Krise nur Teilerscheinung einer sehr viel allgemeineren. Die Literaturgeschichte ist nicht nur eine Disziplin, sondern in ihrer Entwicklung selbst ein Moment der allgemeinen Geschichte.<sup>6</sup>

The neglected emanations of popular culture thus having become the primary object of study, synthesizing authors, losing their socio-esthetical monopoly, are now being referred to as exponential representatives. Temporarily consciously neglected, but at the time influential movements (e.g. the Middle Age's satanic or alchemistic literature) should regain their relative and correct level of importance. Evidently, these modifications will readjust the history of human societies. The myth of an 'uncivilized' working class has only provoked its prolonged but unjustifiable assimilation to the cultural hegemony of a non-popular intellectual upper-class.

The first step towards a reinterpretation of literary history is twofold: a shift in the choice of the subject (object), and a desecration, if not engaged negation of any closed system; in other words, the recognition of the interdependence of all emanations of human activity, more in particular of socio-economic, political and cultural integration, syntagmatically and paradigmatically. The field of analysis being broadened enormously, one might sooner try to limit one's approach as to the object, and not as to the descriptive ramifications, the denotation and the structuralization

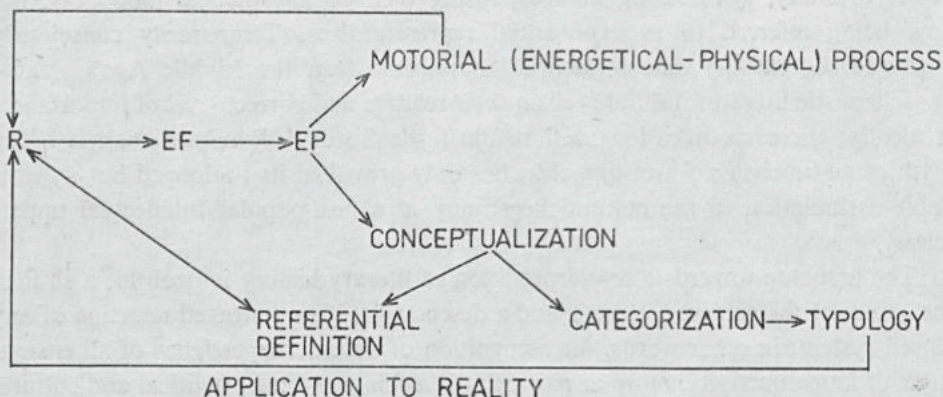
<sup>5</sup> L. Goldmann inculcates this term ("l'extrapolation conceptuelle jusqu'à l'extrême cohérence des tendances réelles, affectives, intellectuelles et même motrices des membres d'un groupe"—*Le Dieu caché*, Gallimard, Paris 1955, p. 349) on great authors, embedding the collective conscience of a group, say a nation, in a minimal group of representatives. Apart from methodological and denotative criticism (see e.g. S. Doubrovsky, R. Barthes, and especially C. Bouazis, *Littérature et société*, Mame, Tours 1972, pp. 177–211), it seems to me that conceptual concentration not necessarily justifies a quantitative sociological reduction, which easily gives way to reification of the authors themselves, rather than of movements, phenomena or contents. This particular problem is dealt with in 1.2.1.

<sup>6</sup> W. Benjamin, *Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft*, [in:] *Angelus Novus*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1966, p. 450. For an application of this tendency towards multi-dimensional integration on *Trivialliteratur*, see B. Rieger, *Trivialliteraturen — datenverarbeitet?*, "LILI — Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik", vol. II, Heft 6, pp. 105–122; G. Waldmann, *Theorie und Didaktik der Trivialliteratur*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1973; more about integrationalism can be found in the tenets of M. Horkheimer, *Kritische Theorie. Eine Dokumentation I/II*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1968, and the "Frankfurter Schule" (Critical Theory: Adorno, Fromm, Benjamin, Marcuse).

of the object.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this article will be exclusively concerned with retracing the phenomenological genealogy and appearance of only one form of *Trivialliteratur*, science fiction.

## 1.2. Statics and Dynamics; Mystification and Illusion.

1.2.0. If we accept that literature then is an emanation of historically explicable structures of a given society and its proper ideological infrastructure,<sup>8</sup> by induction all esthetical phenomena (*EF*) may be considered as mere epistemological patterns (*EP*) for analysis or reflection. These patterns, however, when categorized, tend to give a static impression, which, in my view, would contradict the essentially dynamic conception I introduced in the implied method of dialectics (ideology ↔ society ↔ emanation, which itself becomes the antithesis when ideology and society can be identified, thus causing new structures, etc.). Schematically, the problem could be described as follows, *R* being the materialistic interpretation of reality:



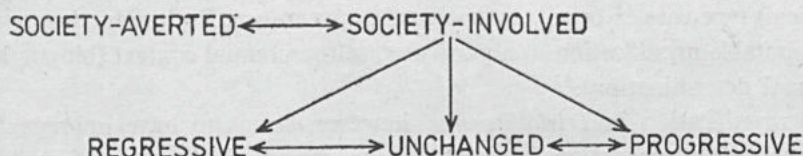
The danger of a static interpretation arises precisely when a consequential typology is introduced in phenomenological data, creating an archetypal entity (*das Wesen*) from which the given data (*Phänomene*) themselves are supposed to be derived.<sup>9</sup> This methodological inversion, *volte-face* even, gives way to a completely illogical shift between a notion and its referential substance. Spatially and diachron-

