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THE RHETORIC OF ITERATION.
THE APOCALYPTIC MOOD IN LITERATURE
AS METAPHOR OF WESTERN WORLD-CONCEPTIONS *

In the history of literature, the genre labeled 'science fiction' inspires most commentators with ambiguous feelings. They never seem to be able to decide whether novels included in that category should be evaluated by the same standards commonly applied to any other literary category. Partly this uncertainty is due to the very topic treated in science fiction, and to the functionality attributed to what the novel conjectures about: in the wake of Gernsback and Campbell, Moore (1957 : 108-120 & 186-189) synthesized the problem as 'fact or fiction'; within the authorial tradition: it was translated as a vigorous opposition between 'hard core' and 'new wave', between 'cumulative objectivity' and 'obsessiveness' (Conquest, in Rose 1976: 39), between 'outer' and 'inner space'. Doubt partly arises also from a sociological angle. Most readers and writers are professional 'real', natural scientists (Hirsch 1957 : 16-20). The result is as disastrous as ideologically biased; authors do feel exempt from meeting literary standards, critics tend either to diversify literature and to cover up poor style or inability to write at all by inventing new categories like 'the physics novel' (Friedman 1979), or to subsume all categories under a more abstract, ideological (Nagl 1972; Schäfer, Schröder 1978) or epistemological (Scholes 1975; Lück 1977; Suvin 1977) denominator, or still, fulminate a ban against the very idea of a 'literary' genre as such (Koestler 1970).

My own opinion has always been slightly different, though I recognized the useful ideas put forward by the ideologists and epistemologists. I defended the idea of reformulating the particular artform at issue in terms of 'mode' (De Vos 1977; De Vos 1979); this operation offered the possibility of trans-

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lating the 'scientific' part in terms of a strategy, which could function at the same time on a political, a literary (objectifying speech; rationalizing style; parody, semiotic emptiness etc.), an epistemological and a scientific level as well (degree of extrapolation). Moreover, this attitude has the advantage of laying bare the philosophical roots of the categories proposed themselves. Habermas' critique on technological thought became reactualized, especially where he stated his reserve against Marcuse's bestseller, *The One-Dimensional Man*:

Die Schwierigkeit, die Marcuse mit dem Ausdruck des politischen Gehalts der technischen Vernunft nur zudeckt, ist die, kategorial genau zu bestimmen, was dass heisst: dass sich die rationale Form von Wissenschaft und Technik, also die in Systemen zweckrationalen Handelns verkörperte Rationalität, zur Lebensform, zur 'geschichtlichen Totalität' einer Lebenswelt erweitert (Habermas 1968: 59—60).

Neither the model of man's fall, Habermas continues, nor the concept of innocent scientific progress can solve the ambiguity of the idea rationality within the framework of a society. It is the aim of this paper to show how, contrary to Habermas' belief, any of these models can and does produce the ambiguity necessary to impregnate Western society with a deliberate ideological choice, namely duality, and to prove that the essence of rationality, as a notion and as tool, is bifurcation. In this serves a particular, functionalistic conception of the universe, which its rhetoric exemplifies and symbolizes. I have chosen the fall, the eschatological structure, mainly represented by the theme of world destruction and the apocalypse; I will proceed then to construct the common basis of Habermas' alternatives; I will call this basis the judaeo-christian rhetoric, and consider the alternatives mentioned (historicizing; the innocent view; the degradation theory) as different configurations of one and the same input, as coloured sets of different coordinates within the same productive field, as shifting, rearranged shapes of intertwined ritualized expressions, i. e. of semiotic action. Finally, I will apply this clearly ideological construction to some practical examples, and especially to J. B. Priestley's *The Doomsday Men* (1938).

A typical representative of the objective school I happened to meet at a Congress last August¹. Defending the idea that art is no more than a modal strategy to consolidate a given ideology, I got mixed up in a quarrel with astronomical engineer and kinetic artist Frank Malina. It soon turned out that both our views remained incompatible, which made me trace the overall effect, and the rationale how and why our disagreement came into being. I think I can resume the insurmountability in four points:

First: given our completely different disposition towards science, the areas included and excluded, the acceptance and contents of the notion of rationality, our education and practice, a major disagreement seemed to be

¹ The 'Art in Culture'-Congress (August 11—15, 1980, Ghent State University), organized by the interdisciplinary group *Communication & Cognition*.

caused by "the influence of differences in scientists' access to the system of scientific beliefs and practice as a whole" (Lugg 1978: 285). This was the case, even if we made abstraction of the precarious interference of institutionalization, e. g. of the rôle of scientific communities, the access to them, the validity of a system of irrational, axiomatic beliefs (Feyerabend 1970), and so on.

Second, my refusal to exclude observation as an unproblematic parameter in the process of measuring stirred Malina's pragmatic conviction that science shouldn't deal with philosophical speculation but stick to well enclosed experiment und proofgivings. Functional as this view may seem (and responsible for his resolute rebuttal of quantum mechanics), there is sound reason to believe that the act of observation deserves a much more central, even crucial place in science building than a simple acceptance of its human determinisms' (cf. Bunge 1980). Watzlawick (1978: 88—92) describes experiments performed by Asch (1955), in which it shows undeniably that social pressure plays a conforming rôle whenever dissent endangers the common opinion about a given observation. So far, nothing revolutionary; Asch's findings can be easily absorbed in the functioning of scientific theories, and their use of negative heuristics (Lakatos 1977: 133—134). But the conclusions Watzlawick himself draws from the evidence are much more revealing and disturbing: social conventions often prevent people from plain awareness, the corollary of which is, in scientific theorizing, a monadic perspective. I did (and do) not want to accuse my opponent of not realizing the problem. It became clear, however, that he had taken once and for all, a decision in view of relevance, thereby reaffirming and restating the neutral point of view, and not letting interfere the contextual and cognitive deviation factors, which, to my mind, are decisive for theoretical configurations.

