

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA
Faculty of Philosophy
ICS-programme

Suvi Korpi

Realism and Otherness in the Science Fiction Film *District 9*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 <i>District 9</i>	7
1.2 Methodology	8
2 SCIENCE FICTION	10
2.1 Genre Studies -Defining a Genre	11
2.2 What is Science Fiction? -Defining the Genre	15
2.2.1 Antidefinitions of a Diverse Field	15
2.2.2 Fiction of Cognitive Estrangement -Discussions on Darko Suvin's Pioneering Definition	17
2.2.3 The Label for Science Fiction	23
2.3 Science Fiction as a Transrealistic or Realistic Genre	27
2.3.1 Science Fiction as a Historical Genre	30
2.3.2 Science Fiction as Symbolic Mode of Literature	32
2.4 Thematic of Science Fiction	37
3 OTHERNESS	41
3.1 Otherness in Science Fiction	43
3.2 Aliens in Science Fiction -Exploiting Otherness	46

4 THE SCIENCE FICTION IN <i>DISTRICT 9</i>	49
4.1 A Suvinian Analysis of <i>District 9</i>	50
4.2 The Label of Science Fiction in <i>District 9</i>	55
4.3 Transrealism and Realism in <i>District 9</i>	60
4.3.1 The Metaphor, Symbol and Parable of a Transrealistic Film	65
4.3.2 Allegory of a Historical Transrealistic Film	70
4.4 Otherness in <i>District 9</i>	79
4.4.1 The Metamorphosis	85
4.4.2 The Alien	91
5 CONCLUSION	99
WORKS CITED	102
EXAMPLES	
Example 1. The "real" people interviewed in District 9	62
Example 2. The documentary style specialists narrating District 9	63
Example 3. The documentary style news footage	64
Example 4. Signs in the film	69
Example 5. A sign from District 9 and a sign from the apartheid era	73
Example 6. The District 9 area, the new area for the aliens, Cape Flats	75
Example 7. Wikus fully metamorphosed and Wikus metamorphosing	86
Example 8. The alien "prawn" of District 9 and the "Parktown Prawn" of Johannesburg	92
Example 9. A scared alien and a thoughtful sad alien	96

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Author:	Suvi Korpi
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ABSTRACT

As a popular culture genre, science fiction is in a constant state of transition. Science fiction critics have debated on the nature of the genre for decades, but the problem of a stable definition remains unsolved. The science fiction film *District 9* can be considered as a starter of a new wave of science fiction film in the twenty-first century and thus it is the subject of the thesis.

Previous research of the field shows that science fiction has not been granted the prestige of realistic fiction. Even though its extraterrestrial aliens have been connected to the study of otherness, their connection to reality in an allegorical way has been denied. This M.A. thesis set off from the hypothesis that science fiction today is capable to represent reality allegorically and as such it is capable of examining otherness in a realistic manner. The previous studies of the science fiction genre and otherness were used as a basis for the case study.

The study revealed the existence of an undeniable realistic allegorical link between the subject film's diegetic world and the empirical world. The realisation of this allegory was built on the science fictional novum and it was based on transrealism. The allegory of the subject film refers to the history of apartheid in South Africa. Otherness as a theme in the film has been based on this allegorical link to apartheid. In this allegory, the science fictional aliens represent the black population of South Africa during the apartheid.

KEY WORDS: science fiction, popular culture, otherness, apartheid, realism, transrealism

1 INTRODUCTION

The genre of science fiction has a long tradition of delivering news from the galaxy far, far away to feed the imagination of the popular culture consumers. Like other products of popular culture, science fiction has suffered from undervaluation as a serious literary genre. The situation is on a route towards change, for as the attitude towards popular culture has changed, the critics of science fiction have started to consider the genre more in terms of serious literature. Among these features are realism and culture bound issues in the form of otherness, which form the ultimate focus of this study.

As the previous studies of the field show, science fiction's relation to reality and capability to address questions from our empirical world rather than a completely imaginary one, has been under serious dispute. So far this debate has been leaning towards the denial of the genre's capability to represent reality. The science fictional Hollywood film is currently experiencing one of its peaks, for it seems that a new science fiction film premieres every week. The origins of the current science fictional boom can be traced back to the 2009 film *District 9*, which is the subject of this study. As a beginner of the first science fictional wave of twenty-first century, *District 9* represents the foundational nature of science fictional film today. It is thus a perfect subject for the study of the genre's current situation.

The question of "otherness" as a part of our cultural identity has been studied from numerous perspectives. There is no doubt that science fiction has contributed to the discussion about the "other" with its typical alien encounters, but its ability to represent the otherness from the actual realistic empirical world has been questioned. If science fiction has not been considered to be able to represent reality, it most certainly has not been considered capable of representing the "others" of our reality. However, the study will show that the subject film *District 9* can prove that one of the science fiction genre's contemporary features is indeed its capability to represent reality in an allegorical manner and to represent the otherness of our cultural reality in allegorical manner. Science fiction can therefore be seen as a fresh popular culture tool to study the concept of otherness.

On the basis of this study, the meaning of the legendary first lines of the *Star Wars* films: "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." (Star Wars 1977, 1980, 1983) unfolds anew to summarise the possible new features of science fiction today. Previous studies of the field start off from the critic Damon Knight's famous definition that science fiction is "what we point to and call science fiction." (quoted in Landon 2002: 14 and Roberts 2006:23). This kind of vague definition seems to point at towards the popular culture identity of the genre, which underestimates science fiction's role as a genre of serious fiction. In connection to this, the first lines of *Star Wars* might lead to the conclusion that the galaxy far away is completely a product of our fantastic imagination. However, the present study will show that the "galaxy" of a science fictional film is actually not that far away at all, and that it most certainly is in the past or present rather than in the future. As human beings we are not capable of imagining anything else than what we already know exists. Therefore, instead of an unreal and unfamiliar fantastical world of aliens, the world of *District 9* is not that far from ours'. It reflects the nuances of our cultural reality back to us in its typical fantastical and popular science fictional style.

Even though science fiction might not be able to explain what kind of answer is 42 to Douglas Adams' ultimate question of life, universe and everything, (Adams 1996) it still has the potential of being more than a simple fictional product of popular culture. The themes and characteristics of science fiction film may well go beyond simple entertainment. Popular culture texts are capable of addressing serious issues, but what could those issues be in the genre of science fiction? If we take a closer look at a science fictional story, we begin to see that the idea of an alien race might not be as farfetched as one would think. Instead of being just a figure of our imagination, the aliens reflect our very own reality and culture. After all, a human mind is incapable of imagining anything that does not already exist. The alien other is a representation of the other in the familiar society. Therefore, there is nothing new in the genre, whose main idea is seemingly based on the new. This study will show how deep the science fictional genre is capable of reaching in order to reflect our cultural reality and by doing so it contributes to the generic discussion of the nature of the science fictional genre today.

1.1 *District 9*

The subject of this case study, a science fiction film *District 9* released in 2009, may be seen as an invoking piece for the genre of science fiction and as such it has the potential for strengthening the theories on the perspectives, themes, characteristics and basic definitions of science fiction as they have been defined by theorists of the field and at the same time to enlighten the nature and development of science fiction genre in the twenty-first century towards a fresh interpreter of our cultural reality and identity negotiation through the question of otherness. In order to avoid interpreting and speculating about the film at this stage, the film company's synopsis of the film reveals in itself a great deal of information about the genre and as such it acts as a good introduction to the material of the study. The non-analytical and commercial purpose of the synopsis offers the reader of this study a somewhat neutral standpoint, similar to that of the starting point of this study.

Thirty years ago, aliens made first contact with Earth.

Humans waited for the hostile attack, or the giant advances in technology. Neither came. Instead, the aliens were refugees, the last survivors of their home world. The creatures were set up in a makeshift home in South Africa's District 9 as the world's nations argued over what to do with them.

Now, patience over the alien situation has run out. Control over the aliens has been contracted out to Multi-National United (MNU), a private company uninterested in the aliens' welfare - they will receive tremendous profits if they can make the aliens' awesome weaponry work. So far, they have failed; activation of the weaponry requires alien DNA.

The tension between the aliens and the humans comes to a head when an MNU field operative, Wikus van der Merwe (Sharlto Copley), contracts a mysterious virus that begins changing his DNA. Wikus quickly becomes the most hunted man in the world, as well as the most valuable - he is the key to unlocking the secrets of alien technology. Ostracized and friendless, there is only one place left for him to hide: District 9.

(District 9 Synopsis, 2009)

By keeping in mind the definitions and themes of science fiction, which will be the base of this study, the synopsis already holds up some of the main themes of science fiction, which the analysis of the film will demonstrate. In the course of what is relevant to this study and to enrich the analysis of the film, some of the (possible) inspirations of the film makers are also brought into the study to further strengthen and support the analysis.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology of the study is based on the research question of the realistic nature of science fiction in the twenty-first century through the analysis of the film *District 9*. Even though a case study with only one representative may not be able to create a new theory about science fiction as a genre, it will illuminate the current situation of the genre and perhaps suggest something about the direction and the future of the genre. As mentioned before, creating a stable definition for a genre, which seems to be constantly on the move, is problematic and by suggesting this kind of alternative for a solid definition, the genre may well be closer to defining itself, at least when we think about the science fiction of today. As we will come to see, looking at the contributions that a single text has to offer for the definition of a genre or at least the genre supertext, might prove useful for further defining the current situation of the genre of science fiction.

In order to successfully analyse the material and to answer the research question, the analysis needs to be based on the theoretical framework, which in this case is the enormous amount of genre theory, which is and has been in the centre of debate as long as literary critics have tried to come up with a stable and solid definition for science fiction. These theories are further supported with relevant notions from the field of identity studies, particularly that of otherness, for exploring otherness can be said to be the dominant theme of science fiction. However, before we can even start to consider trying to define the ultimate nature or characteristic, themes and other aspects of a certain genre such as science fiction, we need to address the question of genre itself. Considering the fact that we are likely to define any genre in relation to other genres

that are closely related to it, the discussion of science fiction as a genre should start from deciding what makes it, or any of its counterparts, a genre. As we will see, the problem of defining a genre will get easier after we have decided (or at least suggested) what establishes a genre.

After we have created the basis for a genre analysis, we may concentrate on the previous studies on the genre. The reason why these genre matters are insisted upon in the study is the relevance of the genre specific features to this study of realism and otherness in a popular culture genre. These genre specific features of science fiction enable the fresh point of view towards realism and otherness. Including the genre studies of science fiction in the study, with as many nuances as possible, is a strength of the study. It proves that the present writer has taken into account and not overlooked previous theories of the genre, whose very nature this study is ultimately examining. As an example of a science fictional device of realism and otherness, the metaphorical "novum" of an extraterrestrial alien can be mentioned. This concept of "novum" will be explained later, but as the study will show, it is a genre specific device, which in this study might prove to be a fresh vehicle of realism and portrayal of otherness.