<sup>7</sup> Structuralization, using "structure" in the sense M. Serres attributes it in his definition: "Un ensemble opérationnel à significations indéfinies, groupant des éléments en nombre quelconque, dont on ne spécifie pas le contenu, et des relations en nombre fini, dont on ne spécifie pas la nature, mais dont on a spécifié la fonction et certains résultats quant aux éléments" (*Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, décembre 1967, 4, p. 449). In this article, no development of conceptual definitions will be tackled; we'll stick to a formal, descriptive analysis.

<sup>8</sup> With 'ideological infrastructure', I mean "the whole of structured, ethically founded, relative-partial belief-disbelief systems of social groups, containing  $x$  = indefinite elements, the relations between whom are dynamic." Of great help has been H. van den Enden, *Het Begrip "Ideologie"*, *Studia Philosophica Gandensia*, 1966, 4, pp. 103–155.

<sup>9</sup> A double danger of static interpretation may result from T.W. Adorno's statement: "Der realen Gesellschaft wird der Unterschied des Statischen und Dynamischen, sei es vom klassifikatorischen Bedürfnis, sei es von einer latenten Philosophie, imputiert" (*Ueber Statik und Dynamik als soziologische Kategorien*, *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, May–June 1961, 81, p. 49).

ically, the traditional division in the literary creation, based on its relationship with the reified notion of 'society', and asserting a literary work of art to be parallel to, opposed to, or averted from society, remains therefore inadequate. The abstract, static category of society-opposed works of art for instance, might refer at the same time to anti-fascist or anti-communist inspirations. The relevance of such a method is already refuted by no more than the ideological paradox; it is not the concept of 'society' which defines the relation of the author towards it, but the interpretations of the society and its structures that create the substance of the concept. Inferential and inter-referential categories, referring to a dialectical basic opposition, and starting from the interrelation between substance of notions and socio-economical dynamics (including ideological engagement), should replace the idealistic misconception of fundamental, eternal, independent structures:



Although some new static categories seem to have been constituted on ideological grounds (regressive, unchanged, progressive), with the fundamental dynamics of ideology itself, the definitions of these categories remain liable to diachronic and motorial evolution.<sup>10</sup> In the actual context, regressive literary works of art indicate those trying to preserve the type of society the writer is living in; they cause an increasing distance between immobilized structures and the psycho-attitudinal evolution of mankind; even more regression is aimed at when completely unadaptable structures are claimed to be imputed to a non-adjusted society, fixing it on an infinite time-dimension (see e.g.—though essentially reorientated by its cynical allegory—the deliberate fascism in Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream*). Works expressing revolt, from Swift to Čapek, often belong to the second category, actually not using existing social structures to apply a necessary dialectical method to transform their society into a more socialized ideal (I have clearly introduced a preliminary limit on relational-communicational functions and interpretational functions; my theoretical system starts from intentional functions), which on the other hand is relatively realized by the progressive movement (e.g. Mack Reynolds, *Commune 2000 A.D.*). That the regressive and society-averted groups are largely dominant cannot surprise us. The fact reflects undoubtedly the inherent conservatism of hierarchical structures, which can be observed in the whole paradigm of grading organizations and liberal conceptions of the economy. *Trivialliteratur*, being most affected by commercial needs and fluctuations, will easily respond to any analytical approach of our structural inequalities for three main reasons: its thematic and

<sup>10</sup> Always taking into account the relativity of the formal expressions themselves, and the dynamic development of the human being and his group-formation.

ideological simplification, its high degree of socio-economical incorporation, and its quantitative importance.

1.2.1. Another subsidiary, but none the less all-embracing and fundamental reason why *Trivialliteratur* may be preferred to *Weltliteratur* as an object of study, is the differing nature of its mystification, a danger to which all forms of cultural expression are subjected in one respect or another. Empirical reduction, for one thing, results from the synthetic character of academic literature; ideological concentration incites its being interpreted as exemplary and specific. Since the authors are then being regarded as movement-makers, a double falsification occurs: the veneration of synthetic writers leads us back to an individualistic conception of the history of literature; and even worse, one tends to overlook the overpersonalized form of alienation, highly intrinsic and interpreting the subject as an accidental, independent phenomenon. Phenomenological objectivation, however, automatically implies reification of the subject. The subject is reduced either to a psychological (or psycho-analytical) type-case,<sup>11</sup> or to a symptomatic appearance. Both reductions engender an indisputable mystification in a particular, self-referential context (biographical or situational determination).<sup>12</sup>

