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Science Fiction

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Translation William Hanff (2015)

The term 'science fiction' means that there is a grey zone in which science and imagination, fact and fiction, overlap and intersect themselves, and against this both scientists and writers can raise objections and make arguments. Within such an overlap/intersection, neither science nor fiction can, in fact, be taken seriously; and there would be a serious risk that the quality of both disciplines would be reduced to a common denominator. At present however, such an opposition of science and fiction is no longer feasible. It is becoming increasingly clear that scientific thinking and praxis not do come about without fiction. (no thinking without hypotheses, no experimental praxis without simulations) One could even take the position that the entire scientific worldview/edifice is a scientific fiction, if the term "fiction" is precisely defined, and that the scientific worldview, as well as images in general, is fictitious. (In other words) It is becoming increasingly clear that science should be seen as a special case of fiction. This raises/begs the question, what is currently meant by the term "science fiction."

If we consider the majority of the texts that have been published under this designation [as science fiction], then we will be disappointed. It is not really about science, but about art; and not really about fiction, but about extrapolations of trends already observable in art/technology. These are texts, which seek to anticipate the evolution of technology and its effects on individuals and society. This is disappointing, not because such [mental/theoretical] gymnastics are not interesting. It very much is interesting and amusing to think about how a life under machines created by genetic engineering would look like. But rather it's disappointing because we're expecting something completely different from the title "science fiction." We expect texts, which set up fictitious scientific hypotheses to therefore be fictitious. Such as imaginative alternatives to Darwin or Einstein. We are disappointed, because we notice in these scientific texts a far greater imagination at work than in the vast majority of the texts of "science fiction." For example, the subatomic particles of atomic nuclei and their behavior, or the chimera of genetics and the resulting ecosystems are incomparably more fantastic than anything than the texts of "science fiction" tell [explicate]. Why is this?

This has deep roots, and is related to the present concept of truth. We must wean ourselves of wanting clear ([yet] false) distinctions between true and untrue. Completely true statements (tautologies) are as pointless as completely wrong statements (contradictions). For example, "it is raining or it is not raining" (an entirely true statement), is as pointless as "it is raining and it is not raining" (which is not true). Only a statement that lies somewhere between true and false is meaningful. [All of] Science is a type of fiction, if only because it would be of no interest if we wanted it to be completely true. Meaningful statements are more or less probable [achievable] when the "true" is one unachievable horizon, and the other unachievable horizon is the "probable"

In one such epistemology, nothing can go about arriving at truth, but instead approach truth more and more, by applying two complementary strategies. One is that all probable, ostensible ([but still] fictional) statements made appear progressively, so that they are always more and more probably and less and less improbable. This can be called the strategy of "falsification".

The other strategy is to be able to accurately measure possible degree of improbability of any statement (their "margin of error"), in order to be able to work with the imprecision ("fuzziness") as precise as possible. Both strategies are not completely intellectually satisfiable (they are not very "nice"), but they are extraordinarily fruitful/prolific. They are the [source of the] vast knowledge/insights that modern science owes [its existence to].

With some imagination, we can now think of an epistemology that goes the opposite way. Such an epistemology would be about making statements that are more and more improbable, in order to, so to say, approach the truth from the opposite side. This type of strategy has always existed, for example among the traditions of the [Gnostic] Scholastics and in the [esoteric study of] the Talmud. Both of these are attempts to reach enlightenment by reduction to the absurd [reductio ad absurdum], to somehow find the truth. So, we gain insights in nonfiction by passing through fiction, but not penetrating too deeply. This is what we should expect from "science fiction": leading science ad absurdum by means of fiction, thus science becomes a method of knowledge.

If we imagine such a "science fiction", as a text whose statements become more and more improbable without ever completely losing sight of the truth, then we see beauty in the genuine sense of the term. Because apparition and beauty (deceit and art) are the two sides of the same coin. The decisive factor here is that such a "science fiction" as a counter-science would need to obey the same exact discipline as those of the scientific texts. There is probably no such thing, because it requires from the author both, desire to be improbable and maintaining scientific rigor.

However, on closer examination, what has just been said, turns out to be a description of the creative act. Creative acts [and transactions] always have a strict passion for the improbable, or (as Leonardo [da Vinci] said) a "fantasia essata". [a exacting fantasy] What we can expect of "science fiction" would be the same creative powers, which manifest themselves in science, only in the opposite direction, in the direction of the beautiful. This does probably not exist in literature, and probably cannot exist. But therefore it is possible in computer codes. Is it possible that the synthetic images, based on the equations of science, are the first actual "science fiction" based on the intended meaning of that word?