By constituting the basis for science fiction on the underlying definitions and only after that, we may start to consider the typical aspects of the genre along with themes and characteristics. However, because a representative of the genre might never use all the possible tools of the genre to establish its place in it, the themes and characteristics with the tools for achieving them are examined only to the point which is relevant for analysing the material in question. As an example, because the film *District 9* does not explore science fiction's theme of otherness via gender related issues, or as it barely scratches its surface, the previous studies on gender issues and representation in science fiction are left out of this study. Nevertheless, these omissions do not affect the analysis or its results, for aspects like the one mentioned are only tools which science fiction can choose from to address its themes and achieve the generic characteristics typical for it. Justifiably, the analysis is based on the relevant general theory of science fiction and otherness. Henceforth whenever the textual concept allows, science fiction will be referred to with "SF", as it is a widely used abbreviation.

2 SCIENCE FICTION

This section will provide the theoretical framework for the purpose of this study. Therefore, any irrelevant features of for example previous studies of SF will be left out. This is to say that, as one will notice from the analysis, because gender issues (Melzer 2006) are not dealt in the subject material, they have not been considered to be relevant background information to mention in the discussion of previous studies in the field, even though they might in some other material form one of SF's devices to explore otherness.

The first part of this section will provide a sufficient framework for the study of a specific genre by looking at the concept of genre in general. As the subject of the study is a film, rather than for example a literary novel, before entering any discussion about a genre, let alone the genre of SF, we must first conclude in the words of film genre critic Rick Altman, that "Clearly, much that is said about film genre is simply borrowed from a long tradition of literary genre criticism." (Altman 2000: 13) Because of this assumption, the theoretical background of this thesis will partly concentrate on the notions on literary genre and SF text. The term "text" itself is widely used to describe both the actual printed text, but also other readable media such as films.

The second part of this chapter will examine the definitions and features of the science fictional genre. Starting from antidefinitions, the discussion moves on through Darko Suvin's pioneering definition and its criticism to a general discussion on definitions of the genre. The third part of this chapter will introduce SF as a realistic and/or transrealistic genre, after which it continues to develop these ideas further by looking at the genre as one that relies on historical events and as metaphorical mode of literature. Finally, the fourth part of the chapter will introduce the central thematic of the genre, as it is relevant for this study.

2.1 Genre Studies -Defining a Genre

Before entering the discussion of science fiction as a genre, we need first to define what constitutes a genre or rather why any text should be considered as a representative of a certain genre. Contrary to what might be assumed, the answer to these questions is not as simple as making some kind of checklist for certain characteristics, themes and other factors that a text should be able to correspond positively to before it can be confirmed to represent a certain genre. As the subject of this study is a film, the discussion of defining a genre should begin from the following.

According to Martin Flanagan, film makers need to understand the spectator and his/her response in order to communicate their narrative message. All language usage is dependent on this two-way interaction, dialogism. By understanding the response and reactions of the spectator, the film makers are able to deliver their narrative message, which is tailored to serve that understanding. (Flanagan 1999: 157) At this point the significance of a defined genre is acknowledged, for a defined genre provides the spectator a solid and familiar framework along with a "recognisable signifying system for varied narrative material." (Flanagan 1999: 157). However, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, genre should be recognised as a narrative mode, which is shaped by the literary development throughout centuries, which again is shaped by its interaction with human experience in that process of reception and by intertextual relations. (quoted in Flanagan 1999:156) By acknowledging this constant development and intertextual communication between genres, we may come to understand the difficulty of defining a genre.

Finding the purest case to represent a certain genre used to be the tradition in defining any genre and defining the genre of SF was not an exception for that matter. However, as Claudio Guillen argues, such pure manifestations cannot be found but instead as a contrast to that, all texts appear at an intersection of several genres. The actual differentiating force between those genres is the tension of their very own position and existence in that intersection. (quoted in Johnson-Smith 2004: 17) Tzvetan Todorov has also argued against finding the purest form of a genre by suggesting that "it is not the

quantity of the observations, but the logical coherence of a theory that finally matters." (quoted in Johnson-Smith 2004: 17) By developing this idea further, James Donald argued that genres cannot be distinguished from each other by defining particular formal elements, but the way those elements are combined to produce narrative structures and modes of address. It is not, according to Donald, so much about the obvious iconographic and narrative conventions, but more about "systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject." (quoted in Johnson-Smith 2004: 18).

Therefore, according to Fredric Jameson, we can argue that when we try to fit a text inside a generic form, it is more useful to look at the genre theory as means for co-ordination and location than trying to make a pure delineation, inclusion or exclusion. (quoted in Johnson-Smith 2004: 18) What is problematic in defining a genre, is its mutable nature. The definitions that are brought forward need to be continually reassessed and reconsidered "in the context of its era, ideology and culture, all of which impact upon it in the past, present and future." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 18). But does this kind of definition really help us to define a genre? With help of these theories about the nature of a genre we can come to the conclusion that the nature of defining any genre is indeed problematic and furthermore, the problem of fitting a text inside a genre remains still unanswered. We may have come closer to understanding what the ultimate difficulty is, but if we are to define a certain genre, the following theories have to be taken into consideration as the basis for making use of any of the definitions SF critics have had to offer.

Genre critic John Cawelti has clarified the term of "supertext" for the means of genre studies. This supertext is built from a collection of most significant characteristics of a genre, which are present among many particular texts. These family resemblances that exist between different texts are therefore the basis of genre formation and can be "...analysed, evaluated and otherwise related to each other by virtue of their connection with" this "consolidation of many texts created at different times." (quoted in Telotte 2001: 10). However, even this cannot be considered as a trouble-free basis for defining a genre, for what results from this is the reason why the supertext as such cannot be

considered as a sufficient enough basis for defining a genre. As we have already previously come to see via many critical views on genre theory, genre in itself is mutable in its nature. Keeping this in mind, the idea of defining a supertext for any genre becomes impossible. New characteristics come up all the time, accordingly expanding the supertext continuously. (Telotte 2001: 10) At this point we might ask why this expanding nature of a supertext is problematic at all. If we are able to conclude that genre in itself is mutable in its nature, why should we assume anything else when it comes to supertext in the first place. Finally, what we have accomplished with this idea of a supertext, constitutes the basis of our last review of genre theory. By combining this idea of a supertext to the following, we have accomplished a basis for analysing the genre of SF.

In contrast to other genre theorists before him, Carl Freedman has come to understand genre as an element or a tendency rather than a classification. With his theory of a text's generic tendency, Freedman has quite successfully freed the genre defining discussions from the need to form a solid framework into which a text should fit in order to represent a certain genre. This generic tendency, in combination with other somewhat autonomous generic tendencies, "is active to a greater or lesser degree within a literary text that is itself understood as a complexly structured totality." (Freedman 2000: 20). Like critics before and after him, Freedman has come to the conclusion that there is probably no text that would be a solid and perfect embodiment of a genre. Hence there cannot be a perfect delineation for a genre, but rather a text has a tendency towards a certain generic category. In other words, a text that favours one generic category over others is a representative of that genre. Therefore, "a text is not filed under a certain generic category; instead a generic tendency is something that happens within a text." (Freedman 2000: 20). By this Freedman insists that a text can never be filed under one category alone. However, even though a text here emerges in an intersection of many generic categories, it is the dominant characteristics that ultimately determine its genre. That is to say, if a text has a tendency towards for example characteristics of SF over the characteristics of other genres, the text can be considered as SF. In other words, the text's generic tendency is science fiction. (Freedman 2000: 20–21)

In addition to Freedman's comprehensively liberating theory, we need also to consider genre as a social phenomenon. Similarly as Freedman, Mark Rose has come to insist that genre is not something that inhabits a text, but according to him it is rather a set of expectations. (quoted in Landon 2002: 9) Combining Freedman's and Rose's ideas we come back to the idea of a supertext.

Rick Altman has emphasised the need of analysing the semantic and syntactic elements of a text in order to model the structure of a particular generic text and "compare it to other examples of the genre (i.e., other parts of the supertext).", which appear either at the same time or some other point of the genre history, and representatives of other closely associated genres. (quoted in Telotte 2001: 18) According to Altman, this theory of his might help us understand "a genre's very formation: how it first came into being, as a set of semantic units gradually acquired a body of syntactic structures in response to certain cultural conditions." (quoted in Telotte 2001: 18). However, Telotte criticises this by claiming that it limits the study of genre characteristics by creating a grammar for a genre, treating a text as a formal language and hence avoiding any essential conclusions. His preference instead is to treat a text as a form of colloquial speech or slang, which changes with time or falls out of use completely. (Telotte 2001: 18)

As a conclusion to this debate of the nature and definition of genre, we are left to wonder whether any particular one of these standpoints is able to completely exclude the others. By combining elements of them, rather than simply rejecting some in favour of others, we come to see both the beginning of a genre and the current situation of its development. After all, if we are to study a genre, we cannot make up the rules all over again separately for each text. At that point the idea of supertext and generic tendency prove themselves worthy as a basis for a generic debate. The supertext is expanding exactly because all genres are constantly changing, representing at the same time the past and the present of the genre, which enables any genre to change over time. Generic tendency might be seen as something that appears to both enable and counterbalance this development, something that curbs the expansion and holds the genre together. From this standpoint, we may continue to examine the generic debate of SF.

2.2 What is Science Fiction? -Defining the Genre

The problematic nature of the discussion of the field comes evident each time a new critic starts the discussion of trying to define SF. Usually the discussion starts with the exact notion of the difficulty of making a solid definition and that is the origin of problematic and vague descriptions. Some of these definitions may resemble each other, but their important differences are in their different nuances. Even though the critics of the field seem to be somewhat indecisive with their definitions, most of them seem to agree at least to some extent on the ultimate nature of SF.

2.2.1 Antidefinitions of a Diverse Field

As the following will demonstrate, the problematic nature of defining SF has been acknowledged by the critics themselves. In fact, it may almost seem like the only thing the critics do agree on, is exactly the difficulty of arriving on a solid definition and achieving a definitional consensus. Carl Freedman starts to address this problem by stating that it is only symptomatic to the critical discussion of such a complex genre as SF to devote considerable attention to definitions. It is clear for Freedman that there still is no definitional consensus. He has been able to identify this problem by dividing these definitions into narrow and broad, eulogistic and dyslogistic, those that position SF in relation to its generic others such as fantasy or mainstream realistic fiction, and antidefinitions. (Freedman 2000: 13)

A good place to start reviewing these different kinds of definitions is what Freedman terms antidefinitions. (Freedman 2000: 13) Because their idea is simply to "proclaim the problem of definition to be insoluble" (Freedman 2000: 13), they seem to be the quickest way out of the discussion, but at the same time they can be seen to reveal something about the genre and therefore they can be used to ground up the discussion of definitions. According to Vivian Sobchack, SF's "very rationale seems to work against the 'tyrannical' academic demand of defining terms." (quoted in Johnson-Smith 2004: 16). J.P. Telotte, on the other hand, settles for noting that SF is simply a form that seems difficult to pin down satisfactorily and that this sense of difficulty is often the place to

start an academic discussion on the subject. (Telotte 2001: 3). But in what seems to be an agreement to Sobchack's argument, Telotte quotes David Hartwell's suggestion that in its forms and subjects SF is so diverse that "it defies any simple definition." (Telotte 2001: 4). It seems that this diversity, combined to the need for every popular genre to constantly produce something new, is the reason for the SF film's resistance of a simple definition. (Telotte 2001: 9).

