

12th Symposium Stella Incognita
the 'Esprit Futur' collective and the 'Stella Incognita' association
PRESENT

WHEN SCIENCE FICTION CHANGES THE WORLD...



10-12
avril 2024

Call for papers





INTREREDUCTION

Since no one knows the future, no one can claim to be an expert on it. Nevertheless, as we all project ourselves into the future, a narrative is inevitably constructed and even a number of multiple ones, in which all possible questions are intertwined. This call for papers therefore draws on a wide range of disciplines to intuitively envisage probable, plausible or possible futures (Voros, 2006) or those being significant in terms of what we are provided with to consider and live vicariously through. While other literatures of the imaginary (Fantasy, Fantastique) are based on a leap out of reality, In this call, we'd like to take a look at our relationship to changes in the world, which is more akin to science fiction, even though there are several definitions of the "science fiction" genre.

In literature, film, series, video games, comics, artworks, etc., science fiction works on the inherent uncertainty of the future and the plurality of projections it induces. Having its share of utopias and dystopias, threatening futures, radiant futures and in-betweens, this plurality of projections is explored in all directions, tackling technological, political, social, societal and environmental themes.

Science fiction, then, is an exploration of changes in the world, and through the projections it shows us, it sometimes becomes a participant in those changes, leading us to think about problematic futures and interesting horizons. Moreover, all these imageries can be studied both as revealing and as vectors of transformations in our conceptions, exerting a certain influence on opinions (for example, Brake, 2022, McCranor, 2022, Besson, 2021) because of their infiltration of the public sphere beyond SF fans.

Consequently, in this age of intense transformation and great uncertainty, science fiction can be seen as a formidable 'thinking-machine' raising socio-political, ethical, anthropological, scientific and economic questions. Taking into account the theme of exploring changes in the world, the aim of the forthcoming symposium is to study this material in all its diversity as a kind of mirror held up to the future. Through the images given, multiple angles are made available through which changes in the world can be apprehended to a great extent. Additionally, reflections on our powers and powerlessness, our human bonds and ruptures and our hopes and fears are provided.





TOPICS OF REFLECTION

The topics proposed for the symposium may fall under one or more of the following headings:

SECTION 1: THREATS AND DYSTOPIA: BEYOND TALES OF FEAR?

Dystopia, post-apocalyptic fiction and tales of fear and anxiety are common in science fiction. Can the visions provided of our future encourage reflection, action and commitment or renunciation? Putting current fears linked to technology into perspective is present in a number of recent series, such as *Black Mirror* bringing out the dark side of innovations in each episode, as do *Severance*, *Peripheric* and *The Fortress*.

The following questions could also be raised: what exactly do these threats reveal? Can they be the expression of a resistance to change; a kind of nostalgia (Juhl et al., 2010; Ionescu et al., 2023) or a critique of techno-capitalism? Can it be simply an existential evocation of contemporary fears (Ord, 2020)?

SECTION 2: ARE UTOPIAN STORIES STILL POSSIBLE?

To what extent are we able to conceive utopia, i.e. the idea that humanity can achieve a new, perfect form of social and/or technological organization? The very notion of progress and a common, desirable future raises an essential question about utopia: can it be shared by all, and if so, at what cost? It can be understood that this is a profoundly political question (Friedman, 2015; Bregman, 2017), since the utopias of some can quickly become the dystopias of others, for example, in B.F. Skinner's *Walden 2* (1948) describing a communal utopia governed by the principles of behaviorism.

In these narratives, whenever the monotony of utopia is broken, i.e. when its social imposture is revealed, action exists. Perhaps, it could be regarded as a question of our own mind's inability to grasp the concept of utopia instead of utopia itself as a socio-political idea.

If tomorrow's society could really be utopian, what kind of actions would the fictional scenarios leading to it be based on? How could this utopia be independent of the political objectives of the ideology of progress?

SECTION 3: IMPACT OF UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN FICCTIONS?

