American Literature Readings in the 21st Century

Exploring the Limits of the Human through Science Fiction

GERALD ALVA MILLER, JR.
American Literature Readings in the 21st Century publishes works by contemporary critics that help shape critical opinion regarding literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States.

Published by Palgrave Macmillan:

- *Freak Shows in Modern American Imagination: Constructing the Damaged Body from Willa Cather to Truman Capote*  
  By Thomas Fahy

- *Women and Race in Contemporary U.S. Writing: From Faulkner to Morrison*  
  By Kelly Lynch Reames

- *American Political Poetry in the 21st Century*  
  By Michael Dowdy

- *Science and Technology in the Age of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James: Thinking and Writing Electricity*  
  By Sam Halliday

- *F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Racial Angles and the Business of Literary Greatness*  
  By Michael Nowlin

- *Sex, Race, and Family in Contemporary American Short Stories*  
  By Melissa Bostrom

- *Democracy in Contemporary U.S. Women’s Poetry*  
  By Nicky Marsh

- *James Merrill and W.H. Auden: Homosexuality and Poetic Influence*  
  By Piotr K. Gwiazda

- *Contemporary U.S. Latino/a Literary Criticism*  
  Edited by Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez

- *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction: The Works of Saul Bellow and Don DeLillo*  
  By Stephanie S. Halldorson

- *Race and Identity in Hemingway’s Fiction*  
  By Amy L. Strong

- *Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism*  
  By Jennifer Haytock

- *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut*  
  By David Simmons

- *Indians, Environment, and Identity on the Borders of American Literature: From Faulkner and Morrison to Walker and Silko*  
  By Lindsey Claire Smith

- *The American Landscape in the Poetry of Frost, Bishop, and Ashbery: The House Abandoned*  
  By Marit J. MacArthur

- *Narrating Class in American Fiction*  
  By William Dow
The Culture of Soft Work: Labor, Gender, and Race in Postmodern American Narrative
   By Heather J. Hicks

Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles
   By Kenneth Lincoln

Elizabeth Spencer’s Complicated Cartographies: Reimagining Home, the South, and Southern Literary Production
   By Catherine Seltzer

New Critical Essays on Kurt Vonnegut
   Edited by David Simmons

Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech
   By Dianne L. Chambers

The Emergence of the American Frontier Hero 1682–1826: Gender, Action, and Emotion
   By Denise Mary MacNeil

Norman Mailer’s Later Fictions: Ancient Evenings through Castle in the Forest
   Edited by John Whalen-Bridge

Fetishism and its Discontents in Post-1960 American Fiction
   By Christopher Kocela

Language, Gender, and Community in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction: American Voices and American Identities
   By Mary Jane Hurst

Repression and Realism in Postwar American Literature
   By Erin Mercer

Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(ist) Art of Self-Fashioning
   By Timothy W. Galow

Bret Easton Ellis: Underwriting the Contemporary
   By Georgina Colby

Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction: Counterhistory
   By Marni Gauthier

Vigilante Women in Contemporary American Fiction
   By Alison Graham-Bertolini

Queer Commodities: Contemporary US Fiction, Consumer Capitalism, and Gay and Lesbian Subcultures
   By Guy Davidson

Reading Vietnam Amid the War on Terror
   By Ty Hawkins

American Authorship and Autobiographical Narrative: Mailer, Wildeman, Eggers
   By Jonathan D’Amore

Readings of Trauma, Madness, and the Body
   By Sarah Wood Anderson

Intuitions in Literature, Technology, and Politics: Parabilities
   By Alan Ramón Clinton

African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places
   By Maisha L. Wester

Exploring the Limits of the Human through Science Fiction
   By Gerald Alva Miller, Jr.
EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF THE HUMAN THROUGH SCIENCE FICTION

Gerald Alva Miller, Jr.
CONTENTS

Preface vii
Acknowledgments ix

Introduction The Genre of the Non-Place: Science Fiction as Critical Theory 1

Part I Science Fictions of Estrangement
1 Variables of the Human: Gender and the Programmable Subject in Samuel R. Delany’s Triton 33
2 The Human as Desiring Machine: Anime Explorations of Disembodiment and Evolution 65

Part II Science Fictions of the Present
3 The Eversion of the Virtual: Postmodernity and Control Societies in William Gibson’s Science Fictions of the Present 99
4 The Spectacle of Memory: Realism, Narrative, and Time Travel Cinema 129

Conclusion Beyond the Human: Ontogenesis, Technology, and the Posthuman in Kubrick and Clarke’s 2001 163

Notes 191
Bibliography 207
Index 227
Minutes to go. Souls rotten from their orgasm drugs, flesh shuddering from their nova ovens, prisoners of the earth to come out. With your help we can occupy The Reality Studio and retake their universe of Fear Death and Monopoly.