The vast body of texts that have been filed under the title of SF has grown so immense, that for John Clute it seems that an ostensible definition of SF can no longer exist to the extent that it would "even begin to match the corrosive intricacies of the exploded genre." (quoted in Roberts 2006: 24). Because of this "exploding" of the genre, Edward James has suggested that only by understanding what authors are trying or have tried to do, we may arrive at a proper definition (quoted in Telotte 2001: 4). However, this brings us to one of the core questions of this thesis (as the analysis will demonstrate), for James claims that at the same time the genre has changed, the definitions of it have been bound to change with it. This leads to the conclusion that the development of SF genre is bound up with the development of the definitions and "with the attempts by writers to *live up to those definitions.*" (quoted in Telotte 2001: 4) (my italics)

At this point it is relevant to notice that the previous paragraph and chapter serves as an introduction to the generic debate of SF and needs to be acknowledged in order to further theorise about the nature of the genre and answer the research question of twenty-first century SF's nature as realistic fiction. But, in order to examine the possibility of realism and thus the theme of otherness in a twenty-first century SF film, the previous establishments in defining the genre need to be paid attention to as comprehensively as this study will prove to require.

2.2.2 Fiction of Cognitive Estrangement

-Discussions on Darko Suvin's Pioneering Definition

The majority of attempts to define the genre of SF is based on the effort to differentiate it from its closely related generic others. The discussion of Darko Suvin's (1979) groundbreaking and highly debated definition and its critique acts as a starting point and, as for so many others before the present author, the basis from which the discussion of constantly debatable definitions can be started from. As we shall see, even though one must not forget other independently formed definitions, such as those of Damien Broderick and Robert Scholes (quoted in Roberts 2006: 10–11), Suvin's definition has inspired other definitions as the starting point for many critics. Therefore we will look at Suvin's definition in relation to the contribution that other critics have made to the field when using Suvin as the basis for their discussions. Because of the seminality and the status of the definition, the vast amount of critique it has provoked needs to be looked at in addition to the definition itself.

Roger Luckhurst begins his discussion of the genre by noting that Suvin's definition has been the dominating one since its first publication in 1972. However, instead of claiming for or against it, he outlines the framework in which it has stabilised its place as the dominant one, as the "conceptual framework for Science Fiction Studies, the journal Suvin co-founded in 1973." (Luckhurst 2005: 7). The basis for Suvin's definition lies in his underlying sentence of SF as a genre "*whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.*" (Suvin 1979: 7-8). This sentence quoted by many, is the framework for all who wish to consider Suvin's definition in the light of critique.

The key element of Suvin's (1979) stance is the importance of the term "cognitive estrangement", which can be explained as follows. By estrangement Suvin means that the world of a SF text that the reader enters is different, in other words estranged, from the empirical world surrounding the reader or the writer. But, even though the world may be different, the differences obey "rational causation or scientific law." (Lukhurst

2005: 7). This in turn explains the "cognitive" part of the term, the world is different, but the difference is made plausible or cognitive. Suvin notes that "the concept of "cognitiveness" or "cognition" [...] implies not only a reflection *of* but also *on* reality. It implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment." (Suvin 1979: 10). Consequently, the world of SF is one that extrapolates rationally and scientifically the tendencies of the reader's empirical environment. (Luckhurst 2005: 7)

Luckhurst admits that the strength of Suvin's definition is that it enabled him to define SF against other genres. Nevertheless, he criticises Suvin's theory of SF by pointing out that because it is deeply prescriptive and judgemental formulation, it often berates science fictional works for their inability to measure up. Hence, based on this definition, Suvin's attitude towards more than eighty percent of SF texts is claimed to be that of "intemperate condemnation" (Luckhurst 2005: 7). Luckhurst suggests, that this tendency of Suvin's to purge might be the result of over-precise terms, of Suvin's insistence on the science of science fiction (Luckhurst 2005: 8), for Suvin does insist on the "kindred thesaurus concepts of *science* for cognition, and *fiction* for estrangement," (Suvin 1979:13).

Instead of concentrating only on what is wrong with Suvin's (1979) definition, Carl Freedman has attempted to solve the problems that even Suvin himself has admitted to speak against his definition. (Freedman 2000: 18–21). He discusses Suvin's idea by elaborating it as "*dialectic* between estrangement and cognition" (Freedman 2000:16), which is indeed what Suvin (1979) seems to refer to. The genre differentiating capability of the definition is based on Suvin's claim that estrangement cannot be found from the realistic mainstream fiction and that cognition separates SF from other closely related genres, such as myth, folk tale and fantasy (ghost, horror, Gothic and weird), which might produce the effect of estrangement. (Suvin 1979: 8) In other words, cognition is seen to have the significant role of separating SF from its close generic others. The generic others, such as fantasy, are based on estrangement, but they do not exploit cognition. According to Suvin, the genre of fantasy is "committed to the interposition of anticognitive laws into the empirical environment." (Suvin 1979: 8).

The operation of this cognition guarantees that the science fictional text is capable of accounting rationally for the imagined world as well as its connections and disconnections to the empirical world of ours (Freedman 2000: 17). Therefore, the coincidental appearance of cognition and estrangement is what distinguishes SF from related and unrelated genres.

Suvin (1979) himself found and admitted two problems in his definition, which Freedman has tried to solve. The first one is the position that the cognition imposes for the literary critic, for it demands that he/she makes "generic distinctions on the basis of matters far removed from literature and genre." (Freedman 2000: 17). Freedman opened up this problem by explaining that in some texts it might be easy to see that the world of SF might be cognitively related to ours, contrary to fantasy, in which it is easy to recognise that, for example, hobbits do not belong to our empirical world. However, it might not always be so easy to make this distinction. Some texts are labelled as SF even though the cognition cannot be proved by the critics. Freedman arrives to the conclusion that cognition is not the underlying quality that defines SF. Instead he offers a more unrestricted term of "cognition effect" to replace it. (Freedman 2000: 17–18)

According to Freedman, generic discrimination should be done on the basis of the attitude of the text itself, by concentrating on the type of estrangement that it performs. A text in itself is not cognitive, but it might produce the effect of cognition. Freedman can be understood to argue that cognition in itself is not necessary for SF, it is enough that the text produces the effect of cognition. Nevertheless he still insists to conclude that SF is preeminently a genuine cognitive genre because the cognition effect is achieved precisely through cognition itself. (Freedman 2000: 19)

Definitions of SF should, according to Freedman, start from defining the roots of SF genre. The origin of the genre can be traced to the American pulp tradition. However, Freedman insists that SF cannot be categorised to be strictly part of pulp tradition, for it is too vague and excludes too much. He admits that this categorisation has two merits, its popular currency and philological correctness. The term of SF itself, originally "scientifiction", was originally invented in the pulps, yet SF is nowadays seen as much

more than pulp. (Freedman 2000: 14–15) Freedman considers the construction of SF to be "as broad as the pulp-centered construction is narrow." (Freedman 2000: 15). This brings us to the second problem of Suvin's definition. The literature of cognitive estrangement seems to deny SF's relation to pulp tradition, in which its definitional roots are grounded and to grant the title of SF to works that are produced far from the influence of the pulp tradition. The cognitive estrangement, therefore, overturns both merits of the pulp, common usage and philology. (Freedman 2000: 19) As a remark against Freedman's critique and in defense of Suvin, SF's constantly changing nature needs to be remembered here. Therefore it could be suggested that this literature of cognitive estrangement might not always have been the apt definition of SF and it might not always be so. SF may have changed so that the definitions of pulp no longer apply to it, the same way as Suvin's definition may no longer apply fifty years from today.

As a solution to these problems, Freedman suggests that according to his previously discussed idea of generic tendency, the cognitive estrangement needs not to be the only feature of SF. For a text to be labelled as SF, it is enough that the cognitive estrangement is the dominant generic tendency of the text. (Freedman 2000: 20–21) Freedman adds to this discussion the notion that there is probably no text that could be labelled as pure SF, in other words a text in which SF is the only generic tendency. Freedman also argues that this SF tendency is never completely absent from any text, for "this tendency is the constitution of fictionality - and even of representation itself." (Freedman 2000: 21). This seems to be the point where Freedman disagrees with Suvin. Where Suvin demanded that realistic fiction lacks estrangement, Freedman seems to demand that it can be found even from the most realistic fictional texts.

Hence Freedman concludes, as cognition and estrangement are crucial to the existence of all literature, the dominance of cognition and estrangement together constitute the generic tendency of SF in a text (Freedman 2000: 22). In the grounds of this study, Freedman's final argument on the film category of SF needs to be considered. According to him, the strongly visual dimension of film as a medium has the potential for forming the dominant generic tendency of SF film. Freedman claims that film as a medium might not be able to activate the SF tendency of literature texts, but the

"spectacular hypertrophy of the specifically *visual* dimension..." establishes the dominant generic tendency of SF film. (Freedman 2000: 22)

Jan Johnson-Smith has also commented on Suvin's definition by insisting that SF's capability of achieving estrangement is limited. The diegesis of SF must be in some cognitively understandable relation to our own empirical experiences. Therefore, he claims cognitive estrangement to mean that "we must question and challenge what we see in order to comprehend it." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 26). Narrative structures of SF establish a base for the reader to consider the differences of our world compared to that of the text and at the same time to reflect on the similarities of the two worlds (Johnson-Smith 2004: 27). Explained by Telotte, the intent of the form of cognitive estrangement is to defamiliarise reality by using various generic strategies for the purpose of reflecting on the reality more effectively (Telotte 2001: 4).

Once again, the cognition aspect of SF tries to lead us to understand or comprehend the diegesis world and the estrangement aspect refers to alienation from the familiar surroundings of our own world. In SF, conversely to for example fantasy, this diegesis or alternative world must "reflect the constraints of science" (Roberts 2006: 8), in other words it must be possible in terms of science. Roberts considers this aspect of Suvin to be a strength, for it represents "a common-sense tautology, that SF is scientific fictionalising." (Roberts 2006: 8). At this point, the vehicle through which Suvin claims this cognitive estrangement of his is possible, must be introduced.

Even if the previously discussed aspects of Suvin's definition have been highly debated and commented on, the one thing most critics seem to agree upon is what Suvin (1979) proposed to call the "novum". This Latin word translates into "new" or a "new thing", which in SF is the vehicle with which the estrangement is achieved. That is to say, it refers to the point of difference in the diegesis of SF. Suvin calls this novum "the *differentia specifica* of the SF narration." in relation to SF's generic others (Suvin 1979: 63). He claims that "*SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional "novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic.*" (Suvin 1979: 63) A simple example of this science fictional novum would be a spaceship. What makes it

a new thing and differentiates it from NASA's existing space shuttles, is usually its appearance among other features, such as a capability to travel faster than the speed of light. According to Johnson-Smith, this novum and the cognitive estrangement are the two major structural components of SF (Johnson-Smith 2004: 25).