The mystification in *Trivialliteratur*, however, seems to have impregnated the greater half of its production, but is at the same time limited to its surface structure, to the superficial aspects of the literary creation, that is. The shift results from a logical process. Whether the author uses pseudonyms (Michael Crichton, John Wyndham, Henry Kuttner, Pierre Barbet etc.), or almost reaches anonymity by the creation of a legendary hero (Flash Gordon, Perry Rhodan—even deliberate mythicizing can occur: e.g. Jerry Cornelius) his identity submits—on purpose—to the fame of this hero, the stereotyped attraction of the setting, or the restricted basic patterns of conflict: E.E. Doc Smith's Skylark-series, the Mars and Venus series of E.R. Burroughs, the post-atomic war setting, the whims of a time-machine, robots and androids...<sup>13</sup> The elimination of the immediate referential framework looks for compensation in the adaptation of the literary work to formal fashions (Michael Moorcock, *A Cure for Cancer*; Roger Zelazny, *Lord of Light*) and modernistic ingredients (e.g. non-Aristotelian philosophy, see A.E. Van Vogt, *The World of Null-A*; drug-experi-

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. B. Eizykman, *Science-Fiction et capitalisme*, Mame, Tours 1974, pp. 31–41, denoting H.P. Lovecraft's fantastical creatures as typical Judaic characters; see, on the other hand, the Marxist preference for the identification of Balzac with his commercial and bourgeois background (Lukács), or Mishima's reincarnation of the Japanese Samurai-code.

<sup>12</sup> Determinism, based upon the retrospective interpretative system that should be described in a collectivistic and critical way, but includes the anti-materialistic prevalence of the Idea, which Lukács proves "malgré lui [...] L'idée est tout, l'oeuvre s'effaçant devant l'idée" (A. Reszler, *Bakounine, Marx et l'héritage esthétique du socialisme*, "Esprit," 1974, vol. XLII, no 438, p. 228). The same criticism of idealism can be applied to the positivists, especially to H. Taine, who even dangerously tends towards economico-racial deterministic conceptions: "Mais la résistance [contre l'Espagne] ne fut pas la même dans le Midi que dans le Nord; c'est qu'au Midi le sang Germanique, la race indépendante et protestante n'était pas pure" (*Philosophie de l'art*, tome II, Hachette, Paris 1906<sup>12</sup>, p. 41). See also A. Chevrillon, *Taine. Formation de sa pensée*, Plon, Paris 1932, pp. 335–340.

<sup>13</sup> For a simplified list, see J.T. Sladek's division in M. Schwonke, *Vom Staatsroman zur Science Fiction*, Göttinger Abhandlungen zur Soziologie, Stuttgart 1957.

ences: see William Burroughs, *Nova Express*; pornography, see Philip José Farmer, *The Image of the Beast*, or *Flesh*; new mysticism, see Arthur C. Clarke, 2001. *A Space Odyssey*). Although a more differentiated phenomenological existence and recurrent, short-lived transformations of Science Fiction might complicate the outline of a thematic typology, the consequent generalizations on the level of the ideological deep-structure imply two important conclusions:

a) the utter engagement of science fiction, even if hidden, refers ultimately to the basic expressions of a 'conscience collective'; it refutes any positivist, axiomatic theory, considering itself free of values, which some have tried to impute to science fiction:

Der eigentliche Grund für die Affinitäten zwischen dem soziologischen Positivismus und der Science Fiction aber liegt darin, dass beide — auf verschiedenen Ebenen — dieselbe, als wertfrei ausgegebene, technokratische Auffassung von der Gesellschaft vertreten. Die 'Wertfreiheit' bezeichnet dabei nichts anderes als den ausdrücklichen Verzicht auf einen humanen postulathaften Begriff von Gesellschaft.<sup>14</sup>

b) reification takes place on the level of the objects (texts), through their phenomenological cliché-concentration; it is easier to see through such a superficial obstacle than to analyze any materialization in a complex, sociological, ideological and philosophical context. Four dangers can be avoided:

\*1. Incorrect analysis and mystification of the subject (see e.g. Kawabata et al.).

\*2. Deviation from the object of study (see e.g. the historiographic school in literature).

\*3. Ambiguity and contradictory interpretations due to the reification of the author's psychology (see e.g. the role of fate in Racine's works).

\*4. Biographical individualization and reduction (see e.g. Edgar Allan Poe).

1.2.2. The absence, then, of a direct, referential context is reinforced by the de-individualization, both factors that oppose the documentary trend in the recent developments of modern literature. Social realism, naturalism, the commentary novel, and all other forms of documentary literature may provide an interesting opinion on or interpretation of a particular type of society, but surely not an objective image. Such an attempt at faithful reproduction lacks nuance and historical perspective, thus of relativity. Formal, ideological or optional engagement often model the author's world vision. It is easier to avoid that obfuscation of any concep-