—William S. Burroughs (Nova 7)

For some, genre literature and film constitute nothing more than fodder for “geeks” and social malcontents. But for others, genre literature allows the audience to explore the human in new ways—it probes the darker sides of fear and desire (horror), it takes us to nonexistent yet nostalgic lands (fantasy), or it allows us to imagine ourselves differently (science fiction). This project embodies almost eight years of thinking, researching, and writing about science fiction, and it derives from the belief that science fiction increasingly represents the genre most capable of critically engaging with our postmodern world. In essence, we are all already characters in a science fiction novel. Whether the future in which we currently reside is utopian or dystopian is, no doubt, a matter of interpretation. But, for many of us, society is already the dystopia that Orwell, Huxley, Zamyatin, and others imagined so many decades ago. It has arrived in an unexpected and more subtle form—but the society of control and surveillance is here. This project does not seek to engage with such ideas in a paranoid fashion but instead to demonstrate how science fiction allows us to critically engage with our present world according to a more complicated methodology.

We are increasingly a society on the brink: whether it is the brink of destruction or transformation remains to be seen. Terrorism, economic collapse, nuclear/biochemical warfare, and genocide constantly loom over the horizon at any given moment. Of course, such problems have
always plagued human civilization, but the postmodern media sphere bombards us with images of real or potential devastation, forcing us to constantly feel as if we are living in a dystopian science fiction film or a disaster movie. But, simultaneously, the exponential advances in science and technology offer the promise of a world in which constraints increasingly disappear, communication becomes ever more instantaneous and egalitarian, and innovative technologies open up new possibilities for identity and self-expression. *We have minutes to go!* Metamorphosis or annihilation waits just around the bend.

There is a growing feeling among the left that something fundamental must change in the coming years. World civilization remains mired in the same old modes of politics and economics regardless of the rapid changes brought on by globalization and computerization. Despite the obvious need for human rights reforms, our global civilization continues to resist revisions to blatantly oppressive laws. And such resistance to change is not confined to the various oppressive regimes around the world—it also remains a major issue here in the United States where certain groups, like gay and lesbian individuals, are denied basic rights because our nation refuses to abandon its outdated concepts of ethics. The recent revolutions in Africa and the massive “Occupy” movements exhibit a growing, global dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, yet such groups often lack coherent plans of reorganization. They can only see ahead to the revolution and not beyond. Science fiction allows us to imagine the beyond: beyond our current societies and economic systems and beyond our current body and identity structures. In other words, science fiction lets us explore the limits of the human and what might possibly lie outside them. It allows us to storm the Reality Studio, as Burroughs calls it, that controls our world and our perceptions of it. More than any other genre, science fiction calls to us to imagine new ways of theorizing, philosophizing, criticizing, and living. Science fiction points the way beyond the limits of the human. It allows us to begin imagining how we might slip the bonds and constraints that limit us and embrace new orders of identity and existence.
Acknowledgments