Usually this novum is constructed from "a number of interrelated 'nova'" (Roberts 2006: 7). As was pointed out earlier, the diegesis must be possible in terms of science, which is also in the core of the concept of novum. This leads to the idea that the difference between our empirical world and that of an SF text is a material one instead of just a conceptual or imaginative one. (Roberts 2006: 7) Roberts and Johnson-Smith see SF as a thought experiment, where the consequences brought by this novum are processed. (Roberts 2006: 9, Johnson-Smith 2004: 25) However, this novum does not need to represent the truth because scientific truth is not important to SF. The novum is a fictional device, it forms the narrative dominance in a SF text. According to Suvin, this novum is "*validated by cognitive logic*", in order to fulfill its function as such, it has to be explained logically (Suvin 1979:63). For Suvin, this logic is above everything else, "culturally acquired cognitive logic." (Suvin 1979: 66).

The fictional novum, which is based upon scientific or logical innovations, is the device of the difference between the mundane world and that of SF text. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 25) For Johnson-Smith, the novum is a specific device, which implications to the empirical world are examined in combination with SF's tendency to foreground the background. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 26) According to Carl Malmgren, the presence of at least one novum as a factor of estrangement is a precondition for a text to be read as SF (quoted in Landon 2002: 17).

The concept of cognitive estrangement and novum as its device will be considered in connection to SF's metaphorical or symbolical nature later on in this chapter. Understanding Suvin's definitions seems to be the basis for understanding the actual definitions and the academic debate on them. By acknowledging Suvin's theory's dominant position and the fact that many critics after Suvin have based their definitions

on the basis of Suvin's, we may move on to the other definitions, possibly to find something to compliment or substitute it.

2.2.3 The Label for Science Fiction

The discussion about the attempts to form general definitions about science fiction should begin by noting the previously mentioned antidefinitions. For even the previously mentioned Damon Knight's seemingly simple definition is a problematic one (see page 6). When the definition is cut into pieces, the use and purpose of the word "we" leads to the roots of the problem. The "we" in itself includes difference, which cannot be defined by a unified agreement. (Roberts 2006: 24) The starting point for the discussion of the diverse definitions of SF is the approval of Farah Mendlesohn's statement: "SF is less a genre... than an ongoing discussion" (Roberts 2006: 24)

Adam Roberts has identified the problem of the process of defining SF. When a critic arrives at a definition he/she usually ends up disregarding many such texts outside the genre, which have been identified as SF according to other definitions and which ought to be considered as such. This has the risk of opening a critical binary as the classics of SF are considered as respectable and other texts as worthless for critical attention. Therefore it might seem that definitions, which try to be too inclusive or exclusive, are necessarily not any better than that of Damon Knight's. Roberts insists that whatever SF is, it is not binary but rather a multiplicity of discourses, "each of which contains material good, bad and indifferent." (Roberts 2006: 23).

In fact, we need to recognize that the reason for this plurality of definitions is SF's nature as "a wide-ranging, multivalent and endlessly cross-fertilizing cultural idiom." (Roberts 2006: 2) Because the genre has proven to be one of the most flexible popular genres, it seems to be the most culturally useful one. (Telotte 2001: 10) Roberts insists that it is easier to recognise SF as a form of cultural discourse than to try and assert that all the different manifestations of the genre belong under the same umbrella term. (Roberts 2006: 25) Freedman goes as far as to suggest that we might as well be provocative and argue "that fiction is a subcategory of science fiction rather than that

other way around." (Freedman 2000: 16). The most general, but at the same time quite informative description of all can be found from the back cover of *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. According to it, "Science fiction is at the intersection of numerous fields. It is a literature which draws on popular culture, and which engages in speculation about science, history and all types of social relations." (James & Mendlesohn 2003).

If we consider what differentiates SF from other genres, Darko Suvin's definition seems to form the basis for that. The exact point of difference brought by the symbolic but plausible novum is the crucial factor that separates SF from other forms of imaginative and fantastic literature (Roberts 2006: 6). Thus, SF is a literature of ideas, which are based on substantive differences between the diegetic world and the empirical world. Contrary to other genres, such as horror or fantasy, these differences need to be plausible within the structure of the text. (Roberts 2006: 5) This is also demanded by Johnson-Smith, who claims that this plausibility is vital. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 20) In SF, the differences need to be grounded on a material or physical rationalisation, separating it from the supernatural or arbitrary differences of its generic others. One of SF's key features is therefore its material rather than supernatural foundation. This so called material device of SF is the one that answers to the genre's requirement of plausibility. (Roberts 2006: 5)

Even though the precondition of earlier SF might have been the assumption that the material device should obey the laws of physics or the knowledge of them at the time, nowadays it is enough that it might be possible. (Roberts 2006: 4–6) In other words, all that is required is an explanation, which in itself does not have to be possible according to science today. According to Johnson-Smith, this explanatory nature of SF distinguishes it categorically from fantasy. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 28) The metaphorical function of this material device or novum is discussed in detail later on.

Robert Scholes has stressed the metaphorical tension of SF. Like Suvin, he formed a two-word definition for it in the form of structural fabulation. According to him, fabulation is a form of fiction that presents a diegetic world clearly disconnected from

our own world. Yet this diegesis confronts the empirical world in some cognitive way. Hence, SF is firstly different from our own world, but it returns to confront it. This fabulation includes all the imaginative or fantastic fiction, but by adding the structural element in to it, Scholes has narrowed his definition of SF. This structural can be seen as synonymous with science as the fabulation may be seen synonymous with fiction. For Scholes, the fundamental basis of the genre is "an awareness of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures." (Roberts 2006: 10) However, Scholes differs from Suvin in his emphasis on the fictionalisation. The fabulation is not interested in scientific methods or actual science, it is more "a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science." (Roberts 2006: 10)

Another SF critic, Damien Broderick, like many other critics, is concerned with SF's capability to perform as a form of serious literature genre or a representative of high art. This supposes that the genre is not for example capable of producing detailed and subtle analyses of characters. For Broderick, SF is more interested in the object than the subject. Concreteness is preferred over symbolism, in other words concrete aliens are preferred over metaphorical ones. Broderick also claims that SF is recognised and differentiated from other similar genres by certain icons that are consensually agreed to be SF. These icons are devices, which are derived from a corpus of accepted nova consisting of starships, aliens et cetera. These in turn connect with "a particular 'estranged' version of our reality." (Roberts 2006: 11). (quoted in Roberts 2006: 11–13)

Damien Broderick himself has quoted a New York Times' reviewer Gerald Jones, who maintains that there is simply no room for the traditional novel of character in SF. Because of its nature as novum based narration, it is incapable of focusing on the character development. It may use the characters to demonstrate the way a change in technology or social organisation modifies the human condition. It might also study how certain character traits, such as greed or passion, take different forms in different situations, by creating these radically different diegetic worlds. (Broderick 2009: 62) Hence Broderick argues that SF has more in common with experimental fiction than with the traditional novel of character. (Broderick 2009: 63)

As a conclusion for the discussion of these rather indefinite definitions of SF, another attempt to form an exclusive definition needs to be looked at. One of SF's most famous writers, Ursula Le Guin has given her contribution to the academic debate as well. Brooks Landon claims that her definition of SF's thought processes offers "an effective index to the critical discourse that has sprung up around twentieth-century SF..." (Landon 2002: 10). This is why, but also because of its seemingly exhaustive nature, the definition needs to be repeated here in its original form, quoted by Landon.

Materialistic cause and effect; the universe conceived as comprehensible object of exploration and exploitation; *multiculturalism; multispeciesism; evolutionism; entropy; technology conceived as intensive industrial development*, permanently developing in the direction of complexity, novelty, and importance; *the idea of gender, race, behavior, belief as culturally constructed*; the consideration of *mind, person, personality, and body as objects of investigation and manipulation*: such fundamental assumptions of various sciences or of the engineering mind underlie and inform the imagery and the discourse of science fiction.

(my italics) (quoted in Landon 2002: 10)

The italics have been added for the purpose of the analysis of the subject of this study in order to highlight the crucial aspects of the definition. These highlighted aspects will be referred to in the analysis of the subject film. Le Guin's definition of SF's thought patterns is by no means exclusive, which seems to be its strength. Finally, it can be concluded on the basis of, and as a conclusion to these general definitions, that it is in the nature of SF to be interrogative and open. According to Johnson-Smith, "The possibilities of open, radical, questioning texts in science fiction appear to be endless." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 30).

2.3 Science Fiction as a Transrealistic or Realistic Genre

Most of us would at least at first define science fiction as nonrealistic. The *Macmillan English Dictionary's* description represents this attitude by proposing it to be "books and films about imaginary future events and characters, often dealing with space travel and life on other planets." (Macmillan 2002). Seemingly, this differentiates it from forms of realistic fiction that attempt to reproduce our experience of a world which can be recognised as ours. However, even if this dictionary definition does reveal something about the way many people would at first hand define SF, it has little to do with more profound analyses or theories of the field.

According to Roberts, SF worlds are distinguishable from our own world in one degree or another and therefore as a product of imagination rather than reality, the genre can be seen to be a part of fantastic literature. (Roberts 2006: 1) But if we consider SF to be a symbolic genre, as we shall see in the following chapters and in the analysis, SF may have more to do with realism than with other forms of imaginative fiction. Realistic fiction tries to reproduce the experience we have of our empirical world, aiming for "a sense of documentary verisimilitude" (Roberts 2006: 15). Suvin has substituted the term 'reality' with 'author's empirical environment', because he insists this reality needs to be defined before labelling SF as such. At the same time he notes that the genre is "often pigeonholed as nonrealistic." (Suvin 1979: 4), but insists that the genre "raises basic philosophical issues," (Suvin 1979: 4). Nevertheless, Suvin claims that SF is a synthesis between the empirically validated effect of reality in naturalistic fiction and supernatural genres lacking this effect, "in which the effect or reality is validated by a cognitive innovation" (Suvin 1979:81). Hence, keeping in mind Suvin's idea of cognitive estrangement, we may take a look at what Johnson-Smith has had to say about SF's potential for realism.

If the very device of SF is to defamiliarise us from our own environment by presenting a reality different from ours, Johnson-Smith has claimed that by doing so it is able to reflect our empirical environment back to us "in an extravagant, extrapolated fashion." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 23) At the same time he quotes the formalist critic Fredrik

Jameson, who has claimed that what SF offers to us is simply the renewal of our reading present via estrangement. Nonetheless, Johnson-Smith claims that SF cannot present a textual version of reality because its entire purpose is to speculate about other potential realities. He suggests that it is more practical to consider realism in any genre to be produced afresh in every discourse. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 22–23)

If the connection between SF and reality lies in its symbolism, it might be more productive, or at least a beneficial alternative, to look at it as a form of transrealism than realism in itself. In his essay, *A Transrealistic Manifesto*, Rudy Rucker advocates a style of SF that he calls transrealism. He adds that this transrealism is not a type of SF as much as it is "a type of avant-garde literature." (Rucker). Nevertheless, as Rucker's manifesto is over twenty years of age (Rucker) and claims transrealism to be the mode of literature of that time, it needs to be looked at from the point of view of Damien Broderick, who has examined it in the context of twenty-first century.

