Science Fiction

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I think I was about 10 or 11 when I bought my first science fiction book. At the Blokker bookshop in Heemstede. The first “Meulenhofjes”, Bruna Zwarte Beertjes and Prisma paperbacks. I remember “Sam, of de Pluterdag” by Paul van Herck (M=SF 14), the Tschai series by Jack Vance, Asimov's Foundation trilogy and many other books. In terms of fiction, I didn't really read much else in my life besides SF.

And I am starting to understand why.

What mattered to me when reading science fiction was what is called “a sense of wonder”, a kind of rapture that made my heart beat faster. The rapture is about being placed in a different world, with different rules. The endless possibilities. And as a side effect it renders the conventional reality of everyday living more mysterious, more deep...

It has been a while since I last held a science fiction book in my hands. However, I recently read a translation of **“By his bootstraps”** by Robert Heinlein. I've read it before, but I still liked it!

Not the future, but a different normal

Science fiction is commonly described as a genre about the future: technological progress, distant planets, artificial intelligence. But this framing misses what actually happens when science fiction works.

It does not primarily show us what might one day exist. It shows us what could count as normal.

Good science fiction does not predict. It configures. It builds worlds in which other assumptions operate silently: about time, identity, perception, death, knowledge, and what a self even is. And then it lets us live there for a while.

Not as tourists. As temporary inhabitants.

In that sense, science fiction is not only a genre. It is a method. A practice of creating mindsets.

Worldbuilding as experiential design

Every coherent science fiction world installs a background logic, usually without explaining it.

What is real here? What counts as a person? Where does agency reside? What is stable, and what is fluid? What can be trusted, and what cannot?

These questions are not discussed. They are built into the environment.

In Blade Runner, the problem is not artificial intelligence, but the instability of the category “human”. In Arrival, the issue is not alien contact, but the structure of time as lived experience. In The Matrix, the shock is not simulation, but the discovery that perception itself is an interface. In Solaris, the disturbance is not an alien ocean, but the collapse of psychological interiority.

Such works do not argue. They stage. The world itself does the philosophical work.

Science fiction as a laboratory

Seen this way, science fiction functions less like literature and more like an experimental setup.

Each world is a model. Each narrative is a test environment. Each premise is a manipulation of experiential parameters.

What happens if memory is unreliable? If bodies are interchangeable? If consciousness is shared? If death is reversible? If perception is programmable?

These are not speculative questions. They are architectural decisions. The writer designs a world in which these conditions already apply, and once inside, the reader does not contemplate them. The reader lives them.

This is what gives the genre its power. It does not sit at the level of opinion. It operates at the level of orientation.

From concepts to lived assumptions

A mindset is not an idea. It is a configuration of experience.

It is the silent background against which things make sense. It determines what appears self-evident, what needs explanation, what is imaginable, what feels absurd, what counts as possible.

Science fiction externalizes these backgrounds. It makes them visible by making them strange.

By relocating consciousness, stretching time, reformatting bodies, or destabilizing perception, it exposes how contingent our own experiential setup is.

Not wrong, but constructed. Every science fiction world is a thought-world you can walk around in.

The reader as temporary inhabitant

When science fiction succeeds, something subtle happens. The reader does not just learn about another world. The reader’s perceptual habits are briefly reorganized.

One starts to anticipate differently, to interpret events differently, to accept conditions that would normally feel impossible. For a while, a different logic becomes natural.

This is why the genre can be unsettling even when nothing frightening occurs. It relocates what counts as obvious. It rearranges the furniture of experience.

You return, but something no longer fits exactly the way it did before. Not because you were convinced of something, but because you inhabited something.

Mindsets made visible

Science fiction performs the same operation again and again: it turns implicit world-structures into explicit worlds.

It takes what normally operates invisibly and builds it into landscapes, technologies, species, social systems, and physical laws.

It makes metaphysics experiential. It makes epistemology spatial. It makes ontology narrative.

And by doing so, it shows that any experienced world is already the expression of a mindset. Ours included.

Destabilization as a function

The most interesting science fiction does not comfort. It destabilizes. Not necessarily through spectacle, but through misalignment.

The slow realization that what once felt self-evident no longer is: what is a self, what is inside or outside, what is alive, what is chosen, what is real.

Such questions are not added to the story. They emerge from living inside its conditions.

In that sense, science fiction often performs a secular version of what philosophical and contemplative traditions attempt in other ways: it loosens the grip of the default world. It interrupts the automaticity of this one.

Not escape, but exposure

Science fiction is often accused of escapism. But its deeper function is the opposite.

It does not remove us from reality. It exposes the constructedness of any reality.

By showing worlds that operate differently, it reveals that this world too is operating. It rests on arrangements, assumptions, selections, exclusions.

It undermines the idea that there is only one way a world can show up. And in doing so, it opens a space, not for better worlds, but for visible worlds.

The art of creating mindsets

Science fiction is the art of creating mindsets that can be inhabited.

Not explained. Not defended. Not theorized. Lived.

It constructs experiential laboratories in which consciousness encounters its own plasticity. And when it is most precise, it does not give answers. It gives disorientation.

Not because another world is true, but because this one is no longer inevitable.