Over the almost eight years since the first germs of this project took root in Tyler Curtain’s provocative graduate seminar on science fiction at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I have been lucky to have the support and input of a large number of generous and influential individuals. First of all, I must express my sincere gratitude to Gregory Flaxman who has offered his tireless advice as my mentor for nine years now and who has guided me both with tough love and kind words throughout the realization of this project. A tireless, devoted, and brilliant academic, he became not just an exemplary mentor but a respected friend as well. Secondly, I must thank all the other professors who have provided me with support, guidance, and input over the years. In particular, Linda Wagner-Martin, Tyler Curtain, María DeGuzmán, and Priscilla Wald have been kind enough to read drafts of this project and offer advice from the initial proposal stage through the present. In addition, I want to thank all of my friends and colleagues at the University of North Carolina who helped create a friendly and intellectual environment. I would like to especially thank my friends Nathaniel Cadle, Henry Veggian, and Robert Martinez who read and offered advice on this project. I would also like to thank my high school English teachers, Susan Roberts and Jeanette Harris, who helped start me on my journey into the world of literary studies. Furthermore, I would like to thank my undergraduate professors and advisors, particularly Helen Lock and LaRue Love Sloan, who helped prepare me for my career as a graduate student and scholar. Finally, I want to thank my family for all their love and support over the years. My father (Jerry Miller), my mother (Debbie Miller), my sisters (Michelle Miller and Miranda Johnson), and my grandmothers (Dorothy Miller and Bobbie Arrant) have never lost faith in my lengthy and strange educational career. As a child, my father first introduced me to science fiction, and, without his influence, this project might not have taken place. My mother’s unconditional love and our friendship has helped me through every hurdle and heartache over the years, my sisters remain two of my best friends,
and my grandmothers have always encouraged me despite the weirdness of the subjects that I study. I also would like to express my gratitude to Scott Johnson, who has been my best friend for over 20 years now. Almost more like a brother than a friend, Scott has always supported me and aided in my intellectual introspections on marginalized genres such as science fiction, horror, transgressive cinema, and anime. Above all else, I must sincerely express the debt of gratitude that I owe to my wife, Leigh, who has stood by me throughout the entire creation of this project without ever wavering in her emotional support. Without her as my best friend and partner, this project would not have been possible.
INTRODUCTION

The Genre of the Non-Place: Science Fiction as Critical Theory

Yet among all the distractions and diversions of a planet which now seemed well on the way to becoming one vast playground, there were some who still found time to repeat an ancient and never-answered question: “Where do we go from here?”

—Arthur C. Clarke (Childhood’s End 105)

This suggests that far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted.

—Hayden White (“Narrative” 1)

There are no facts, everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive.

—Friedrich Nietzsche (Will §604)

As the above epigraph from Hayden White suggests, narrative functions as humankind’s most basic tool for navigating and making sense out of reality—it operates as a kind of universal code that transcends linguistic and sociocultural boundaries and that lies at the very core of the human. From our personal thoughts to our everyday conversations, from the shortest flash fiction to gargantuan novels, narrative is always already philosophical because it represents our perhaps feeble attempts to carve manageable slices out of the chaotic manifold of sensory input. We are continuously assailed with stimuli not just in the sense that we live in an era of overstimulation and information bombardment but also in a more fundamental way. With our five
senses receiving input that ranges from the constant streams of data that emanate from ubiquitous media sources to our continually evolving interactions with other individuals, one might expect our systems to crash already from information overload without ever considering the continual barrage of data assaulting us from smart phones, laptops, electronic billboards, televisions, GPS devices, and the various computer displays that appear everywhere from supermarkets to car dashboards to the backs of airplane seats. But we constantly delete or strain off irrelevant bits of data like so many unwanted cache files on a hard drive. Simultaneously, we string together one moment with the next, we connect important moments to our identity and personal history, and we revise our narratives concerning others as we continue to interact further with them. To be human is to narrate; hence, any attempt to explore the human and its limits must necessarily consider narrative. All narratives function on both ontological and epistemological levels—they build our images of the world and our selves, and they store and transmit our knowledge in intelligible packages. However, certain forms of narrative make the ontological and epistemological nature of narrative more apparent. Science fiction (SF) represents a unique form of narrative because it inscribes a distinctive kind of space that allows for the interrogation, elucidation, and generation of theoretical concepts. Science fiction also represents the postmodern genre par excellence because its modus operandi closely resembles that of postmodern literature and theory: both question and undermine our most solid beliefs about humanity, society, and the universe.

In his preface to *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Gilles Deleuze explains philosophy in relation to certain genres of fiction: “A book of philosophy should be in part a very particular sort of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction” (Deleuze, *Difference* xx). Deleuze argues that a philosophical treatise performs a certain kind of cognitive work, a kind of work in which the author and the reader engage in the process of either seeking truths (as in detective fiction) or creating concepts (as in science fiction). Science fiction harbors an intimate relation with philosophy because, like the above quote from Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1953), it asks, “Where do we go from here?” But the genre also asks several other fundamental questions that persist as being central inquiries in both philosophy and critical theory. Where have we been? Where are we now? What else might there be? Who are we? And what might we become? In essence, this book seeks to demonstrate how science fiction examines these questions in a manner akin to critical theory; that is, it generates
its own theoretical concepts that center upon what I term “the limits of the human,” the various facets, characteristics, social forms, and ideologies that comprise, attempt to define, and delimit the human experience. But science fiction also extrapolates beyond our present condition to imagine the potential transcendence of these limits, to examine the possibility of new social forms and identity configurations, and to critically interrogate the current manifestations of the human, its philosophical outlooks, and its sociocultural practices. Ultimately, this book will expand upon and invert Deleuze’s statement by demonstrating how critical theory strays into the realm of science fiction and, simultaneously, how science fiction is always already critical theory.