By looking at Damien Broderick's definition of transrealistic fiction we come closer to understand what Rudy Rucker was trying to pursue and what seems to be a more definite alternative to realism. According to Broderick, "Transrealism...is the Conceptoid... to describe fantastic fiction that draws much of its power and density from closely observed reality, especially the biographical experience of the writer." (Broderick 2009: 52). The 'trans-' part of the term refers to aspects in the text that are transformational, transgressive and transmutational. Hence, the transrealistic fiction offers an enlightening approach to realistic fiction, as it strengthens the realistic narrative with inspirations from the fantastical imagination. (Broderick 2009: 52–53) Rucker declared that transrealistic fiction is simply about our immediate perception narrated in a fantastic way. Broderick opens this up by stating that the purpose of a transrealist is, via well-known literary techniques, to capture and present the world of immediate perception by writing about the fantastic and shocking. Consequently, transrealism in this sense is a tool for those writers who wish to intensify the narratives that are grounded in the ordinary life and those who wish to create fantastic worlds. (Broderick 2009: 53) However, this stands as contradictory for Broderick, who claims that "SF, almost by definition, is usually fiction detached from the known, aslant to it

(and often askance, sidelong, questioning and questionable)." (Broderick 2000: 130) Nevertheless, referring to the previous, he then points out that the reality of and for the transrealistic writers may already be skewed. (Broderick 2000: 130)

To justify his arguments for the transrealistic nature of SF, Rudy Rucker insists that any fiction that does not represent our actual reality is weak, but as the genre of straight realism has lost its power, SF has the tools to thicken and intensify realistic fiction. (Rucker) What we can derive from this is that the previously introduced novum of SF is, as we shall discuss in greater detail later on in this chapter, a symbolic tool that Rucker here suggests to be fantastic device in intensifying the realistic fiction. Hence it can be roughly concluded that for example the aliens are the 'trans' and 'reality' is the assumption that all fiction must be based on reality. Furthermore, the characters of a narrative must be based on actual people. In conclusion to his manifesto, Rucker claims that transrealism is a revolutionary form of art and as such it is the path to artistic SF. (Rucker) Broderick seems to have a positive attitude at least towards the implication this has on SF. He proposes that portraying the naturalistic characters, even those of aliens or robots, whose personal histories and complex inner lives resemble those of real people, against the fantastic and invented settings, "denotes sf with heart" (Broderick 2000: 11).

According to Broderick, mainstream SF's tendency to recreate stereotyped characters and plot events over and over again, created the need for the transrealistic mode of the genre. However, the shocking element of the transrealistic effect has been minimal, for a loose familiarity has proven to be commercially successful. The key features of transrealism for Broderick seem to be its interest in epistemology, asking how we know what we think we know about ourselves, others and our world, and ontology, asking what is the nature of that world or reality. Broderick's conclusive claim to this development is that the best of twenty-first century SF has lived up to this expansion and deepening of mode from stereotyped narratives typical to SF before. For the interests of this study, Broderick points out that the transrealistic contribution to cinema has been little analysed to date. (Broderick 2009: 54–57) As a conclusion for the discussion of realism and transrealism, it needs to be acknowledged that as the analysis

will show, these notions about them will be both strengthened and significantly renewed when applied to the subject film.

2.3.1 Science Fiction as a Historical Genre

We now come back to the previously mentioned dictionary definition of science fiction, claiming that SF deals with "imaginary future events and characters" (Macmillan 2002). The following arguments, made by several critics, are crucial for the purpose of this study. The key words in the dictionary definition for this chapter are 'imaginary' and 'future'. Again, it can be admitted that many people see it simply and exactly as such and nothing more. However, as agreed by many critics, SF sees much more than just the imaginary future.

Adam Roberts has claimed that contradictory to this popular belief about SF as something that looks to the future, "the truth is that most SF texts are more interested in the way things have been." (Roberts 2006: 25). Age-old issues are explored anew, making the chief mode of SF nostalgia instead of prophecy of the future. Despite this surface attachment to the future, SF enacts the past to the extent that instead of being just a genre, it holds an awareness of the empirical world. Roberts concludes this by claiming that SF's purpose is not to show us the future, but to relate us to past which has led to our present. (Roberts 2006: 25–28)

In his studies of SF TV series, Jan Johnson-Smith has observed that the genre seems to desire rewriting the past by looking backwards and a tendency to draw inspiration from the past and present. He described this mode of TV drama to be visually thought-provoking and therefore capable of representing history. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 10–11) It must be noted that if this is true about science fictional TV, the cinematic mode cannot be seen to be less visually thought-provoking. Johnson-Smith's answer to the relationship between past and present in SF is, consequently, that the genre creates new histories or futures to examine their impact on societies and individuals in them. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 25)

Carl Freedman has made his contribution to the discussion of SF as a historical novel by noting that as the concept of actual historical novel has become increasingly problematic, SF has tried to further keep alive the critical historical consciousness. For historical realism is defined by the dialect of present and past, which many science fictional works accomplish. In fact, Freedman claims that many SF texts contain "a subordinate element that might be called disguised historical fiction." (Freedman 2000: 56).

By referring to Suvin's term, the present is estranged from the future and the past at the same time. The cognitive estrangement of a science fictional historical novel is the defamiliarisation of knowledge about the history. For Freedman (2000), the possibility of historical knowledge becomes the exact problem of such a fictional novel. Nonetheless he demands that the science fictional historical novel is indeed a subgenre, but the estrangement of history in this form questions the historical reality and knowledge about it instead of parting from the known historical reality. This perfect utopia, in which these critical historical perspectives end up is a transparent picture of significant sociohistorical forces and relations. Therefore, Freedman insists that for a fictional text to be a realistically historical one, it needs to be strictly utopian in all its representations. (Freedman 2000: 56–61)

Finally, Damien Broderick has addressed this question of utopia by examining Fredrik Jameson's idea of historical utopia as the approach of choice for SF. (Broderick 2009: 60) Broderick's repetition of Jameson's paradoxical utopia serves as a conclusion for this discussion. Because this kind of perfect utopia can only make us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment, the best utopia is one that fails completely. (Broderick 2009: 61)

2.3.2 Science Fiction as Symbolic Mode of Literature

It seems almost to be a universally acknowledged truth that all fiction is at some basic level metaphorical or symbolic. The main difference between different genres seems to be the way they accomplish this symbolism. The analysis of this study will profit from the use of concepts of metaphor, symbolism, parable, allegory and analogy. Hence these concepts will be explained briefly before entering the discussion of the use and manifestation of them in the SF genre. According to Donald Davidson, a metaphor in its most basic form can be described as "a figure of thought and speech that "makes us see one thing as another"" (quoted in Mikics 2007: 180-181). It is a literary tool that is used to refer to one thing in terms of another. A parable, in turn, is a story that shows or teaches a lesson (Mikics 2007: 222). According to David Mikics, "In the parable, a precept or allegorical kernel, often an enigmatic one, lies hidden under the tale." (Mikics 2007: 222). Allegory, on the other hand, can be seen as a form of symbolic representation (Mikics 2007: 293) whereas analogy can be used to describe the conceits of for example metaphor and simile (Mikics 2007). The analysis of the subject film *District 9* will further explain these concepts when their usage demands it.

Adam Roberts (2006) has dedicated a whole chapter for considering the metaphor in science fiction. Hence the discussion of SF's symbolic nature will start from the basis of his discussion. Roberts has made a useful observation on the basis of the various definitions of the science fictional genre, implying that they all have something in common. He insists that all the definitions suggest indirectly that SF is simply a symbolist genre. It accomplishes this symbolism by the use of the novum, which acts as a symbolic manifestation of something that is familiar to us from our own world. In other words, by using this novum, SF tries to represent the empirical world in its own terms by creating a world of its own. (Roberts 2006: 14) Johnson-Smith tries to argue the same by insisting that what all SF texts have in common is that they comment on our world by using metaphor and extrapolation, by creating utopian or dystopian alternative realities. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 30)

Hence and finally the importance of the concept of Suvin's novum becomes clear. SF is a symbolist system centered on a cognitively validated novum. (Suvin 1979: 80). Hence, the nova (a plural for novum) is not an exhausted set of clichés but rather a body of material symbols. It is exactly this materialism and the demand for an explained novum that differentiates the science fictional symbol from that of other genres. (Roberts 2006: 14–15) The novum does not have to be a piece of technology as long as it is not supernatural. In other words, the insistence of plausibility guarantees that the difference to the empirical world is material rather than conceptual or imaginative. (Roberts 2006: 7) The novum might be a technical breakthrough of some kind, but on a deeper level it is an idea, through which a moral or philosophical central question can be addressed. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 25) Roberts goes on to suggest that in this way "science fiction reconfigures symbolism for our materialist age." (Roberts 2006: 15). He explains this material device with the example of a drug that could change one's skin color. Even though such drug is not scientific at the time, SF may use it as a concrete and material symbol in terms of a text by integrating it into a discourse of scientific plausibility. (Roberts 2006: 6) The role of the novum is therefore the exact point of difference between science fictional text and realistic text as it proves that SF is a metaphorical mode of literature. (Roberts 2006: 135) This symbolism of the novum is the result of a shift that its role has experienced in the history of the genre as it nowadays connects the reader with a symbolic fiction for reconsidering the world, rather than just a discourse of science. (Roberts 2006: 25)

Johnson Smith has argued that by using the nova, a SF story is able to extrapolate the empirical world that we live in through the cultural, social and technological ramifications of the nova. As a result, an autonomous reality is created, "which can then be explored to its properties and the human condition it implies." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 25). The discussion of the symbolic or metaphorical nature of the science fictional novum demands yet another assumption to be made, which is termed as SF's tendency to 'foreground the background'. Johnson-Smith claims that this Formalist-based method is combined with the effects of the novum as a device of exploring the existing reality. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 26) The novum of a SF TV-series *Stargate* is used as an example of this method. The stargate, a door-like device which transfers material through a

wormhole from, for example, planet A to B, could be considered as a door. However, in the context of SF we accept it to be more than just a mundane door, because this ordinary object is explained more closely than a simple door would be. Hence SF stories spend more time on the background information, in other words, they foreground the background. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 24)

Johnson-Smith adds that the use of this technique of foregrounding the background may lead to the assumption that SF is lacking any symbolism as it could be seen as just a style without the substance. But this assumption can be avoided by demanding that SF simply does not have time for the traditional symbolism, because its richly filled aesthetic framework is too complex for it. The perverted form of mundane cultural iconography developed by SF can be used to shock as effectively as the traditional symbolism, because it contains estrangement, through which it allows the renewal of the empirical present and that way negates the effect of classical realism. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 24)

At this point, the contradictory nature of the following debate needs to be noted for the purpose of the analysis of this study, for is this really not what constitutes a metaphor? If we claim that the novum is there as a device of the cognitive estrangement, which reflects our own world back to us through the diegetic world, could it be consequently claimed that a SF text is just a big metaphor consisting of symbols? During the following three paragraphs, we need to keep in mind what Roberts suggests about the term SF. It seems incomprehensible how he, on the one hand suggests that the term "today suggests an imaginative fiction in which one or more of the contemporary constraints upon the business of living are removed or modified." (Roberts 2006: 25), which could basically be the definition of a traditional Aristotelian metaphor. On the other hand he insists that the traditional metaphor is not sufficient enough a concept to be used when it comes to SF (Roberts 2006: 142).