From Watzlawick's conclusions to the core of our dissent is but one step. The core of the problem consists of two related problems. One: terminology. Two: conceptualization. The laws of nature, for instance, so dear to Malina, are always mediated—if we follow Watzlawick's argument—by language, by symbolization, i. e. an operation stemming from a large scale conviction. Watzlawick (1978: 137—138) obviates his own use of terms-excluded-by-his-own-theory, like 'in reality', 'effectively', 'really' or 'obviously', by systematizing his inevitable terminological paradoxes vis a two categories conception of reality: reality of primary order, and reality of secondary order. However, the implementation of his categories is subjected to the fate all notions are likely or liable to undergo. A type case of systematic confusion was debated by Blackmore (1979), and testifies to the contradictory starting point Watzlawick holds; it proves at the same time Habermas' (and perhaps in direct line also Malina's, up to a certain point) reduction of this impossible solution to a study *from the inside* of sociohistorical modelling of theories, and to the pragmatic organization of the domains of scientific interest:

...information, aiming at the expansion of technical control in work; interpretation, ensuring the orientation of action through language within shared traditions; and analysis, freeing consciousness from ideologically covered power. (Merquior 1979: 114).

Our main point remains unaffected, none the less. From Blackmore and Watzlawick we can learn how terms tend to empty themselves, not so much by turning into a formal language, but rather by getting stuffed with so many contradictory uses that they render language full control of itself. In other words, the *artificial* construction of a 'content', and organic *signifié* can no longer be hidden; hence, language as a formal system in operation, as a world of *signifiants* is granted independence, if not inaccessibility. Therefore, we shifted the scene to indirect knowledge. What know is but *performative ideology*, caught in—and here we follow Liabermas—historical modulations, contextual focalizing and reciprocal dependence of conceptualization and practice. This consciousness strikes a final blow to Kuhn's one-dimensional notion of a 'scientific revolution' (Kuhn 1970). The multitude of interpretational (constructional dimensions, of constructive layers, of change and fluctuations of perspectives, prevent a scientist from talking about self-relying 'alternatives', about program switch, if they are not primarily included in a limited and pragmatic project. At most, one could talk about rhetorical reorientations, but the complexity of parameters framing social action, and the necessity to ensure 'understanding' within the community can't but hamper any mechanistic conception of evolution. It is the *belief* in *progress* that permits Kuhn to construct a catastrophic model, even though it shows at the same time his correct vision on latent discontinuities within any given system or historical construction.

It has become obvious, then, that the main stumbling block for Malina and myself was the 'historical totality', our completely diverging conception and construction of the universe proper. Frank Malina, for one thing, sticks to a rather crude, Newtonian image of the universe, in which time and space form a pair of fixed complementarities (sufficient a frame for the practice Malina's theory, or better, his activity—designing rockets—leads to), and in which an *objective* reality is given. A reality that can be described in formal and natural language (analogous observation), by a subject independent of the objects around him. But this dogmatic anthropocentric conception simultaneously delivers the rhetorical filter necessary to convey its claims:

Yet there is something for which Newton—or better to say not Newton alone, but modern science in general—can still be made responsible: it is the splitting of our world in two. [...] It did this by substituting for our world of quality and sense perception [...] the world of quantity, of reified geometry, a world in which, though there is place for everything, there is no place for man. (Koyré 1965: 23).

It is this ultimate paradox I'll come back to later on which backed my main point: I argued that we have only produced that kind of science which our knowledge and traditions, more scientifically, our ritualizations of thought-patterns and our ideologies allow us to produce. To put it bluntly: it was

my tenet that it is the very language we speak that forms, and is formed by, the historical and actual social institutions, like the church, scientific communities, literary societies and so on, that give us the potential shapes, the matrix of conceptions we will develop, for instance about the world and the cosmos. Post-Searlian pragmatics clearly points in the same direction (cfr. Verschueren 1979; Verschueren 1980). I went even further, and I will try to show my point in this paper, too, stating that we have not developed a real; single new idea since about 2.000 years. By 'we', I always refer to 'Western culture', by 'idea' I mean a basic premiss that functions as a corner-stone of our conception of the universe.

The reason why I forwarded such a provoking hypothesis is that my research in the field of text-theory, mythology (De Vos 1981), semiotics (De Vos 1980), religion, science-fiction and the science of science (De Vos & Holthof 1980) has forced me to accept that the rhetoric that is in use since, say, Plato, has not been fundamentally changed, if changed at all. The rhetoric Plato developed was carried forth by the main organizations that came after him and dogmatized his conception of reality: the Roman Empire and the Church or, if you prefer, the Bible at first, economical organizations later on. That is why, from now on, I shall always refer in this respect to the judaeo-christian (neo-platonic) rhetoric as our ritualized way of *constructing*, not decyphering, decoding or interpreting the universe and reality. By that, emphasis is laid on the dogmatic, asse assertive nature of any hypothesis concerning world-constructions.

In the first part of my treatment of science fiction, I will try to show that SF, as the literature of the future (cf. e. g. Asimov 1957: 326. "Of all branches of literature, science fiction is the most modern. It is the one literary response to the problems peculiar to our own day and no other"), the *progressive* literature giving "new vitality to the dream of human experience" (Clareson 1972 : 25), claims to hold an idea of improvement, higher culture and progress (the "speculative" dimension, to join Heinlein and Merrill (Nicholls 1979: 160), without accepting the former's weird simplicity: see Heinlein 1953 : 1190—1191 on 'authenticity')², of which I will prove that the notion itself is sustained by a conception and development of a notion of *time*, which is vectorized in a linear way and therefore paradoxical with the utter premisses of the judaeo-christian rhetoric itself that developed this kind of notion of time. I will make my point clear by reducing time to an

² See also, among others, Ash 1975: 13; Turner, in Ash 1977: 262 ("What, if any, are the special values science fiction can contribute to world literature? Science fiction has contributed an insistence on alternative possibilities of ambience, physical shape, thought and accepted fact. Other literary forms have attempted this, but none so consistently or successfully"); Ash, *ibid.*: 270 ("Risking overemphasis, it has to be said that science fiction is the only modern literature which presents these considerations in anything approaching an accurate light"); Graaf 1971: 12; etc.

utterance of the rhetoric, which, traditionally, is subject to three basic features:

1. the judaeo-christian rhetoric is of an *absolutistic* nature, and therefore fills up the universe completely (or claims to do so).