<sup>14</sup> M. Nagl, *Science-Fiction in Deutschland*, Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde E.V., Tübingen Schloss 1972, pp. 11–12. Nagl can also be criticized for his ideological narrow-mindedness, deliberately classifying all "progressive" forms of science fiction under the utopia. Formally and elementary, neither N. Schachner (*Beyond Infinity*, 1937), nor S. Lem (*Niezwydzony*, 1967), A. Zagat (*Exile of the Moon*, 1931) or B. Kellermann (*Der Tunnel*, 1913), to quote only a few examples, can be considered as utopian writers. Intentional writing might be considered as another danger to objective analysis, being a methodological falsification and evaluation. To refute Nagl's method, see different conceptions: M. Pehlke and N. Lingfeld, *Roboter und Gartenlaube; Ideologie und Unterhaltung in der Science-Fiction-Literatur*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München 1970; M. Hillegas, *Victorian Extra-Terrestrials*, [in:] *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 391–414; J.G. Ballard, *Notizen vom Nullpunkt*, [in:] *Computerträume. Neue Science-Fiction*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1973, pp. 36–39; etc.

tion of the group and have a statistical (since quantitatively important), thematic (since simplified and intensified, using extreme situations) and ideological (since popularized and depersonalized) analysis of the structurally transparent mass of pulp literature. Largely traditional in form and description, the deep structure patterns show an extraordinary, intrinsic evidence, conform to a slow but dialectical evolution of the society. The main difficulty in piercing the resistance on the surface level is, as I have mentioned, the mystification of the given society, i.e. the transformation of actual tendencies in a transcendental form, a projection of the unconscious strivings of humanity at large in an immanent stream of values and conceptions. Fragmentary case-studies (H. Bausinger, R. Escarpit, J.D. Hart, W. Nutz, R. Hoggart, J.M.S. Tompkins, R. Williams etc.) have given the first elements towards reconstructing a fair image of popular culture. A quasi-archetypal cycle, popular mythology, regularly emerges. The Gilgamesh epic, the *Odyssey*, the *Eddas*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the Legends of Saint Patrick, far from being starting points, should be considered as resultants of mythicizing; the *Kalevala* is merely a poor collection of a much richer (but oral) heroic mythology. The same integrational approach of a society in a popular form, perhaps once to be synthetized in extensive, fictional works, can be discovered in science fiction, and, partly, in some other forms of *Trivalliteratur*.

2. I limit myself to literature in its largest sense, especially to its regularly disparaged forms. It can't be a coincidence that mythicizing constitutes the main characteristic of popular art. Indeed, the inferior social status of the masses, and the ambiguous role of the intellectuals—materially dependent upon the ruling classes, while distinctly sympathizing, if not cooperating with the lower or working classes—have induced a concentration of distinctive features, often projected in a temporal dimension, distanced in linear time. Lacking effective, pragmatismal power of defense in a given set of social structures and conditions (e.g. against the 'Regenten' in Holland's Golden Age), the oppressed and the marginal unite their desires and hopes in a series of fictitious qualities, the sum of which should enable them theoretically to restore the social equilibrium (dialectical procedure); and, in the long run, in might help power gravitate towards them. The personification, or rather the allegorizing of these complexes forms an ideal soil for the generation of the hero, the latter's image being relatively consolidated according to the maximalization of a conscious prevention of reality-control (either projection in time, past or future: see resp. Roland and Tupac Amaru—historical falsification; or projection in space, see e.g. the deification of Achilles—metaphysicizing). The increase of distance is inversely proportional to the hero's social level-relation. The hero's role is always connected with moralization and the formation of an ideal and, by that, with education and encouragement (didactic purpose). Consequently, the realization of the non-individualistic nature of this ideal-structuring, in other words a systematic abstraction or depersonalization of the characteristics mentioned above, makes a synthetic author apply that myth-formation to society itself. When the society is being interpreted either as abstract essence or as a moral-ethical pattern (that can be sublimated by the perfect creature, i.e. anthropomorphism and concentrational reification), as in



Plato's *The Republic*, the Utopia is born. De-heroicizing is only synonymous with substitution of the society as organon; the relation of the hero in a utopia to the society is one of a structure-double, of a microcosm parallel to an identical macrocosm; his function may also be a purely mediating one, as narrator, as non-integrated observer (see Pérochon, Butler, Bellamy and others). The transposition of a human model with didactic intentions on a structural entity (e.g. the society) simply denotes the generating of a mythology on a larger level, on a more complex scale, exceeding the individual. The utopia is the first convincing model of an essential projection in the future, inherent in every myth,<sup>15</sup> if not in its ideal image, at least in the didactic directive for the recipient (in the case of Roland, for instance). On the reactionary, neutral or dynamic-progressive image the work of art inspires us with, the interpretation of this necessarily futuristic emanation alone decides. If, by all means, this projection is felt as a loss for the human being when compared to his actual spatio-temporal coordinates, logically the development of mankind is considered as a successive degradation of the phenomenon, which is man (a movement to recognize in the redemption religions, the philosophy of Swedenborg and Kierkegaard, the naturalists and existentialists etc.). Another philosophical implication is the prevalence of the Idea on Matter, or "pour l'homo religiosus, l'essentiel précède l'existence:"<sup>16</sup> matter cannot help striving towards the recuperation of its perfect essence, itself an a-temporal value; that a static world-image results from these concepts is evident. The acceptance of these principles, and a conservative disposi-