According to Roberts, many critics are comfortable with defining SF as metaphoric fiction. However, he considers this to be problematic because of the limiting nature of a micro-metaphor (metaphor on its most basic level). Instead of a metaphor, he prefers

Suvin's idea of a parable, something between a metaphor and a story. (quoted in Roberts 2006: 136) However, both of these terms limit the text into a certain field of signification, allowing only one interpretation (Roberts 2006: 136). If Suvin himself is quoted, Roberts' claim against him becomes confusing, for Suvin claims that "Any significant SF text should be read as an analogy, somewhere between a vague symbol and a precisely aimed parable," (Suvin 1979: 76). Suvin simply prefers analogy to allegory by insisting that SF is not allegorical in the orthodox sense of the term. (Suvin 1979: 76). This might suggest that Roberts has not completely grasped the central hypothesis Suvin was trying to make. For Suvin (1979) it seems that SF is a symbolic system, and analogy rather than just one of its more limited subtypes, a parable.

The problem here is that metaphor is everywhere. Roberts is not satisfied with Suvin's proposition of a vital (comparison to something new) rather than dead metaphor, or Samuel Delany's proposition of metonymy rather than metaphor. Metonymy would suggest that we read a text differently if we read it as SF and therefore Roberts sees that an analysis of SF as metonymy would end before it even started. Roberts explains that metaphor is produced by the combination of logical semantic structure and a psychological surplus and therefore in order to see SF as metaphorical mode of fiction, we need to understand that the focus in it will not be on the semantic content but rather on the poetic surplus. (Roberts 2006: 138–139)

To further consider the nature of science fictional metaphor, Roberts makes the claim that SF has the tendency to literalise the metaphor. He cites Rosemary Jackson, who has suggested that SF uses metaphorical constructions literally. As an example of this, he explains that vampires are no longer just a metaphor of for example capitalist overlords, they are literally real. (Roberts 2006: 140–141) However, Roberts is still not satisfied and demands that "to call SF a metaphoric genre is to place all the imaginative constructions of SF in inferior position to reality." (Roberts 2006: 142). Finally, he suggests that rather than speaking of metaphors we must speak of a symbolist genre. This aligns SF with poetry, for SF can be said to be both a poetic and a speculative genre. Therefore, as a conclusion to this debate, Roberts prefers the Ricoeurian concept of living metaphor as the metaphorical mode of SF, because poetry and speculative

thought are explained to be the foundation of a living metaphor. Hence, SF is metaphorical in a more playful level than other genres, it is more practical and above all aesthetic. (Roberts 2006: 145–148)

Johnson-Smith argues that in the manner of all fiction, SF is a semiotic practice, for it uses the schism between the signified and the referent. Those concepts, which are incompatible but undoubtedly connected, produce a mirage, which demands the reader to speculate. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 32–33) This kind of symbolism opens itself up to multiple interpretations instead of imposing just one significance in the manner of allegory. (Roberts 2006: 14) Through its devices, SF is able to offer a unique symbolist system, "where the symbol is drained of transcendental or metaphysical aura and relocated back in the material world." (Roberts 2006: 15). Hence, SF is a mode of symbolic literature, but as such it often prefers the realistic accumulation of detail over the poetic and lyrical method (Roberts 2006: 15). In contradiction to Roberts' interpretation, Adilifu Nama has claimed that this openness of the genre to disputed decodings and oppositional conclusions is exactly what makes it a fertile ground for allegory (Nama 2008: 126).

Broderick has presented that his own understanding of the genre is based on the assumption that the genre uses metonymic tactics to achieve its metaphoric strategies. In other words, he understands SF as realistic prose, which is driven by poetic imagination (Broderick 2000: 21) Furthermore, Broderick argues that as a mode of transrealistic fiction, in addition to the traditional usage of metaphor, the genre uses it and other figures of speech mimetically, referring directly to the real world and the writer's realistic record of events. (Broderick 2009: 54) He cites SF writer George Turner, who has stated that SF's originality rests in its way of producing new metaphors for human condition and in its ability to cause reaction and new perspectives by sharpening the normal with small changes to it. (Broderick 2000: 17) Furthermore, SF lacks real-world reference in the traditional sense of signified signifier. The signified in SF does not have a concrete reference to real life and consequently the signifiers must be signified separately in each case. Instead of referring to the referent, the signifiers refer to other

signifiers or signified, making SF a mode built from signs, aptly "Signs Fiction". (Broderick 2000: 27)

2.4 Thematic of Science Fiction

Finally, we come to the last chapter of the discussion of science fiction's nature as a genre, which also functions as an introduction to the next chapter or as a link between the third and the fourth chapter of this thesis. As we shall see, the main theme in the majority of SF is, in simplifying terms, otherness.

Johnson-Smith cites SF actor Ben Browder's comment in an interview. He reports Browder "noting how 'good' SF is often concerned with ethical and moral issues." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 28). Johnson-Smith seems to agree with the actor, for he states that our own cultural values are those implicit, even though idealised and extrapolated, in SF. The most valued aspects of humanity; honour, duty, loyalty, integrity, are illuminated in the future societies of SF. Therefore he claims that SF is trying to deal with the issues we are facing today and tries to "place some sort of philosophical framework around man's place in the universe." (Johnson-Smith 2004: 28). SF offers fresh consideration from a different perspective by separating these values from their everyday context. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 28)

Telotte has distinguished three fundamental themes that are typical for SF films, but may still be in use in other genres. They are based, in terms of Rosemary Jackson in disturbing "the familiar and the known." (quoted in Telotte 2001: 19) The first one is what Telotte names a theme of the "impostor or something" (Telotte 2001: 19), again quoting Rosemary Jackson. This theme explores the fear of the other and what it is that is out there. It also studies the question of what otherness means for the self, how it influences our sense of security and identity. Therefore, it is the tendency of many science fictional texts to lodge a sense of humanity in feelings, passion and desire rather than in the atmosphere of reason and science that is the dominating force of a science fictional world. The second theme is the flipside of otherness, in other words it is

concerned with the self. The theme explores the question of what and how we may, in our increasingly technological world, constitute the self. The existence and use of these two themes is heavily dependent on their mutual existence, while the third theme concentrates on questioning the genre's or text's ability to explain and schematise human experience. While these three themes may not be the only ones explored in SF, they are the key ones. Through them, we see that SF traces out what is unsaid and unseen in culture. (Telotte 2001: 19–23) In this sense it has the ability to make the invisible more visible by rendering our own world, "in all its promise and frustration ever more available for our speculation and instruction." (Telotte 2001: 30)

Continuing deeper into what Telotte's themes introduced, Roberts has cited Gary Westfahl, who argued that the so called Golden Age of science fiction "demonstrated remarkable sensitivities on the subjects of gender and racial diversity and contact." (Roberts 2006: 18). This notion is based on a perception of the consumers of the genre. Because they were alienated or marginalised members of society, the early SF texts responded to their consumer's needs by presenting arguments against prejudice and racism. (Roberts 2006: 18) However, SF seems not to have come far from the themes of its Golden Age. Through its material symbolism, SF symbolically expresses of what it is to be marginalised; in other words, what it is to be for example black or female. The genre is able to foreground the ideological structures of otherness by figuratively symbolising the world rather than reproducing ours. (Roberts 2006: 19) Telotte has based the previously mentioned themes of the genre (other, self and human experience) on this precise argument about racial discrimination as a typical concern of the science fictional form. (Telotte 2001: 16)

Nama has discussed the racial issues in SF and noted that "Race is the ultimate science fiction," (Nama 2008: 42), for it is both the tradition of racism and of SF to try to define and justify different groups based on their physical appearance and to believe in superior and inferior races. Adding to this the fear of racial contamination in many science fictional texts, Nama describes these as general tendencies of American cinema as such. The influences of racial boundaries and their breakage are explored in several SF texts, which address racial purity and genetic contamination through interracial

sexuality. As a part of popular media, the SF genre still persists in presenting racial anxieties. (Nama 2008: 43)

Roberts expands this idea of exploration of the marginalised towards the idea of ideology. He quotes Peter Lev with the argument that SF is "a privileged vehicle for the presentation of ideology." (Roberts 2006: 36) What enables this is the genre's tendency not to be interested in the social reality, which in turn enables it to question the reality, to explore what is and what ought to be. (quoted in Roberts 2006: 36). More importantly, in the framework of this study, Roberts has claimed SF to be the cultural prominence of the "Age of Empires" (Roberts 2006: 49). The reason for this is the official ideology of empire-forming, flattening and eradicating the difference, the subconscious aspect of which SF is able to express. Therefore, rather than depicting our concerns about alien invaders from space, SF portrays concerns about the British, the violence in building an empire, anxieties of otherness and the models for encountering of otherness that are imposed by the empire on the imperial peoples. (Roberts 2006: 48)

Patricia Melzer (2006) has discussed the concepts of colonial and postcolonial subjectivities as they appear in postcolonial and anticolonial discourses. The narratives of SF comment on the anticolonial discourses by playing out the scenarios of subjectivity and resistance and thus revisit and even confirm the complex power relations in European colonialism. Therefore, she claims that stories of colonisation and migration constitute as one of SF's major themes. (Melzer 2006: 47) From eviction to cultural alienation of local communities, the genre explores the whole variety of experiences of dislocation and local colonisation. By acknowledging the heterogeneity and local specificity of a colonial encounter, the genre is able to create a more inclusive criticism of the ramifications of colonialism. The idea here is not to demand knowledge of the entire historical and geographical diversity of colonialism from those who theorise about it, but to acknowledge the diversities while we theorise about the local. Narratives such as SF, which has a long tradition in conceptualising themes of colonialism, are essential for the study of the development and implementations of colonial identities. (Melzer 2006: 49)

Hence SF recognises and explores the major elements of colonialism: migration, displacement and the local colonial encounter. It examines these with the recognition of the process of colonialism, the "construction of the colonized as the other" (Melzer 2006: 49) Melzer claims that SF's tendency to deal with the issues of race and gender as well as treating non-Western cultures as metaphors of otherness still persist. However, in her own words, "These narratives continue to confirm colonial relations at the same time as they provide moments where power becomes visible in our own narratives." (Melzer 2006: 50) Nonetheless, according to her analyses of the genre, it has a long tradition of conceptualising themes of colonialism in conservative and reactionary ways. (Melzer 2006: 50) Since an empire establishes and justifies itself by demanding that the dominant culture's values are the best and the other culture with different values should accept that, it demonises the other. According to Roberts, SF emerges as the subconscious of imperialism. (Roberts 2006: 50)

3 OTHERNESS

"We are what we are not." (Kaye and Hunter: 1999: 3) seems to be such a self-evident common truth that it resists any objection. In Western philosophy, the self and its identity are established through the notion of otherness or alterity. (Melzer: 2006: 14, Kearney 2003: 66, 72) In its fundamental nature, identity is exclusive, creating hierarchies and prejudice based on ideas of race, class, gender and nationality, which can lead to negative definitions of difference. (Kaye and Hunter: 1999: 3) Furthermore, according to Scott McCracken, the encounters of self with the other are the most fearful, exiting and exotic of all. (quoted in Roberts 2006: 17) This chapter will introduce the idea of otherness as a fundamental theme of SF. After discussing the concept of otherness, it will continue with a discussion of its exploration in SF. Finally the vehicle of science fictional otherness, the alien is examined and defined.