Over the last decade, numerous critics, such as Carl Freedman and Steven Shaviro, have similarly compared critical theory and science fiction. For instance, Freedman argues that science fiction and critical theory share certain “structural affinities” because “both speculate about the future” (Freedman 181). This affinity relies upon a “shared perspective”; as he explains, “What is crucial is the dialectical standpoint of the science-fictional tendency, with its insistence upon historical mutability, material reducibility, and, at least implicitly, utopian possibility” (Freedman 32). Such critics see science fiction as a conceptual form of narrative because it inscribes a kind of space that allows them to examine “concepts that have not yet been worked out” (Shaviro ix).

Both Freedman and Shaviro essentially use science fiction for the explication of existing theoretical concepts. There are countless examples of such readings of science fiction texts: Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones who Walk away from Omelas” (1973) explores the scapegoat function, Samuel R. Delany’s “Aye, and Gomorrah” (1967) allegorically interrogates homophobia, The Matrix (1999) depicts a kind of Cartesian skepticism about the nature of reality and/or explores the nature of truth in a manner akin to Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” etc.¹ We could proceed onwards with this list of fairly blatant pairings or cite ones that Shaviro and Freedman themselves use. Such readings are useful, particularly when teaching a class of students, but I want to argue that science fiction harbors a more profound relation with theory—it enacts theory by both critically engaging with existing theoretical ventures and creating emergent theoretical concepts. But what is it about this particular narrative genre that resonates so profoundly with philosophy in general and with postmodern critical theory in particular?

Katherine Hayles begins to point us in a more useful direction by exploring the relationship between science and science fiction.
She claims that literature, particularly science fiction, and scientific discourse create a reciprocal circuit of influence upon one another:

Nevertheless, I want to resist the idea that influence flows from science into literature. The cross-currents are considerably more complex than a one-way model of influence would allow...Literary texts [...] actively shape what the technologies mean and what the scientific theories signify in cultural contexts [...] Culture circulates through science no less than science circulates through culture. The heart that keeps this circulatory system flowing is narrative—narratives about culture, narratives within culture, narratives about science, narratives within science. (Hayles, *Posthuman* 21–2)

In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), Hayles uses science fiction texts to trace the history of cybernetics, a field of study that has drastically revised the way we understand thought, identity, and being. The confluence of science fiction and scientific discourse allows Hayles to elaborate her own theory of the posthuman, a reconceptualization of the human for the postmodern, digital age that replaces the unified liberal humanist subject with a multiplicitous subject that cannot logically be separated from its technological environment: “Technology has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer be separated from the human subject” (xiii). Because of this inseparability, “the posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction [...] the presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the ‘wills of others’ is undercut in the posthuman” (3). Hence, Hayles uses science fiction as a means of investigating how technology has altered the human on a fundamental level; she begins to demonstrate how science fiction can itself be used to generate new theoretical concepts and to critically engage with existing ones.

If so many critics have adopted science fiction as the foundation of their theoretical explorations, then we must ask why the genre provides such fertile ground for critical endeavors. This question resides at the heart of this study, and its answer lies in beginning to conceive of literature itself as a space that the reader enters. This book hopes to demonstrate how literature in general creates virtual spaces that foster critical thought in ways that purely theoretical writings cannot and to explain why science fiction represents the paradigmatic genre for any understanding of how literature intersects with and becomes its own
form of critical theory. To achieve this goal, this book will explore five different texts or sets of texts that deal with various concepts and theories vital to any understanding of the human: the different characteristics that define humans (i.e., identity categories, such as gender), the forces that motivate them (desire), the social formations that dominate them (power structures such as discipline and control), the power of memory and narrative that serve as humankind’s primary means for ordering reality and generating discourse, and humanity’s potential to evolve beyond the human and into the posthuman condition. By engaging with these texts, this book will elucidate how science fiction can serve as the perfect literary medium for performing critical theory while also revealing the inherently utopian impulses that underlie any attempt to conceptualize the human.