2. most obviously, its structure is *dualistic*; our world, consequently, is *imperfect*.

3. the sense of this world, finally, lies outside the world itself: it is transcendental, and will be attributed to that entity or construct that always contains "something more" (Beardsley), which is "more than human" (Blish) if you like. The most boring word used for it by scientists and laymen alike is: god.

These three features, *absoluteness*, *dualism*, *transcendentalism*, when applied to literature, induce inescapable tendencies, themes, inspirations. Absoluteness implies that human history—and since literature always tells stories, it follows the same rules as history—takes the form of an eschatological project. Writing is thinking about limits, delimitation, borders, demarcation—with respect to the human being or to a character: birth and death. Dualism leads to a dynamics of opposition; compared to the perfect transcendence which is god in these lines of thinking, human life is an ethical project that portrays a chain of conflicts on a cosmological scale, as is the case in science fiction, I may borrow the word coined by David Ketterer in the subtitle of his study *New Worlds for Old* (1974): dualism requires the adventing "apocalyptic imagination". Finally, the transcendental sense to be attributed to all human deeds is to be probed and understood by means which are at the same time a condition and a falsification of knowledge. In science fiction, most writers—though personally I doubt this fervently—think they use the frame of the *scientific subrhetoric*. One can intensify one's search for real knowledge, i. e. for the sense of our universe, by thematizing this rhetoric itself; SF, in the latter case, becomes, as Darko Suvin puts it, the literature more correctly a (form of) literature of *cognitive estrangement*. It is my final hypothesis in this first part that the rhetoric used forms the stable frame (or the frame temporarily kept stable) of pragmatic models to structure and live with "reality". I will call these pragmatic models 'ideological theories', which explains, for example, why one can posit that, say, marxism, puritanism and even, to a large extent, the Islam produce exactly the same knife-sharpening nonsense on television: their speech, no matter what ideological theory it tries to express, is inscribed in the very same rhetoric that I have called the judaeo-christian one.

In the second part, I will go into that 'nonsense'. Cognitive estrangement, highly present in science fiction stories and novels—or at least presumed to be so—is in my view a *nihilistic* reaction against this rhetoric, and is therefore bound to fail. I hope to show with a few examples how hopeless, if not reactionary, most SF is in its response to the dominating judaeo-christian rhetoric it speaks, it articulates.

Starting from the idea that knowledge of the world is always conferred or transferred by our senses, and that transfer largely means either construction or subjection to determinisms, this knowledge, to my mind, can be covered completely, is expressed entirely by a human *language*. In Wittgenstein's terms, all one can think of can be said, and all you can say can be said in a clear and simple way. Language therefore *is* the world, in a certain sense. Delany's *Babel 17* is but an outright application of Kuhn's concept of "puzzle-and-riddle-solving capacity" of a scientific theory. Language fills the universe, and any novel, any story creates a possible world (to use Leibniz' and Geodman's term). Possible, however, does not mean 'original', 'new', 'feer—language is bound to certain patterns, certain beliefs, certain assumptions, certain rituals of argumentation and conviction. And much more important, it is bound to limits: "The borders of my language are the borders of my world". Wittgenstein. Literature creates not so much of a story in the first place, but of a frame, a closed world—an eschatological concept. The frame as such is submitted to the notion of progress in the rhetoric treated: we are evolving, as a human race, to "our destiny": the stars as in Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!* act as metaphor and gateway to the meaning of our existence itself. The description of this frame, the evolution towards a necessary goal, be it 'peace' in Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, 'inner peace' as in Moorcock's *A Cure for Cancer*, 'rescue' in A. C. Clarke's *A Fall Moondust*, 'self-knowledge' as in the same autor's 2001. *A Space Odyssey*³ is no point zero, cannot, in its solution, trespass the threshold of transcendence. On the other hand, the fundamental paradox introduced by the judaeo-christian premiss is restored by the asymptote to infinity caused by the process of ever further universalization. Transcendence, according to Popper (1968 : 94—95), is inherent in any description (compare Gopnik 1977: 224). A symbolic endeavour to realize the impossible can be found in Delany's *Nova* (1968); on a cosmological scale, the attempt to create universe-wide harmony fails on all levels, individually and socially; the novel's conclusion is typical of the rhetoric used; a plea for a qualitative but delimited transformation of a small scale universe. The visionary hero, atchetype of his society, gains contradictory blindness in his confrontation with the life-bringing destruction the nova implies (energy); all personal projects show their inaptness and cripple construction. The real winner is in fact the forces behind the universe.

Solutions given in SF-novels are fake solutions, relative resting points. We have a better name for it in science fiction as well as in politics: it is the

³ One could broaden this to the symbolic level of the entire race, or more specifically also to the breaking of the code in a game proper. What is the difference, after all, between Polish matematicians and the British Intelligence Service breaking the Nazi-Code (*The Enigma-story*), and, say, the conceptions of Delany's *Babel 17* or Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendez-Vous with Rama*, novels in which the cognitive estrangement is enormously intensive, and brought on an explicit, conscious level?