According to Richard Kearney, "Otherness is a horizon of selfhood." (2003: 16). The stranger in its manifestations has, through history, acted as a basis for the persistence of humans for identifying themselves through and against the other. The stranger is a fracture of the human psyche, dividing the familiar and unfamiliar, the conscious and the unconscious. We have a choice either to understand the stranger or to repudiate it. Nevertheless, what we cannot escape is our tendency to reflect our unconscious fears about ourselves on the others. In other words, we refuse to see the other in ourselves. (Kearney 2003: 3–5) At the same time we are afraid of being in the position of the alien, being considered as one of them rather than one of us. However, reconstructing the identity can change the boundaries between self and other. (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 3)

In order to recognise which aliens are evil and which are in the need of our hospitality, we need to criticise the other in the same terms we criticise ourselves. Otherwise we will not be able to tell the difference between human and non-human. Western culture's tendency to demonise the other is grounded on the fear of the other. (Kearney 2003: 10–18) Many popular media narratives promote paranoia by presenting the other as evil. The demonising of the different as a threat results in stories about invading enemies, termed by Elaine Showalter as "hystories" (Kearney 2003: 65). In these stories the

threats to national security are met with hostility, for nation-states aim at disabling their enemies in order to preserve themselves from the alien. The borders surrounding the state are designed to keep the nationals in and the aliens out, in other words to separate us and them. (Kearney 2003: 65) Inside those borders, the world is unequally divided (Kearney 2003: 68). The situation resembles that of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, in which "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others." (Orwell 2000: 90).

Kearney cites Julia Kristeva, who claims that by externalising the strange in ourselves into the stranger, we deny the strange in ourselves and negate the alien (Kearney 2003: 73). In Freudian terms, the more foreign the other is, the more likely it is to be suitable for carrying the shadow of the unconscious. Therefore the scapegoat foreigner is just our estranged self coming back to haunt us. Demonising the foreign "may thus be interpreted as a harking back to past repressed materials which recur in the present...in the guise of something threatening or terrifying." (Kearney 2003: 75) In other words, the enemy is the self in disguise. The aliens, strangers, foreigners, the other is feared because, in the end the other is more like us than we are. Thus the alien is not an alien, no matter how grotesque or malevolent looking it is. (Kearney 2003: 75)

This tendency of demonising the other can be examined by using the Freudian concepts of the "uncanny" and its opposite, the "familiar". According to Freud, the uncanny originates from the familiar. The confused self rejects the dangerous and repulsive in itself and turns it into a strange, scary and demonic double. (quoted in Kristeva 1992: 188-189). Therefore, Freud's uncanny is a form of anxiety, in which "the distressing is something repressed coming back to haunt us" (quoted in Kristeva 1992: 190) (my translation). This repression creates the 'other' and the 'strange'. Therefore, the uncanny is never actually anything new or strange, it is only the repressed familiar, which awakens fear. This return of the repressed demands an encounter with an unexpected outsider and the possible destructive form of that encounter is due to the unleashing of the feeling of the uncanny. Hence we conclude, again, that the uncanny is not strange at all, for the strange is in ourselves and "we are all strangers" (quoted in Kristeva 1992: 190-196) (my translation).

As a conclusion, the previous chapter has underlined the manifestations of otherness for SF. Before discussing otherness in terms of SF, we may pick out and repeat the key points in the previous, basing them on the definitions of SF. Firstly, SF seems always to find a way to negate the alien, in one form or another. Secondly, the alien is a scapegoat, estranged from our world and the self, it is the ultimately different other. Thus the alien in SF can be seen as nothing less than our own estranged self representing its repressed material.

3.1 Otherness in Science Fiction

According to Johnson-Smith, ideas about identity as well as questions and representations of otherness are common issues for SF. The idea is likely to be that of a common enemy for the humanity to fight against or offer sanctuary to. (Johnson-Smith 2004: 9) When humanity is opposed to the alien in this simple and uncomplicated way, SF is able to present otherness in unitary terms (Roberts 2006: 79). Despite its technological and military superiority, the Western society is insecure and in need of reassurance. The genre portrays this feeling of helplessness by creating nightmare visions, in which humanity is redefined against the alien other. Hence, the genre attempts to define who we (the humanity) are and what we are not (the alien other). It does this by familiarising the other and making the familiar strange, by teaching us about the taboo of the alien within ourselves. (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 3–4)

SF insists on reminding us of the existence of otherness and alienation in our society. Behind the otherness of the imaginary extraterrestrials, lies the otherness of those excluded from the dominant categories of human. These visible and celebrated alien identities have become essential for the identity politics of our postmodern culture. (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 1) Hence, SF explores the statues of the particular cultural moment we live in. The texts within the genre are strongly concerned on revealing our cultural imaginations about the questions of race relations. (Leonard 1997: 4, quoted in Melzer 2006: 45) Thus, SF's hidden agenda is racial. By avoiding the traditional

practises of fiction, it is able to evade the dominant ideology in its tendency to demonise the other. Otherness in it is stereotypical, and stereotypes are the basis for racial discrimination. Within the texts of the genre, the evil is always manifested in its true and evident form, in other words the genre celebrates the stereotypical demonisation of the other by presenting it as something that is evidently, even monstrously not like us. (Roberts 2006: 19–20)

One of SF's ways to present this relationship between the evil other and the self is to explore the idea of bifurcation of the same and the other, a hybridization between the human and the alien. The contradiction between what is good and bad in the alien is explored via a genetic crossover of a human and an alien, via the science fictional grotesque. In a science fictional text, our intense insistence on the sacred image of the same may lead to something that is unconventional. Therefore, gene trading as a metaphor is used to examine the culturally specific definitions of otherness. However, even though this metaphor presents the alien as a threatening other, it often entails the idea of the alien symbiont as an ecstatic difference maker. In other words the hybridisation has a flipside to it, for instead of strengthening or clarifying, it blurs the line between good and evil aliens. Hence, the alien is no longer a singularly self-evident representation of evil. (Luckhurst 2005: 214–219)

These narratives of metamorphosis are SF's way to express self-alienation and represent the correlative of the alien confrontation. Again and again, the SF stories reproduce visions of the fear of dissolution and the actual dissolution of the self (Rose 1999: 179–193). As such, the stories of metamorphosis clearly actualise the Freudian return of the repressed in the self. Mark Rose goes as far as to suggest that this "feeling of self-estrangement may be regarded as the element that completes the underlying structure of science fiction." (Rose 1999: 180). He goes on to suggest that the confrontation with the alien in SF is always a potentially dynamic affair (Rose 1999: 182), which reminds us of the Freudian idea mentioned previously; the possible destructive form of that encounter is due to the unleashing of the feeling of the uncanny. The SF grotesque, therefore, is our estranged world and it implies the daemonic in it. According to Rose, this grotesque is created by the SF's continuous play between the familiar and the

unfamiliar, the human and the nonhuman (Rose 1999: 188). In other words, SF narratives are constantly trying to define the permeable boundaries between the human and the nonhuman. This leads to the psychological significance of SF, for the idea of the SF nonhuman seems to be synonymous with the Freudian uncanny or other.

According to Roberts, the genre is capable of presenting a complex or sophisticated response to the idea of difference, expressing it in the terms of popular culture. He denotes that as robots and aliens from space have in many texts been used as a lucid metaphor for blackness, many of those texts have even succeeded in presenting a lucid demonization. He conjecture's that for Samuel Delany, a SF writer and a critic, the ideal of the genre is not to achieve political correctness, but to make us think about the racial issues and to question that thought process. (Roberts 2006: 94–98) However, achieving this thought process, presenting the other without losing touch with the familiar, is a difficult feature to respond to. Yet, the most renowned science fictional texts succeed in this, they make us encounter ourselves and reveal things in ourselves that are plainly inconvenient. (Roberts 2006: 16–17) This radical potential of the genre to address the issues of alterity "in a popular and accessible form," to provide a symbolic grammar, via the novum, for exploring the issues of alternative ideologies and marginalised discourses of race, is the basis for the affection many critics have for the genre. (Roberts 2006: 17–18)

However, SF's capability to represent the other rather than just the conception of identity through presentations of otherness, has not been a concept of unitary agreement by its critics. Roberts cites Broderick's concern on whether SF really is a narrative of the other, rather than just a narrative of the same as other. (Roberts 2006: 18) It has been criticised because of its preoccupation with military technology, flat and two-dimensional stock types of characters and plots, and because of its tendency to quietly accept dominant ideological and political belief systems. Despite this, Roberts claims that on the basis of its generic history, mentioned in the previous chapter, SF "has always had sympathies with the marginal and the different." (Roberts 2006: 18–19). However, Suvin quite convincingly noted that as SF holds up a "narrative reality sufficiently autonomous and intransitive to be explored at length as to its own properties

and the human relationships it implies" (Suvin 1979: 71), the others (aliens) in SF can only be used as signifiers of human relationships themselves, for we are incapable of imagining anything else.

Pamela Sargent and James Gunn have discussed this question of otherness in SF in their essay "Alien" (1978). They quote Arthur C. Clarke's incisive notion: "Among the stars lies the proper study of mankind; Pope's aphorism gave only part of the truth, for the proper study of mankind is not merely Man, but Intelligence." (Sargent and Gunn 1978: 155) and conclude that SF is able to teach humility. The stories may involve the entire world but they may also be simply about personal experiences. Nevertheless, SF teaches what it is to be a human and an intelligent being. When we encounter the aliens, we encounter our intelligent selves. Therefore, Sargent and Gunn claim that "The final lesson the alien can teach us is that nothing is really alien." (Sargent and Gunn 1978: 155)

In conclusion, it seems that based on the critic, we may consider SF to represent both the identity of the same through the other and the identity of the other as such because, as we discussed previously, the two seem to be inseparable. The analysis will examine the manifestations of otherness in the subject film, but before we can safely make any assumptions about the science fictional novum in question, the alien, we must first take a closer look at its definitions and manifestations.