**Literary Spaces; or, the Slippery Slope of Taxonomy: A Gesture Toward a Theory of a Genre . . .**

For the better part of the twentieth century, science fiction’s pulp heritage hindered its acceptance into the pantheon of canon-worthy genres. In order to legitimate science fiction, critics of the genre began to develop histories, generate overarching theories, and demonstrate the possibilities inherent within the genre’s form and content. In the struggle for science fiction’s literary recognition, sci-fi critics began sketching genealogies that stretched back to a variety of “legitimate” authors in order to argue that science fiction represents a natural outgrowth of pre-existing literary modes, particularly those that dealt with the fantastic, the uncanny, and the marvelous, to use Tzvetan Todorov’s designations. Todorov famously defines “the fantastic” as a genre of literature that functions at least partially through ambiguity:

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us [. . .] The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 25)
Thus, the fantastic only exists as long as the nature of the events remains unclear. Once they receive either confirmation or refutation, the story moves out of the realm of the fantastic and into the domain of either the marvelous or the uncanny. For example, Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Black Cat” (1843) represents a paradigmatic example of the fantastic because it never reveals whether the story’s events derive from purely natural causes or whether some demonic force is actually at work.

To argue for the genre’s legitimacy, critics since Todorov began tracing the origins of the genre back to canonical, nineteenth-century British and American authors: Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne provided respectable, literary forebears of the modern genre. Perhaps more radically, certain critics, such as Darko Suvin, have argued that the genre’s genealogy reaches back to even more antiquated sources: Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726; 1735), Francois Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* books (1532–1564), Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), or even all the way back to the comedies of Aristophanes. Many of these critics attempt to establish totalizing theories of the genre that allow them to strictly demarcate its boundaries. To validate the genre, these critics intend their theoretical explications to act as aesthetic litmus tests by delineating certain texts as genuine science fiction while labeling others as “inferior” genres such as fantasy, horror, or myth.²

However, theories of science fiction become increasingly murky as the twentieth century progresses. For instance, the postmodern novel immediately problematizes any strict definitions of science fiction by virtue of its inclusion of various science-fictional elements: the works of William S. Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, Kathy Acker, Italo Calvino, David Foster Wallace, Mark Z. Danielewski, and Jonathan Lethem—to name only a handful—all feature science fiction tropes as part of the otherwise realistic ontological framework of their novels, yet their works are seldom classified as science fiction.³ Science fiction remains so inextricably linked to postmodern fiction that Brian McHale actually uses the genre as a means for explaining the distinction between modernist and postmodernist fiction: while “the dominant [mode] of modernist fiction is epistemological” and hence features the “logic […] of the detective story,” postmodernism operates in an ontological mode, meaning that it concerns itself with the projection of worlds in a manner akin to science fiction (McHale 9–10).⁴ McHale contends that postmodernist fiction functions ontologically by projecting alternate
visions of our own world or problematizing modernist ontological positions. As McHale’s comments suggest, science fiction increasingly proves to be a genre that is necessary to grasp the postmodern world around us.

As science fiction has achieved ever more minimal recognition as a legitimate form of literature while simultaneously becoming a progressively slippery genre to define, critics have increasingly turned away from examining the origins of the genre or defining its traits and instead begun investigating why science fiction seems to more and more represent a privileged genre for contemporary critical theory. By adopting a similar approach to the genre, I intend to bypass the hopeless morass of taxonomic genre definitions and to alternately argue that science fiction represents a specialized form of narrative that generates the potential for new kinds of critical work because of the unique textual spaces that the genre creates for the reader and the critic.

The textual spaces actualized by science fiction have always played with genre categories such as the fantastic, the marvelous, and the uncanny. But the genre also transcends such categorizations by incorporating rational, scientific extrapolation. Like Todorov’s concept of the fantastic, science fiction exists in a liminal space between realism and fantasy, and it is this space between the words “science” and “fiction” that harbors the genre’s critical capacity. Just as the bar between the signifier and the signified in Ferdinand de Saussure’s equation for the sign becomes such an object of speculation for Jacques Lacan and Jacques Alain-Miller, so does the space that separates “science” from “fiction” in the genre’s designation become an essential site for grasping the genre’s critical power.