<sup>15</sup> Every utopia, however, opposes paradoxically the dynamic foundations of its diachronical development to the static image of a final, "eternal", conclusive pattern of (society-) structures. The projection performed raises a triangular problem: the axes of time, language and conception. Intrinsicly related, their dynamic constitution might be put into question when dissociation is aimed at. Two hypotheses, propounded by André Jacob, try to refute the static petrification of the time-element: "Le temps originaire, qui correspondrait à une visée ontologique [static] risque d'être, par principe, en deça du langage, et... on ne peut donc rien en dire" (irrelevance); and, "Le temps originaire pourrait bien n'être que l'envers des structures temporelles spécifiées dans l'évolution et dans le champ de l'activité humaine" (antithetic dynamism, or dynamic inversion) — A. Jacob, *Temps et langage*, Armand Colin, Paris p. 1967, p. 356–357. Utopian writers therefore risk to arrive at the same point where e.g. Nazi-mythologies (see Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 49) had deliberately created immobility. Such an operation, however, is all too transparent: "Croire trop vite à l'éternel, c'est sans doute réifier onto-théologiquement, au lieu de réaliser humainement le futur, par un mouvement d'impatience ou de crainte, en spatialisant à la source, plutôt qu'au terme, les trois dimensions du temps" (Jacob, *op. cit.*, 330–331). Our generative description differs also from Eliade's views as to the notion of time. For him, the relation with actual society is irrelevant, if not retrospective: he retraces all myths to a kind of sacred, archaic origin; myths stand for the reactualization of sacred time, as opposed to linear, irreversible, "profane" time. In other words, "un mythe raconte des événements qui ont eu lieu in principio, c'est à dire 'aux commencements', dans un instant primordial et atemporel, dans un laps de temps sacré" (M. Eliade, *Images et symboles*, NRF-Gallimard, Paris 1952, p. 73. See also M. Eliade, *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour*, NRF-Gallimard, Paris 1969). Being synonymous with and idealistic, superstructural negation of the diachronical essence of each phenomenon, and excluding a diachronically retraceable interference with the existing social structures, this interpretation should be rejected, because it finally leads to absolute isotopy, thus, to cyclic statics.

<sup>16</sup> M. Eliade, *Aspects du mythe*, NRF-Gallimard, Paris 1971, p. 116.

tion towards such a fallacy which does not take into account the constituent splitting factors (inequality, hierarchy, meritocracy, oppression, ambition, competitive systems and the like), inevitably imply a reactionary attitude. On the other hand, the belief in progression towards an ideal, towards the integration of mankind, towards the ethical interpretation 'improvement', is clearly marked by the notion of progressiveness. The blueprint of this striving can create static images, none the less responding to a progressive future vision. Statics then simply represents the transplantation of the evolution of the actual splitting factors on the futuristic, ideal conception (negative extrapolation) or the recognition of an eventual negative evolution that equals without any doubt the confrontation with the fear of the self, with the created vacuum, enhancing the responsibility of realizing the utopia. That fear can be retraced as well in existentialist literature (e.g. F. Sagan) as in the anti-utopia (J.G. Ballard, *The Drought*; E. Zamyatin, *My*; K. Vonnegut, *Player Piano*; A. Huxley, *Brave New World*; *Ape and Essence*; A. Bester, *The Stars Are My Destiny*; *The Demolished Man*; W.S. Burroughs, *Nova Express*; ...).<sup>17</sup> It cannot surprise us then that it is precisely the variants of the utopia which link together the tellurian mythology, the metaphysical and the technocratic ones. They mediate between the three different society-models, and their interpretations. Oligarchy, feudalism and bourgeois capitalism have called into existence their proper, unnatural mythology. The first system failed to free itself from its premise of inequality (Plato's conception still presupposes an opposition between citizens and slaves, and proclaims it natural). The feudal system's reaction showed itself most ineffective and weak (certainly due to the identification of its intellectual class with the representatives of the institution-

<sup>17</sup> The opinions of critics vary extremely on the position and value of the anti-utopia. M. Nagl nad B. Eizykman oppose each other completely on resp. ideological and psycho-analytical grounds. The danger of the anti-utopia, according to Eizykman comes forth from its probable imitation of the psycho-libidinal patterns underlying the capitalistic system: "Au lieu d'essayer de se démarquer du capitalisme [...] par la recherche d'une collectivité animée par une configuration libidinale différente, l'Anti-Utopie marque son rejet de la Société en choisissant une donnée précise jugée fondamentale quant à la bonne marche du capitalisme, en l'exacerbant." Being "un exercice d'application impliquant l'intelligence approfondie du système actuel," the danger precisely exists in imitating, by depicting and incorporating the principles of such a society into its own basic patterns: "Péril évident si une critique non contaminée du système exige la description de ses mécanismes en contention libidinale du point de vue multiple de la fluidification des flux" (Eizykman, *op. cit.*, p. 99-100). Eizykman's conceptual mistake, however, is twofold: the influence exerted is one-directional (passive, because analytical and descriptive), but worse, he considers the actual system as a monolithic block which is necessarily predominant. The capitalistic system, on the contrary, has become intrinsically paradoxical, having developed a fundamental antagonism between its aim and its praxis (see the study of inflation, on philosophical grounds, by R. Boehm, *Kritik der Grundlage des Zeitalters*, M. Nijhoff, Amsterdam 1974). Eizykman's contradictions (deterministic causality between principles and reproduction) are thus refuted. Further reading: H.-J. Krysmanski, *Die utopische Methode*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Köln/Opladen 1963; M. Pehlke and N. Lingfeld, *Pessimistische Wetterprognosen*, [in:] *op. cit.*, pp. 127-139; M.R. Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale/Edwardsville 1974; G. Woodcock, *Utopias in Negative*, "Sewanee Review", Vol. LXIV, 1956, pp. 81-97; *Der utopische Roman*, R. Villgrader and F. Krey Hrsg., Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstad 1973; B. Davenport a.o., *The Science Fiction Novel: Imagination and Social Criticism*, Advent Publishers, Chicago 1969, etc.