utopia we are striving for, and which needs must fail because of its being expressed in language, in thought-patterns which are tributary to the rhetoric they are derived from: the judaeo-christian rhetoric proclaims man's imperfectness, subdues man to an unknowable higher force and order—any dream or alternative articulated in terms of such a rhetoric is doomed to fail: the dystopia is born, and even former eutopias, like Plato's *Republic* (did not Lundwall call him "that first nazi"?) or Campanella's *Civitas Soli*, are bound to be turned into dystopian nightmares' in different times and/or different societies—as we ourselves actually do; nobody wishes the poet to undergo the fate Plato reserved him in his concept of the State. In most science fiction novels, however, the utopian aspect is but a literary custom, a simple truism, too, to meet the demands of a postromantic audience. It just provides the comforting happy-end (notable exceptions like Wells' *Time Machine*, José Moselli, Thomas Disch or W. S. Burroughs prove that rule) for the description of the progression itself: the story is the *quest* for a Holy Grail, an illustrative sublimation anyhow. Most science fiction stories, from the extraordinary voyage of the 18th Century to the space opera or some new wave mental illness, depict in minute detail, or bloody carnage (*Conan*), the being-on-the-way of man, thereby not so much entertaining the reader, sociologically speaking, but rather confirming and reconfirming a basic norm of the judaeo-christian rhetoric: the notion of progress itself, which is directly linked to the conception of time. I'll come to that soon.

The science fiction story, consequently, is in search of the fulfilment of its longings: a longing for security within the dominant rhetoric, and deliverance of the evil temptations of profane science (as in *Zardoz*; cf. De Vos 1981), redemption even. SF echoes the dogmas of man's fall, of his inevitable, 'natural' state, which is a state of humility, prostration before *true* gods—or one god, for that matter. Man should be aware of his shortcomings, of the dangers of science e. g. (defiance of god, challenge of *the* truth), but also of his mission to subdue nature. The ethical conflict is man's natural environment. James Blish, in *A Case of Conscience* (1958), gives us the in my eyes most morbid but simultaneously most honest example of 'the force'; there is no place for unequivocalty; it is a man's world, and therefore, apocalyps now: the definitive investement of the dual, and loaded with doubt and unsteadyness, of the ambiguous, necessarily conflicting world of oppositions. Father Ramon Ruiz-Sánchez, the jesuit priest and—not fortuitously—a biologist (the evolution, the quest that must be executed and fulfilled; for the theme, see Isaacs 1977) has to declare Lithia's reptilians the work of the devil, even if they have no perceptible sins in terms of the humans' notions. Otherwise, *his* belief, his sense of the world as predicted by his rhetoric, would collapse. No term is ever empty in its use. And it is no credit to Blish that the act of exorcism sets the reptilians' world on fire, because of its sun getting nova. Comprehensible, perhaps, since man, in the judaeo-christian conception and rhetoric, cannot live without his own ontolo-

gical criteria; his own shortcomings are to be the norms to construct the universe, since they are the conditions of his knowledge and understanding. But that is exactly what Nixon thought of Vietnam and the 'communists', too. Flowers for Algernon, so to speak. A most typical theme that confirms my hypothesis on the plea for *modesty via ambiguity* is the frequent use, in utopias, pulp literature and exquisite stories alike of ruined towers, and of cities and other closed, labyrinthine structures. The reason is indisputable: "En annexant le monde, la ville a assimilé les antagonismes et les contradictions", Gauthier writes. "La ville moderne est en effet ségrégative" (Gauthier 1977 : 105). Where formerly the city sustained the idea of duality in opposing nature, actually it has 'swallowed', absorbed nature's ontology by removing its essence of unpredictability, power and danger to man. The victim has become the vampire itself. Here is, by the way, a token and argument for linking up phantasy-stories (think of E. A. Poé's *Fall of the House of Usher*), utopias and science fiction, instead of juggling with genre-characteristics (rhetorical analogy e. g.: Graaf 1971: 11) and extraliterary criteria for exclusion (as 'rationality': Van Herp 1973: 406). Ruins, on the other hand, emphasize at the same time the idea of transience, the passing away of all earthly things, socially as well as symbolically. In the German *Spätromanik* (Kleist, Hoffmann, Uhland), to give a social proof, the motif of the crumbling castle translated the spasmodic downfall the aristocracy.

Durch eine einseitige Auslegung romantische Geschichtsauffassung hat man übersehen, notes Winfried Freund in a recent article in *Diskussion Deutsch*, dass die Ruine keinesfalls nur zurückweist in eine mehr oder weniger idealisierte Vergangenheit, sondern überdies den für den geschichtlichen Fortschritt notwendigen Verfall des Alten und Ueberlebten signalisiert (Freund 1980: 361).

The key-words are all present: Geschichte/history; Fortschritt/progress; Verfall/decay. The symbolical, i. e. ideological downfall is clearly marked in Delany's *Fall of the Towers* (1968) or in J. B. Priestley's *The Doomsday Men. A Thriller of the Atomic Age*, in which the hero, Malcolm Darbyshire (an Englishman in Paris, of course) and his friend, the (evidently American) scientist George Hooker are on the verge of reaching the headquarter of a secret society that is conspiring against the world. The place, for our theory aptly referred to as "The Castello", is then described as follows:

He crawled out shakily into the delicious cool air of early night, saw deep indigo hills against the stars, and high in front many lighted windows; and he knew without being told that they had brought him to the very place at which he has stared from the plane about six hours before; for this could only be the secret headquarters of the Brothehood, the home of the MacMichaels. Yes, dimly rising there, ghostly beneath the stars, was the white tower (Priestley, 189).

Evidently this tower, placed on a cosmological scale (the stars), and like the electric pylons surrounding it, stands for human hybris; Priestley is rewording the story of Babel's ("rising") tower, and divine punishment is bound to come. At the end of the book, the MacMichaels' wicked, nefa-

rious, deep-laid, sinister plan to destroy the world will be thwarted by an exceptionally sober ex-war pilot (whose final conversion and penance decide upon the sort of his fellow-men):

Poor Charlie Atwood, who had performed so many stunts for meagre pay, now did his last stunt for nothing, and perhaps saved the world. He sent old Bendy crashing into the nearest pylon, and as she splintered and flamed and he went to his death, the cables parted. No more electric current was flowing into the tower.