To understand the critical capacity of science fiction, one must first recognize that a literary text (or any kind of text, for that matter) creates its own kind of space and not simply the physical space that exists between the covers of a book. In addition to this physical space, texts also inscribe virtual spaces that the reader enters through the act of reading. In fact, with the advent of digital books and e-readers, texts no longer require any physical manifestation whatsoever; nonetheless they lay out spaces. In The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau makes a similar case:

Whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control. It becomes a text only in its relation to the exteriority of the reader, by an interplay
of implications and ruses between two sorts of “expectation” in combination: the expectation that organizes a readable space (a literality), and one that organizes a procedure necessary for the actualization of the work (a reading). (170–1)

A text has no meaning before the reader—the reader actualizes it, brings it to life. By being read, the words of a text, whether they are housed in the physical object or merely exist in a digital file, open up unto new vistas of experience. Michel de Certeau expands upon this conceptualization of textual spaces when he explains the difference that exists between the writer and the reader’s relationship with this space: “Far from being writers—founders of their own place […] readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (174). The writer thus builds virtual spaces that the reader actualizes by mentally traveling through them. The visionary horizons of the author only come back to life in the mind of the reader. But each reader’s experience of a text will inherently differ—the mental images drawn from readings remain unique and personal. A quick consideration of cinematic adaptations of literary works quickly evinces the fact that the reader always creates his/her own particular meaning from a text. Part of science fiction’s critical importance lies in the kind of spaces that it depicts, spaces that often vary so radically from our everyday life that they force us to experience radical difference and compel us to engage in singular productions of meaning.

Science fiction achieves such levels of theoretical sophistication because the genre inscribes a distinctive kind of space that could be variously characterized as a heterotopia (Michel Foucault), a non-place (Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé), or a plane of immanence (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari). In effect, this study will draw connections prevailing among these three different philosophical usages of topology. Since it dwells upon difference, science fiction can most effectively be understood as a heterotopian space; however, Augé’s conceptualization of the non-place and Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the plane of immanence provide useful starting points for understanding the kind of textual and critical space that science fiction demarcates.

Building off the work of Michel de Certeau, Marc Augé’s *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* draws a distinction between “anthropological places” and “non-places,” the latter of which he argues have come to increasingly define the
THE GENRE OF THE NON-PLACE

postmodern landscape of our everyday lives. An “anthropological place” organizes space and imbues it with meaning, identity, and history: it represents “the concrete and symbolic construction of space” that “serves as a reference for all those it assigns to a position, however humble and modest” (Augé 51–2). The anthropological place, then, provides “a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it” (Augé 51–2).

Places slice up the manifold of space into meaningful units that are connected to history and identity—they connect space with time and create the sense of community that allows the individual to connect both with his/her neighbors as well as with history. Augé contrasts these places with “non-places,” sections of space that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (77–8). Augé mentions different types of non-places, but his interest remains centered on the kind of non-places through which people move with virtual anonymity: supermarkets, airports and airplanes, superhighways, and communication networks—he spends little time on this last manifestation because his study was published before the massive spread of the Internet. Non-places delimit spaces of mobility that attempt to hurry the subject along between places that are often separated by vast gulfs. They are sections of space to which subjects never develop profound connections—they are forgotten as soon as the subject finishes his/her time with them. Importantly, for our purposes, non-places also exhibit a profound link between spaces and texts—the real-world non-places that Augé discusses provide “instructions for use,” directions and prohibitions that guide the individual’s interaction with the non-place: the various signs in supermarkets, the road markers on highways, the guidelines that fill both the airport and the airplane that keep us moving along in an orderly fashion just like the moving sidewalks in airports that whisk us from one terminal to the next (96). But Augé mentions that there are other kinds of non-places that only exist in the words that evoke them.

Science fiction creates non-places partly in the sense discussed above since their relation to current history or identificatory schemas is tenuous, but they also operate precisely like the other form of non-places that Augé mentions: “Certain places exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places, or rather imaginary places [...] Here the word does not create a gap between everyday function and lost myth: it creates image, produces the myth and at the same stroke makes it work” (95). Science fiction pushes us outside our everyday life into a non-place that creates new