alized church). Examples like Magister Nivardus' *Isengrimus*, *Piers Plowman*, or *Van den Vos Reynaerde* are extremely rare, the absence of utopias but for some late exponents poignant. Besides, it is significant that the utopias actually denounce the end of the old mythology (rests of which survive), and even more the languishing social system (Plato, More, Huxley perhaps?). It might make us think that the technocratic mythology in science fiction will end sooner than the previous movements. The logical escalation in the evolution of society-forms could give us undeniable evidence: evolutionary accelerations cause faster transformation of mythologies. This movement will necessarily persist for as long as the old class oppositions fail to be eradicated, since the creation of a mythology qualifies the reaction of a collective universe against the privileges of the upper classes.<sup>18</sup> Projected into science fiction, one can claim with Michel Butor:

Mais pour atteindre à toute sa puissance, il faut qu'elle [= SF] subisse une révolution, il faut qu'elle réussisse à s'unifier. Elle doit devenir une oeuvre collective, comme la science qui est son indispensable base.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the futuristic emanation the the popular ideals is a collective response to the challenge of the power-apparatus. The initiative is still the state's; the power structures, being in force in the socio-economic relationship, are extended to the cultural field, that is. In the last decade, science fiction has tried to turn the tables; a new option should be taken now, not to react anymore, but to pre-act; I presume that the intensifying integrational, utopian-idealistic and equality-minded option will slowly fuse reality and mythology.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Even when this class-concept is covered by a type- or principle-presentation (resp. Oedipus, Ulysses, Sisyphus etc., and the Indian mythology). See, among others, Eliade, *op. cit.*, Further reading: C. Lévy-Strauss, *Mythologiques*, vol. I-IV, Plon, Paris 1964–1971; *Mythology*, P. Maranda ed., Penguin, Harmondsworth 1972; *Myth: a Symposium*, T.A. Sebeok ed., Indiana University Press, 1958; *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice*, J.B. Vickery ed., University of Nebraska Press, 1966, etc.

<sup>19</sup> M. Butor, *La Crise de croissance de la science-fiction*, [in:] *Essays sur les Modernes*, NRF-Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 235–236. It should be a mistake against the dialectical development of spiritual values (and their transformation from and into the material reality) to deny the new form of mystification science fiction incarnates; rationalization may alter the formal characteristics, and even change the complexity of the object-audience relation (interpretation), but does not interfere with the projection of a spontaneous, popular reflex on social structures into a schematic "world-vision". Therefore, one has to reject, in spite of her correct generative definitions, bold assertions like S. Sontag's in *L'Oeuvre parle*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris 1968: "En raison du progrès de l'observation scientifique, une conception plus réaliste de l'univers a triomphé de la croyance en la valeur et l'efficacité des anciens mythes. Passée la période mythique..." (p. 12).

<sup>20</sup> Apart from the opaqueness of actual myth-formation (no time-distance), this seems to me the main reason for the decrease of mythology, and not only the complementary relation myth-rationality, as G. Sebba brings into focus in *Symbol and Myth in Modern Rationalistic Societies*, [in:] T.J.J. Altizer a.o., *Truth, Myth and Symbol*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1962, pp. 141–168, and who points out the danger of political mystification: "Technology, to say nothing of other rational forces, lays down conditions which no modern society can evade. This means that the problems of myth and symbol arise under conditions imposed by the spirit of rationality. Moreover, under the rule of this spirit, myth and symbol become tools of rational socio-political engineering" (p. 168).

3.0. Tentatives until now have proved surprisingly unsuccessful. One ought to know why people—rather a particular age-class, and mainly the lower bourgeoisie—read science fiction. In the absence of more scientific, sociological material (apart from Hirsch and Nagl,<sup>21</sup> only unsystematic data on the specialized reviews can be found<sup>22</sup>), I shall consider the problem speculatively. The mass-production of science fiction proves its value mathematically as a collective response. Interpretations on the futuristic projection of a social, humanitarian ideal can't be traced as yet. The existence of an enormous range of parallel degradation-structures or institutions which favour degradation theories, evidently influenced the common reading public, and provoked an escapist reflex. However, this reflex—and misinterpretations are numerous—does not necessarily represent a reactionary or conservative attitude; on the contrary, mythicizing ensues from the structural impotence of the people to realize their ideals. One example: the Indian mystification around Tupac Amaru after the Spanish invasion of the Inca-Empire. The mythology is the sham weapon of the weak. Often, the mythology is the last freedom left to the human being who lives in an oppressive society. But the mythology is also a double-edged sword: it surely expresses the collective urge towards the ideal situation, but at the same time prevents for a good deal practical action. The mythology, in its dynamics, stands for a stabilizing factor. The inherent dialectic of the phenomena is shown again. From this point of view, Frank R. Scheck, though again intellectually disparaging and lacking the slightest nuance, deduces a remarkably, but only partially accurate observation:

Die Science Fiction ist die Masseliteratur einer kleinbürgerlichen "Bewältigung" der imperialistischen Gesellschaft. "Bewältigung", weil sie anders als Heimat-, Wildwest-, Liebes- und Kriminalroman, die elementaren Gattungen des Trivialen nicht auf gedankliche Flucht in eine vor- oder nebenimperialistische, weitgehend realitätseinkleidete Form sinnt, sondern solche Realität, in ihrer technologischen Perspektive, zugibt; statt Ablehnung der Zivilisation der kapitalistisch industrialisierten Gesellschaft — ihre Einklammerung.<sup>23</sup>

Confusion not only appears between intention, attitude and pragmatism (the demands of which he postulates for the attitude, a normative and unacceptable generalization already refuted in this article), but an apodictic intervention to render fantasy and science fiction synonymous, makes obvious his evident lack of denomination faculty and historical insight; moreover, such a combination must be antithetical, in as far as the fantastic element represents the unique aim of the author (see e.g. Michael Moorcock, *The History of the Runestaff*; Philip K. Dick, *Galactic*

<sup>21</sup> W. Hirsch, *American Science Fiction 1926—1950. A Content Analysis*, Northwestern University, Evanston 1957 (unedited PhD-thesis); Nagl, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> The most important of which are or were "If," "Astounding," "The Magazine of Fantasy" (later: and Science-Fiction), "Galaxy," "Analog," etc. Elements on their importance and sale can be found in J. Sadoul, *Histoire de la science fiction moderne*, Albin Michel, Paris 1973; A. Rogers, *A Requiem for Astounding*, Advent Publishers, Chicago 1964; P. Versins, *Encyclopédie de l'utopie, des voyages extraordinaires et de la science fiction*, Ed. L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne 1972; *Science Fiction Today and Tomorrow*, R. Bretnor ed., Harper & Row, New York 1974, etc.

<sup>23</sup> F.R. Scheck, *Augenschein und Zukunft*, [in:] *Science-Fiction. Theorie und Geschichte*, E. Barmeyer Hrsg., Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1972, p. 263.

*Pot-Healer*; Jack Vance, *The Eyes of the Overworld*; etc.). Is it not the SF-setting that saves a novel from classification under pure fantasy, a movement deriving from the anti-social, late-imperialistic Gothic novel, which reappeared—via the Decadents, the Symbolists, Gogol and Hoffmann—in the early twentieth century (Rosny Aîné, H. Ewers, J. Ray, R. d'Exsteyl...), and by no means contains a progressive-futuristic indication, a vital characteristic of science fiction. The fantastic novel<sup>24</sup> is the product of man-degrading theories, in which the phenomenon of Evil, of wickedness, rather links up with medieval satanic literature; the only clues they all have in common with science fiction are their upper class marginality and their mythicizing. The conception of man as an imperfect shadow of an ideal essence vehemently opposes that of science fiction. In other words, the interpretation of their myth creation differs entirely, always taking into account that, in fact, one shouldn't speak about poetic, intrinsic mythology in the fantasy-movement due to the presence of exclusively negative ideals (dehumanized 'heroes') and especially the absence of a collective future projection in an ideal model. Fantasy is perverse resignation, and is in coalition with the existing social system. Fantasy at its best can partly belong to science fiction as far as its paradigm of characteristics forms part of the whole complex of the mythical therapy. The monster is not Frankenstein, but Dracula, not Doctor Mabuse, but Fu Manchu. Besides, we have left out the formal conditions (e.g. the indispensable element of 'science' in SF); on the other hand, I do not exclude fusions between fantasy and science fiction (see e.g. the Swiftian visions and satirical fantasy in Stanisław Lem's *The Star Diaries of Ion Tichy*).

3.1. To summarize the argument then, we consider that science fiction, as mythology, results exclusively from a social deficiency, namely the impossibility of breaking through the existing power structures in a given society. Evidence of the central object, which assures power for the ruling class, should appear from this literature, more exactly from its themes. The third recognizable form in the creation of Western myths has clearly denounced, isolated, and woven its thematic treatment around the real weapon of the upper classes: technology. In the given context, technology, fatal product of an anti-socially orientated, functionalistic and mainly positive science, could only increase the applications and possibilities of a hierarchical division, and reinforce the structural relations in a modern society. A defective insight made science fiction—almost without exception—tangle object and subject, and, worse, cause and effect. The fear of mechanization, of "technologization", and of the society being computerized (see e.g. the discrepancy between technological and ethical progress in Ernest Pérochon, *Les Hommes frénétiques*; see especially Leo P. Kelley, *The Coins of Murph*, and Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*), remains on the