Nevertheless, high above the burning wreckage, the white figure still raised its arms, to give the final signal, ignoring the confusion and tumult below. As the arms fell, it seemed as if the earth gave a shiver and then split. All the watchers were struck down as if by a hammer; the air went screaming above their prone bodies; the ground shuddered and heaved; and only half-conscious now they heard dimly the earthquake thunder of toppling buildings. It was indeed like the end of the world (Priestley, 246).

Apocalyps now and a "Clash of Symbols", like the Statue of Liberty in the film *The Planet of the Apes* (1968), an ultimate testimony of the force and the truth of the judaeo-christian rhetoric. SF apparently does not bother so much of exploring how this our world can be transformed by liberating it from its own dogmas, but rather fumbles after the conditions and criteria of how to stabilize, i. e. to translate into the terms of our rhetoric and, in doing so, to *assimilate* the projection of new worlds to the models, to the program of the dominant ideology.

A major scientific, theoretical implication can be deduced from this way of reasoning. It concerns the status of the notion of 'time'. Having shown the ideological definition of time in terms of progress and decline as we usually introduce it in everyday speech, the corollary becomes obvious: if we want to escape the use of time in a judaeo-christian respect, we have to recognize that it is either a *constructed* clearly artificial (and not given or universally natural) factor in a universe built up, projected by human beings, be it in a Newtonian or an Einsteinian key; or, if time is in point of fact absolute, consequently it can have no limits or borders (and no measurability); it gains a transcendental quality, superseding its purely normative, natural law-like faculty, but, by that, becomes utterly irrelevant for human society and its functioning. What is absolute does not belong to the human domain—in a judaeo-christian rhetoric, this means that time can be identified with (a quality of) god; or, if we turn the tables—and I prefer to do so—this rhetoric proves to be internally paradoxical, and therefore in flat contradiction with its own premisses, since it pretends to be the only way of truth to reach transcendence on the one hand, but degrades divine capacities to a factor of imperfection on the other. Now christians will call this a mystery of course. My question then would be: but whodunit? The answer is self-evident: science, and scientific speech. It becomes palpable why science is treated with circumspection, and even distrust by so many, SF writers included. They have realized that science, too, is but a *pragmatic* model, repeating, re-articulating the premisses of this very society and its basic convictions. And now the reader also understands why Frank Malina refused to discuss science be-

fore and after Newton. As the quantum-theory has shown, there is not so much a universe that can be described and reproduced by stating so-called natural laws, and that should have an objective, independent existence, but there is and an inevitable interaction between subject and object, thus confusing of not removing the dividing lines between them, and a plurality of worlds that are simultaneously present in different forms and phases of their existence. That construction I have labeled the *tectonic model* (De Vos & Holthof 1980). I am not blind for objections against quantum theoretical fundamentals, raised by methodological (Marshall 1980) or teleonomic (Rietdijk 1980) considerations, but the uncertainty principle and field discontinuities hold. Metaphorically applied to text theoretical constructions, the implications are not surprisingly far going; in a system of different emerging and fusing worlds, no reality can meaningfully exist without a constructor, a framing and thinking human being; no reality leads a fixed existence; it shifts its coordinates permanently, and our descriptions of it are but temporary, necessary and necessarily falsifying stabilizations. Reality becomes a collection of shifting plates, fields of probability, and not the result of pre-fixed determinisms.

It is curious to see how distrust in science is encouraged by the judaeo-christian program. That is because within its rhetoric, science and rationalism are identified (and because of historical reasons, from the rejection of Natural Philosophy by Saint Augustine to the institutional conflicts in the Enlightenment up to Darwin or even Prigogine). The balance of complementarity, necessary within that mode of thinking, should be restored by imputing *empathy*, *Einfühlung*, Huxley's feelies if I don't abuse, intuition. Characteristic examples in science fiction are given by neo-theologians like Ursula K. LeGuin, whose meticulous description of winter in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) appeals to this natural, organic evolution (like the opening images of *The Empire Strikes Back* do), or Walter M. Miller Jr., whose *Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) literally preaches detachment and mystic transcendence. Or as Harold Berger puts it in *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*:

Miller's gentle static clericalism has its virtues. The clerical mentality and temperament is hardly disposed towards inventing world-blasting armaments. In all, however, Miller seems to be less assured by his faith in faith than his faith in scientific ignorance to halt the deadly cycle. Here again science fiction steps backward from the precipice, waiting for the instinct of racial survival—should that ever come—to overtake madness and the machines (154).

Thematizing the growing distrust in science and ideologies, by questioning or even putting to doubt the rhetoric itself via thematizing the medium, language itself—as the New Wave, and especially J. G. Ballard and Samuel Delany have tried so often—is in this respect a most honourable thing to do. But their endeavour, and the second part of this paper will deal with problems related to it, goes not beyond the surface, cannot supersede the posing of

the problem as such. Their perspective remains reductive, nihilistic even, in that the self-evident conclusions from their consciousness have not been put to practice—knowledge of the existence of a dominating, rhetorical program could have incited them to project and conjecture limited, pragmatic working programs (not utopian models), that materialize ideological conflicts. There are several solutions that have been tried out, with little success up till now. I will come to them in a moment. The problem is the form of queer, inverted resignation Ballard is pleading for, and which he tries to reconstitute over and over again, from *The Drought* (1964) to *The Crystal World* (1966), as well as in *Vermillion Sands* or *Crash* (both 1973):

I believe, he states, that the catastrophe story, whoever may tell it, represents a constructive and positive act by the imagination rather than a negative one, an attempt to confront the terrifying void of a patently meaningless universe by challenging it at its own game, to remake zero by provoking it in every conceivable way (Ballard, in Ash 1977: 130).

