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The science-fictionality of the myth of progress: understanding the displacement of techno-scientific imagination.

This paper draws on the analysis of science fiction world imaginaries to discuss the generating process of narratives of technoscientific progress. It uses, in specific, the theoretical accounts on the modalities of “cognitive estrangement” (Suvin 1979, Mather 2002) as a framework to analyze two case studies: the figure of the robot and space exploration. The concept of “cognitive estrangement” is implemented to understand how the figure of the robot and outer space are staged as Other(ed) forms of intelligence and as indicators of advanced knowledge. The fictional design of such figures is thought to provide a dialectical space of interrelation between human/robotic intelligence and earth/space that informs the popular techno scientific consciousness. This point is further elaborated through the concept of “science-fictionality” (Csicsey-Ronay 2008) that exemplifies how science fiction can evolve inside the cultural fabric as a “habit of the mind.”

This analysis implies that scientific knowledge and the aesthetic experience of “cognitive estrangement co-shape the “science-fictionality” of the myth of progress. The term myth is used according to Mary Midgley’s theorization in *The myths we live by* (2005) to indicate a network of imaginative patterns that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. The scope of this enterprise is to understand how specific technoscientific projects gain meaning, not only through their specific epistemological and political enquiry, but also in what Mary Midgley calls the “mythical culture-units” (Midgley 2005).