Research in social psychology shows ideological contrasts in relation to utopian and dystopian representations of the future, as well as differences in the representations and behaviors associated with views of the future (Badaan et

al., 2022; Badaan et al., 2020; Fernando et al., 2018; Jost et al., 2022; Kashima & Fernando, 2020).

This section could specifically question the interest of philosophical reflection on science fiction and the ability of these fictions to induce new modes of reasoning (Hottois, 2000; Martin, 2017) due to the very structure of its narratives. The rather recent impact on economics (Beckert, 2013) or legal sciences (Delage, 2013; Bellagamba and Baret, 2023) could also be developed.

Once the importance of the form of narratives upon the vision of the future is established, their effect on the move to action needs to be considered. Thinking about the future means "programming" it, to use Vint's term, establishing a declaration of intent of attitudes and behaviors aimed at achieving an individual or collective goal (Vint & Alexander, 2022). Riel Miller emphasizes the social and cognitive necessity of learning to think about the future in order to use the future (Miller, 2018; Jonassen et al., 1993).

Science fiction opens up a "veritable virtual laboratory that allows experimentation to fully unfold" (Armand, 2018). The use of science fiction is a way of envisaging a new world in order to play with futures (Minvielle et al., 2016). Science fiction occasionally becomes institutional science fiction (Michaud, 2023) to guide thinking to corporate level, it being a space for questioning leading to involvement in the construction of desirable futures (Kyrou, 2023), futures to be warded off (<https://redteamdefense.org>) or futures to be avoided.

This section particularly focuses on the role of science fiction in changing the viewpoints of social, political and economic actors.

The aim of the symposium is to highlight multidisciplinary approaches to science fiction. Contributions from the disciplines of the arts, literature, psychology, astrophysics, sociology, history and philosophy will be accepted. Furthermore, all disciplines are welcome to discuss narratives of the future and their effect on the utopian and dystopian thoughts and ideologies of science fiction.



TERMS OF PARTICIPATION

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Proposals should include

- The chosen section
- A title
- A word summary of 300 to 500 words (in English or French)
- A short presentation of the author (100 words maximum) and a brief bibliography

Proposals should be sent in *.pdf format to the following address: contact@espritfutur.fr

Important note: To participate (not attend) the conference, you need to be a member of the association (10 euros for PhD candidates and 15 euros for job holders). To update your registration or to register for the first time at Stella Incognita : <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/stella-incognita>

Presentations should last around twenty minutes. They will take place physically (except for international candidates). Additionally, the symposium will also be accessible via Zoom.

Timetable

Submission deadline: Wednesday, December 20, 2023

Response date: mid-January 2024.

Conference date: April 10-12, 2024

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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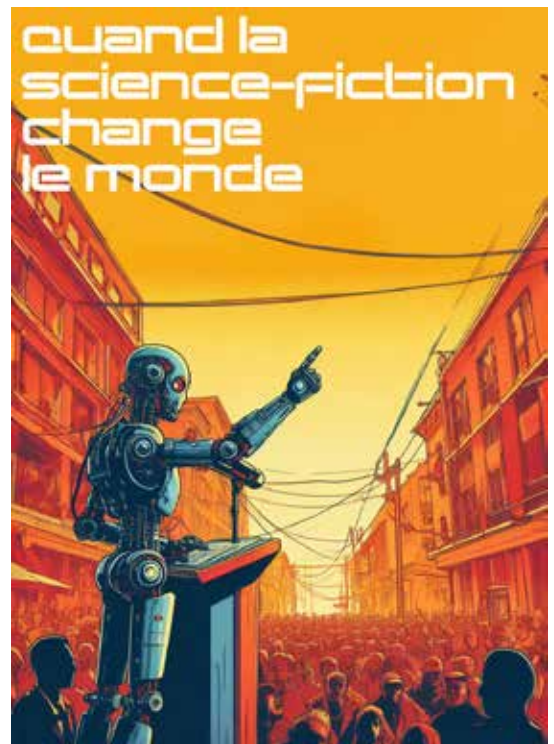
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