It reminds me of a wild, anarchistic return to chaos for chaos's sake, an image that Nat Schachner, in his protest against the general refusal to take up clear outspoken ideological engagements and against bourgeois middle-of-the-road non-commitment to threatening political and social crises in the thirties, transposed already on the whole universe in *Beyond Infinity* (1937), where a core of nothing gnaws at the universe itself from within, growing as the universe expands—a trivial but powerful symbol. It is significant, moreover, that with the nihilistic tendency from the sixties onwards—nihilism which, unlike Nietzsche's, is rarely if ever 'creative'—SF turns to the anti-hero. Some fine examples, like Billy Pilgrim in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), or the roving homosexual youths in William Burroughs' *The Wild Boys* (1969) became politically effective, before degenerating into cult figures. But most of them turned to slapstick and dummy strips, as was the case with Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius. The problem posed from 1968 onwards is as acute as it is potent; the science fiction writer wrestled with his *internalizing* the awareness of *das Grenzkonzept*, the conception of demarcation and delimitation, and how to render it active and meaningful within his own world constructions. The seventies unfortunately, with a deterioration of international relations, retreated to a state nihilism had once led to—the void is again interpreted from the harmonious conception of the world the judaeo-christian vision advocates, and from a general world order as its natural state, and credits it with man's own frustration of having lost redemption and consolation (the streamlining dominant rhetoric promises, and, in point of fact, socially speaking actually offers, too). Hence, emptiness generates fear, even angst, the most inveterate avatar of which is death.⁴ The eschatological void returns in force, as Thomas described it:

⁴ Against the Epicurean view, our society claims that death can be and is intelligible, considered as an evil for the person who dies, because of our "four-dimensional" ability to understand life in durational terms" (H. S. Silverstein, *The Evil of Death*. "The Journal of Philosophy", 7 July 1980, Vol. LXXVII, No 7, p. 424).

Et quand soudain le cadavre atteste que cette attente (de l'avenir) ne déboucle sur rien, alors, c'est l'insoutenable nausée qui, en l'absence de toute menace objective, se traduit par la peur (Thomas 1979: 94).

The causes can be quite diverging; SF writers have imagined them all, from an organic plague in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) or M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901), to a mechanistic causal process as Williamson shows in *After World's End* (1952) extrapolating that too many robots are likely to wipe out the human race itself—incidentally, *The New Scientist* of August 28, 1980 announced somewhat prematurely but already beaming with pride: "Japanese robots are prepared to self-multiply".⁵ Other visions evoke, like Disch's gloomy classic *The Genocides* (1965), a world in which chance and worldconstructions are the factors that relegate mankind to a nuisables species, or deliberate political degradation as in Harold Nicolson's fine diplomatic satire *Public Faces* (1935), or still scientific self-destruction as Hjortsberg's bodyless brains less brains symbolize in *Gray Matters* (1971). *The Doomsday Men*, already referred to, formulates the synthesis of these fears: the void leads to a restoration of static, binary dogmas—the conditions of love/hate, life/death, eros/thanatos, progress/decay etcetera—replacing easily the interactional process of dynamic theories of pragmatic reality-construction viz. world-construction.

One could say then that there are at least four categories, by means of which SF-authors have tried to shun as well nihilism as servile reproduction of the judaeo-christian rhetoric. One category has already been used as example: thematizing the language itself, the first objective of the New Wave. On a much simpler level, the theme of the *frontier* science fiction, and especially the space-opera shares with the western (compare e. g. Allen 1980 and Pizer 1978), is perhaps the most rudimentary notion of the precarious rôle the demarcation concept is invested with in world making theories. A third category is a questioning of the genre as genre. In parodying the so-called genre's most characteristic features, one turns away the attention from near to irrelevant discussions (as in Heinlein 1953) to the construction itself. Moorcock's *Count Brass-stories*, and many a title labeled 'heroic fantasy' are a deliberate attempt to swith from the narcissistic veneration of the unique genre (and its accompanying frustrations in view of the 'mainstream' or of 'realistic writing') to a conscious use of a particular, in this case scientific articulation of the dominant rhetoric. The genre dwindles, the gradual notion of 'mode' replaces the fixed, exclusive category of the former classical theatrical device.⁶ Finally, from a critical point of view, the many attempts at constructing a history of science fiction imitates the highly valued strategies

⁵ An article by Peter Marsh "New Scientist", 28 August 1980, Vol. LXXXVII, No 1216, p. 650.

⁶ A position I defended in De Vos 1977; a German version is to appear in Munich Round-Up (1980).

of continuity and harmony the judaeo-christian model favours. However, the conflicting constructions lay bare the real issue at hand: how do we construct our own history? I can imagine Frank Malina backing Brian Aldiss, who denies in his *Billion Year Spree* (1973) any SF to exist prior to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1820), for his construction would, by and large, converge with his use of the 'New Science'. Shouldn't one ask, none the less, whether SF its actual form is still valid for the Quantum Era? Do these categories overlap further on? Or shouldn't we say that, accepting the hypothesis of a common judaeo-christian rhetoric, compilers like Pierre Versins, who, in his anthology *Outrepart* (1971), shifts the scene of the origins of science fiction to the Gilgamesh Epic, are more right than Aldiss? Is Versins' choice far fetched or not? I should think so, but Aristophanes would do in the modal frame, and so would Plato. Funny though that in this respect that kind of SF affirming "what it was all about". The hard core à la Campbell or Gernsback, is the least revolting, the least exploring branch of SF, too, in its reproducing quite virtuously its own prescribed rôle within the rhetoric, and not asking any questions about its proper origins and conceptual rituals.