<sup>24</sup> A more detailed treatment of the fantastic novel I gave in *The Decadents in a Black Hole: Dorian Gray and William Wilson are Dead*, SAP, Vol. I, n° 1, pp. 86–95. See also H.P. Lovecraft, *Epouvante et surnaturel en littérature*, Ed. 10/18, Paris 1971; J. Van Herp, *Panorama de la Science-Fiction*, Marabout, Verviers 1973; M. Hillegas a.o., *Shadows of Imagination, The Fantasies of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and C. Williams*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale/Edwardsville 1970; M. Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, Fontana, London 1960; further on, see L. James, E. Verhofstadt, E. Birkhead, J.M.S. Tompkins etc.

level of the medium, not on that of the agent. The fear of the machine as an independent entity (object-reification) substitutes a true but often not recognized fear of its manipulators, scientists with the intellect but without the ethical conviction of the *homo futurus*. A complete infrastructure underlies this basic attitude, the most dangerous relation of which consists in a control of science by the leading financial-industrial class, and, by that, automatically in a guided policy of science.

#### 4. Conclusions:

\*1. This purely theoretical outline started from the assumption that basically statics doesn't exist; no empirical proofs, except for our reading experience, have been given; moreover, "da alles offen daliegt, ist auch nichts zu erklären."<sup>25</sup> But we have to recognize "was daliegt".

\*2. Popular culture is a dynamic strategy to restore the balance between oppressive society-structures (or structures felt as being oppressive) and a revolting majority of the members of this society. This strategy takes a largely unconscious form: mythology. *Trivalliteratur* is a transparent emanation of the response of the body of society to the given society-structures.

\*3. Statics doesn't exist, neither as an ontological category, nor as a phenomenological item.

\*4. Three periods of myth-formation dominate Western history: the tellurian period, the metaphysical period, the technocratic period.

\*5. *Trivalliteratur*, and because of its wide thematic range especially science fiction, clearly incarnates the technocratic mythology.

\*6. Science fiction lacks abstraction. Mythicizing shows for the first time a tendency towards objectivation and object-veneration, instead of towards a humanistic ideal. Channel or method, and motivation are wrongly mixed up.

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### SCIENCE FICTION JAKO LITERATURA TRYWIALNA. NIEKTÓRE PROBLEMY ONTOLOGICZNE

#### STRESZCZENIE

Wychodząc od dynamicznej koncepcji wszystkich zjawisk estetycznych praca niniejsza jest próbą ustalenia zbioru kategorii, które by pozwoliły dowieść, dlaczego — zarówno z socjologicznego, jak i filozoficznego punktu widzenia — literatura trywialna (*Trivalliteratur*) jest lepszym i mocniej uzasadnionym przedmiotem badań socjologicznych niż literatura światowa (*Weltliteratur*). Jako

<sup>25</sup> Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

układy epistemologiczne zjawiska estetyczne z literaturą włącznie nie przystają do żadnego statycznego modelu czy metody. Wprowadzają one kategorie dynamiczne, takie jak dialektyka, procesy budowy diachronicznej, przenikalność itd. Skoro więc literaturę interpretuje się jako manifestację złożonej, historycznej i ideologicznej infrastruktury danego społeczeństwa, to jej analiza powinna odzwierciedlać pole jej genealogii, czyli społeczeństwo i system komunikacji.

Toteż negacja jakiegokolwiek systemu zamkniętego (pojęciowego, przedmiotowego i społecznego) wymaga zmiany podejścia nie tylko do przedmiotu badań (ograniczenia zakresu badań), ale także zaniechania indywidualizacji na rzecz matrycy tekstowej i jej suprastrukturalnych implikacji: mitologizacji i ideologii (*Trivialliteratur*). Na doniosłość literatury trywialnej jako przedmiotu badania wpływają trzy czynniki: uproszczenie tematyczno-ideologiczne, wysoki stopień integracji ze strukturą społeczno-ekonomiczną oraz jej związki ilościowe. Powyższym czynnikom odpowiadają trzy typy analizy: strukturalno-tematyczna, statystyczna oraz ideologiczna.

Praca niniejsza skupia się na ostatnim typie analizy, ponieważ łączy się on z główną cechą literatury trywialnej, a mianowicie z różnicującym charakterem mistyfikacji oraz jej formą (struktura zewnętrzna — zjawisko), a także z reifikacją (zniekształcenie przedmiotu). Za przykład obrano *science fiction*. Mitologizację w literaturze fantastycznonaukowej potraktowano historycznie i porównawczo w stosunku do powieści fantastycznej. Jej charakter wywodzi się ze społecznego zachowania klas niższych wobec wyobcowanych układów władzy. Jej rola, a zwłaszcza rola utopii jako początkowego modelu projekcji przyszłości, polega na mediacji i aktywności: odzwierciedla ona całkowitą zmianę modelu zachodniego społeczeństwa (w kierunku modelu tellurańskiego, metafizycznego, technokratycznego) i sugeruje modele alternatywne. Jednakże niektórych odchyień nie da się praktycznie wyeliminować (czynnik stabilizujący, obiektywizacja).

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