To resume the argument then, and to start the final part of my paper, one could say that changes we have translated into categories of religion, political conflicts, ideologies or literary genres, to give a few examples, did not occur on a fundamental level, but exclusively in a gradual development, rendering successively the World, the Subject and the Transcendental corner in the classical triangle more and more dynamic. To paraphrase the great historian and philosopher of science Alexandre Koyré (1957), we can state an evolution from the closed earth to the unstable universe. The borders have become relative and moving, not only the world's but also the individual's—Kristeva's "pluralité du sujet". Disaster, then, serves as a continuous warning against breaking the self-imposed (by the dominant rhetoric, that is) truce of harmony. The utmost sagging of the pendulum has been reached, I think, in Brian Aldiss, *Barefoot in the Head* (1969), or Stanislaw Lem, *The Futurological Congress* (1971). In both reality as we knew it is destroyed, but it changes constantly under the influence of hallucinogens or drugs; and since human language, according to the rhetoric's initial premisses, cannot word the transcendental, the imaginary borders we, none the less, laid upon it (e. g.: god is good; he (!) is just and righteous; he is male; etc.; "the nine billion names of god", in A. C. Clarke's appropriate terms) were removed, or at least attempts to annihilate them were executed by the diverse forms of nihilistic thinking. But even the latter have generally accepted that the features reigning man's core, his essence, are not of a rational nature, but clearly purely instinctive (espoir angoisse; hope and angst). It follows that his intellect (and henceforth science, too, which is assumed to be based on it), that frames the world he lives in, is but of a secondary, artificial order, and is therefore considered non-natural, unnatural. As well to the contents as

to the form the results are disastrous when the same, identical, judaeo-christian rhetoric is being applied in all fields of human activity: like divisions of power induce like organizations of the different institutions that keep up the rhetoric: science, and literature, for that matter, resemble closely the institutions that preserved and continue producing and conserving the dominant rhetoric, e. g. the church. They will produce and generate identical structures of dogmatism, analogous ritualizations, *Scheinprobleme*, an hierarchic division, excesses etc. But this is research for science sociology.

I myself would like to end with presenting two practical examples, one thematic, the other institutional. Let me start with the latter. The Lucas-Kershner production *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), articulates the apocalyptic mood on several levels. The utopia, space, a potential land to conquer (theme of the frontier!), a "lost continent", shows in its exotic (the Ice World of Hoth, Yoda's planet Dagobah) and beautiful imagery "its fundamental justification, which is to deny any identification by History" (Barthes 1973: 96). But the utopia cannot deny its own framing: it is a liturgical iteration of eternal conflict, of an archetypal redemption religion. In its initiation rituals (Luke Skywalker in the grotto; the psycho-analytical exemplary situations, as the confrontation of Skywalker with Darth Vader as the son-father conflict; the rhetorical ritual of war and escape; etc.), *The Empire Strikes Back* centres around its very background: space, metaphysically transformed in shrines—endlessness versus man's enclosure: space-ships, a city in the clouds, a swamp, a grotto. "L'espace de cette saga est l'espace métaphysique de la Faute", concludes Forestier (1980: 14). The film is indeed a saga of man's imperfection, and of his duty to practice it. The idea of degradation, combined or not with eschatological connotations, is interspersed on all levels: in the layer of plot-implementation, on a rhetorical level within the film, on the level of film production as a social institution.

As to the plot, I proved (De Vos 1980 b) that *The Star Wars Saga* is but a poor copy of Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy*. But even within the story, one cannot fail to denote the specific and explicit symbolization. One example: Solo's spacecraft is called the *Millennium Falcon*. Confronted with all sorts of technical and factual misfortunes, the name's symbolism takes care of its ideological framing. The bird of prey scarcely disguises plain American nationalism, prodigiously escaping all traps the lurking forces of evil have prepared; 'Millennium' stands for the total simulation of history, the millenarian eschatology so common to American culture (cfr. e. g. Brown 1952 or Smith 1965). The name is not surprising if we know that an alternative title of Asimov's Doubleday-edition of *Foundation* was precisely *The 1000 Year Plan* (Barron 1976: 135).

Much more important, and even less surprising is the rhetoric's colouration. The forged opposition between technics and metaphysics (unduly attributed to, amongst others, Tarkovsky) can be disclosed in *The Empire Strikes Back* by unveiling the triangular conspiracy set up by science (expres-

sion), religion (postponement of sense attribution) and ideology (framing). Projecting social decline lends itself to a transfer into filmic design in the form of a *decadent spectacle*. The spectacular mustn't be interpreted as an escape; on the contrary, it functions as the form designate of *propagandistic overacting*.

Doubt is feigned. Simulation stresses the power to conjure evil. That is why the spectator, flabbergasted by the scenery, imitates in its reactions the military selfcomplacency. Minute details do not support technical ingenuity or 'verisimilitude', but *speaks* the spectacular, as the Baroque articulated the Counter-Reformation. The new baroque of superproductions, for that matter, modulates in the frame as such the opera. Technically perfect, excessive, heavy music fills space, in the film and in the cinema. But the spectacle is typical of that sense of loss, of its striving towards unruffled harmony which slowly eliminates the spectacle itself. Its final concept of *Universalgeschichte* (Morgeler 1950) is entropic totality; no wonder that Spengler's and Toynbee's influence in SF has been more than outrageous.

On a final level, one can conjecture that the film, as a superproduction (financially and technically), is symptomatic of a regressing trend. The value of a rhetorical form can be measured by the frequency of TV-series—actually at a very low rate for science fiction. Superproductions are no more than the mausoleums of decadent periods, where chroniclers try to preserve the spirit of the age for future generations, sensing civilisation has already ended.

The last example is again Priestley's *The Doomsday Men*. In the last but one chapter, as in Greek tragedies the kernel scene in which catastrophe takes place, the whole ideological undertaking of all twentieth century science fiction may be resumed: the original triangle, negative pendant of god's unknown and unknowable delta, is restored as the threat of world destruction by an atomic explosion is justified by the evil MacMicheal Brothers. Henry, the business man, is to talk first. He stands for the layman, and adheres to a surprising, though by no means original inverted philanthropy: resignation, because evil is too strong for man and renders people inevitably unhappy. His will to destroy humanity resembles estrangely the Mad Professor's in W. L. Alden's story *The Purple Death*, which appeared in "Cassell's Magazine" in 1895, and anticipates that same feeling of uneasiness to cope with ethical dilemmas, and therefore chooses to surrender to a higher force. I quote from Alden's self-defence:

Unlike other philanthropists, I have intelligence and, I hope, the courage of my convictions. You have heard me say that all the poverty and misery of the world are due to overpopulation. Well, I have there in my laboratory the remedy for this evil. I can, with merciful swiftness and with absolute certainty, reduce the population of Europe to a half, or a third, of what it is now. I have only to take my Purple Death (Alden, in Russell 1979: 7).

Priestley, on the other hand, then combines Paul's scientific cynicism, the conviction of an utterly senseless universe derived from blind materialism,

with John's visionary dogmatism. I quote him extensively, thereby resuming the content of my paper:

'My brother does not realize', he said quietly, 'that he himself is but an instrument in the grasp of a power whose very existence he will not acknowledge. This universe of his, with its blind dance of atoms, is only an illusion, and all our life here is only a kind of dream, a shadow play. And we can only be bewildered by the dream and the shadows if we imagine that science can give us any true vision of reality. The measurements of a house are not house. The reading of a man's weight on the scales does not give you the man himself. My brother looks out through his eyes and is in despair because nowhere can he see himself, forgetting that he is behind and not in front of his own eyes. But I have looked the other way—and found God. Now all that is happening in the world has long been foretold, for God warns us. But all the nations, one by one, are turning away, some to this idol some to that, and like the men who built Babel or mocked at Noah, in an age not unlike ours, they imagine they can live without God. But God is not mocked. And this world is now the great Babylon that was foretold in the *Book of Revelation*. I have prayed that no more souls of men may be born into this later and greater captivity, and as it has happened many times before, by the divine irony, my prayer has been granted and the instrument of destruction and salvation placed in my hand by the errors of my own brothers. They go to seek death. I go to seek life. And we cannot be judged by such as you, who are not proud enough to prefer death, nor wise enough to know where life is' (Priestley, 239—240).

The suddenly roaring commercial success of apocalyptic visions is not so much due to the worsening political, ecological or economical situation in the world. On the contrary, it is my belief that there is wider consciousness, mainly because of generalized, standardized information (as Delany points out in *Nova*). If that be the case, consuming the end of the world (as the original title of this paper's presentation was) means continuously experiencing the confirmation and re-confirmation of our deepest convictions. And the latter, based as they are on duality, are offered the security of the rhetoric, while on the social level, our dogmas are revitalized, thus reinforcing the institutions that sustain the rhetoric. I am not surprised anymore that churches in England look more like a grocery store or a transcendental SF bookshop than like places to pray.

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RETORYKA POWTARZANIA.
NASTRÓJ APOKALIPTYCZNY W LITERATURZE
JAKO METAFORA KONCEPCJI ZACHODNIEGO ŚWIATA

STRESZCZENIE

Według głównej hipotezy usługowej wobec argumentacji w tej rozprawie każdy model społecznych i poznawczych konfiguracji powoduje identyczne i nieuchronnie ideologiczne przekształcenia tego samego wyboru, który stosowała zachodnia cywilizacja od czasów autentycznej Grecji, a mianowicie: dwoistość, która w swych uroszczeniach racjonalistycznych (co nie oznacza równocześnie struktur racjonalistycznych) — formułuje koncepcję funkcjonalną wszechświata. Ta właśnie koncepcja jest określona, zezemplifikowana i usymbolizowana przez swoją własną retorykę.

Nasze zastosowanie badawcze tej hipotezy rozpoczyna się od formy literackiej, która bardziej, niż którakolwiek inna, chce uchodzić za przepojoną racjonalnością naukową: science-fiction. Badamy tutaj tylko jeden ze społecznych modeli rozpoznanych przez Habermasa: Grzech Pierwotny w jego najważniejszej obecności modalnej w science-fiction: w modalności apokaliptycznej. Zamierzylśmy dowieść, iż wiedza ludzka, a tym bardziej wiedza naukowa, jest tylko uformowaną ideologią. W zachodniej cywilizacji ideologia w punkcie swej dojrzałości jest wyartykułowana przez szczególną rytualizację, która buduje rzeczywistość, nie zaś ją interpretuje; nazywamy ją retoryką judeo-chrześcijańską (neoplatońską).

Przeciwstawiamy się pojęciu obiektywizmu naukowego, jako bronionego przez Malina, ukazując nasze z nią rozbieżności: odmienne podejście do przekonań naukowych, statut obserwacji, problemy terminologii i konceptualizacji. Ukazujemy następnie, że artykulacja racjonalności jest nieuchronnie niejasna, i że wynika to właśnie z uprawianej retoryki. Ona to traktuje tekst literacki pojęty jako proces historyczny równocześnie jako projekcję eschatologiczną, projekcję etyczną, i jako ekspresję poznawczej alienacji. Ale alienacja nie może osiągnąć krytycznej autorefleksyjności zachwalanej przez Habermasa, a to z przyczyny swej natury nihilistycznej i swojej paradoksalnej antologii. Znajdujemy dosyć na to dowodów w wyborze utworów o charakterze science-fiction.

Jeśli przyjmiemy, że modalność naukowa jest tylko pragmatyczną ekspresją pewnej retoryki dogmatycznej i powtarzającej, wyniknie stąd, że możemy wyjaśnić równie dobrze umieszczenie anty-bohatera w science-fiction, jako poronione wysiłki rozwiązania paradoksalności nuklearnej przez tematyzację mowy, temat granicy, zakwestionowanie gatunku czy konstrukcji fabuły science-fiction.

Próbujemy wreszcie umocnić naszą tezę przez analizę dwóch przykładów: filmu *The Empire Strikes Back*, (*L'Empire Contre-Attaque*) 1980 i powieści J. B. Priestley'a *The Doomsday Men* (*Les Hommes du Dernier Jugement*), 1935. Proponujemy zatem wprowadzenie teorii tektonicznej w historię literatury i idei: wtedy rzeczywistość mogłaby być rozważana jako interakcja ślizgających się brył, jako totalność pól prawdopodobieństwa łączących się i nakładających się na siebie.

Przełożyła Stefania Skwarczyńska