3.2 Aliens in Science Fiction -Exploiting Otherness

Scott McCracken has aptly stated that "At the root of all science fiction lies the fantasy of alien encounter." (quoted in Roberts: 2006: 17). According to Gwyneth Jones, the image of otherness in the alien form will survive, instruct and fascinate us as long as there are others around, notably if those others look strange in some way (Jones 2003: 169). The dictionary entry for 'alien' in the *Macmillan English Dictionary*, provides a basis for decoding the alien in the form and meaning of SF. As an adjective, the 'alien' is described as something from a different country, race, culture, or planet and different

from the way one usually does or feels. As a noun, however, it refers to those that are not citizens of the country they live in and persons or creatures from other planets. As we have seen and will be discussing further, the dictionary definition needs only to be interpreted in the terms of SF, with emphasis on "not citizen", "race", "culture", "planet", "creatures" and "different from what you usually do, feel or know". On this basis it could be insisted that the alien or aliens are those who do not belong in our world, culture or planet, those who do not look like us and those who do not share our ideologies.

According to Kaye and Hunter in their essay on alien identities, aliens are "all-purpose outsiders" (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 2), in other words they are nothing more than the simple other against which humanity can unite. Hence, the science fictional aliens offer the perfect vehicle to comment on the empirical world, without representing a particular identifiable group of people. Nowadays the safest and politically correct way to justify something as an enemy is to present it as the evil and inhuman science fictional alien. These aliens are metaphorical, as they represent the presence of otherness in our world. This way, in most cases, the alien as a metaphor is able to address the contemporary anxieties of multiculturalism. (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 2–3) Patricia Melzer has quoted Frances Bonner, who has explained the alien as an all-purpose other from a different point of view. Likewise, he defines the alien as a metaphorical substitute for "any number of social divisions", but he stresses the effect of the alien, whose humanity is revealed and accepted, in representing racial and social issues (Melzer 2006: 45).

Kaye and Hunter continue by claiming that many SF films have identified the alien with "monstrous, gloopy, insect-like otherness", using the ugly appearance of the alien to achieve its sole intention to demonize the other. (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 2) However, the grotesque appearance of an alien has been used for a completely opposite purpose by some SF films, such as "The Fly". Karin Littau (1999: 141) has studied the monstrous other in this film and noted that the machine that produces the metamorphoses between a human and a fly, can also be used as a metaphor for adaptation. Hence, Kaye and Hunter claim that the hybrids of human and alien can be seen as a metaphor for the process of adaptation to the other as well as that of alienation

from the society and loss of authority. By referring to the "Alien" films, they proclaim that the most horrible moment is the one in which the alien bursts out of the human, out of the self. In this sense the alien, once again, represents the insecurity of the self and the impossibility of a unified self. Because of this, we attempt to control the alien by creating stereotypes of it. Consequently, defining otherness is based on politics, in other words on our ideological agenda. (Kaye and Hunter 1999: 7–8)

Sargent and Gunn have categorised the encounters between the human and the alien based on three central aspects. The first one is the relationship between the alien and the human. The second one is their attitudes towards each other and the third is the final result of this encounter. (Sargent and Gunn 1978: 150) The relationship between human and alien is further defined to have four alternatives, which are based on the stage of the civilisation or its technological development. In relation to humans, the aliens can be superior, inferior, equal or just different from us. With its advanced physical, psychological, technological or other abilities, a superior alien represents a threat to the humanity. This kind of science fictional story is likely be a story, in which humanity fights back. Often the superiority has some kind of flaw, which in the end results in the victory and superiority of the presumed human inferior. But, if the aliens are somehow innocent or inferior to us, "the stories usually reenact the experience of European civilization in the New World," (Sargent and Gunn 1978: 151). However, those who are the first to visit the other, are seen as superior. In accordance, if the aliens come to us, they must be superior. Yet, this superiority does not always have to mean that they threaten or plan to invade us. Instead, in their superiority, they might try to tempt us, judge us or teach us. (Sargent and Gunn 1978: 150–154)

4 THE SCIENCE FICTION IN *DISTRICT 9*

As the previous chapters have shown, there seems to be no definitional consensus of the nature of the genre of SF. The reason for this problem seems already to be acknowledged, for it has been noted that the genre is constantly changing. This is no wonder, for SF is also acknowledged to be an idiom or a product of our culture, which in turn is constantly on the move. Therefore, we might suggest that the definitions of SF should follow the definitions of cultures at the moment; their past and their present. As a product of popular culture, the science fictional film needs to continuously produce new idioms in order to fascinate its audiences and to address culturally bound issues anew.

Moreover, the history of SF seems to be the history of our own cultural conditions, producing texts that are striking at the moment of their release. Hence, we might suggest that rather than trying to fit every old and new SF text under the exact same detailed descriptions, we need to concentrate on the moment of their release. Instead of monotonously trying to fit a new text into the old category, we should look at the contributions it has on the genre's supertext. By simultaneously looking at the history of the supertext and the new features, we may come to see the genre as it exists at the moment, a product of our cultural moment. At the same time we need to keep in mind the claim that as the SF genre has changed and been defined according to those changes, the authors of SF have tried to live up to those changed definitions.

As the following chapters of the analysis will show, *District 9* has proven to be an exceptionally good example to support the previously mentioned idea of studying SF as a contemporary cultural phenomenon in terms of its supertext and generic tendency. The analysis of *District 9* will prove the film's capability to both strengthen the old features of the SF supertext as well as its capability to develop that supertext by bringing new features in it and even upsetting the old ones. In other words, *District 9* as a representative of twenty-first century SF has managed to attest the majority of the previous definitions, to campaign against them and to contribute to the growing supertext at the same time.

Suvin's definition of SF is by far the most appreciated one and therefore, it is used as a starting point and basis for the analysis of the film *District 9*. After analysing and recognising the cognitive estrangement and the nova of the film, a more detailed analysis can be conducted on their basis. Firstly *District 9*'s capability to produce subtle characters as SF is analysed after which Ursula Le Guin's definition is briefly opened up as an introduction to the realism and transrealism of the film as well to the film's theme of otherness. The film's relationship to realism and transrealism will be demonstrated and discussed after which the notion of otherness as the main theme of the film will be analysed and discussed.

4.1 A Suvinian Analysis of *District 9*

Any eager follower of science fiction would agree that a typical setting for a SF text is another planet, universe, galaxy or space in general. If those options are not exploited and the setting is our own home world or part of it, a typical Hollywood SF film is typically constructed in the soil of the United States of America. In a more general level, especially the history of this kind of SF film is in majority constructed of narratives where the alien arrives and is encountered in America, by the American people. However, *District 9* makes an exception to this even though it can be categorised as a Hollywood production. This exception is recognised and supported by the film itself, which recognises the popular culture genre's tendency of an American setting and highlights its own exceptional setting by noting in the second minute of the film that "To everyone's surprise the ship didn't come to a stop over Manhattan or Washington or Chicago, but instead it coasted to a halt directly over the city of Johannesburg." (*District 9*, chapter 1). The message is clear, this time the aliens do not visit New York, instead they arrive in South Africa's Johannesburg, which is the setting of the cognitive estrangement in *District 9*.

The cognitive estrangement of SF is based on the respective novum or nova. Therefore, the nova of *District 9* must be identified before analysing the cognitive estrangement or

the cognitive effect of the film. In general, the nova of *District 9* is nothing really new for an SF film, as it is composed of several typical SF nova. The combination of alien weaponry, other alien technology and alien physics together form the basic structure of the nova; spaceships, laser guns and genetics based technology. On a deeper level, breaking the nova into isolated pieces and recognising their connections and collective effect is a more fruitful basis for analysing the nova's metaphorical or symbolical meaning.

Therefore, we may start from the previously mentioned threefold structure of the nova in *District 9*; alien weaponry, other alien technology and alien physics. Starting from the weaponry, the film has paid attention to explaining the novum. First of all, the weapons are explained to function only if their user has alien DNA. The humans have tried to study the weapons' technology, but their information is limited because they have not been able to operate these weapons. Either way, they have given their own names to the weapons for the purpose of their study. As the main character Wikus van de Merwe starts to metamorphose into an alien, he is able to operate the weaponry. The film shows how the alien weaponry is tested on him in a laboratory, where the testing is done with several different alien guns named "AMR-B5", "AMR-B13", "AMR-B7" and "AMR-B21". The numbering of the different kinds of weapons, which clearly do not significantly differ from each other by their looks, suggests that the humans have a wide range of different kind of alien weapons in their possession.

The difference between the human weaponry and the alien one is explained in *District 9* both by describing the weapons' connection to the user's DNA and by the visual and audio effects used by the film. As the weapons are fired, their effect on the target is different than what one usually expects from the mundane weapons of the humans. Filmgoers will recognise from their previous film experiences that the usual human handheld weaponry produces a different kind of voice when fired and is not capable of blowing up the target from inside out as the alien weapons seem to do. As the alien weapons are fired, they remind the viewer of a typical laser ray gun used in many SF films. By their looks, the alien weapons do at least distantly resemble those of humans'. The trigger and the barrel are where we are used to seeing them, which turns out to be

the basis of this novum. As we have come to see, the novum of weaponry has been explained as far as it is important and necessary for SF. The weapons are fundamentally based on our mundane idea of weapons by their looks. The difference making capability is the operation and technique of them. These two ideas constitute the novum in question and correspond to the demand of a fictional device validated by cognitive logic.

The nova of other alien technology in the film of *District 9* is constructed of two spaceships and the nova related to their functioning. The ship in which the aliens have arrived is shown floating over Johannesburg in many scenes throughout the film. This typical SF novum of an alien mothership is mostly left unexplained in terms of its specific technological functions. It becomes clear, however, that the spaceship represents new kind of technology as the humans are not able to operate it. The film also explains that the aliens themselves are not capable of operating the ship, for they are described as being merely workers of a colony, aimless and leaderless. Nevertheless, the space travelling technology is explained in the form of a smaller dropship, which is shown detaching from the mothership in the beginning of the film and which is later used by both main characters of the film. The dropship itself (as well as the mothership) is what could be described as a typical SF alien spacecraft seen from outside.

However, the inside of the dropship reveals its technology, which is again based on the operator's DNA. The two spacecraft can only be operated by the alien or those who have alien DNA. In order to steer the dropship, its pilot uses a three-dimensional looking computer, which responds only to alien DNA and is controlled by putting one's hands inside the three-dimensional display. The technology is clearly new, but at the same time it resembles the touchscreen technology of our days. Again, the basis of the novum is our mundane world, which supports the cognition. The estrangement comes from the three-dimensional display and its link to its user's DNA.

Another novum supporting the idea of DNA as a key element for technology is what is explained to be the fuel of the spacecrafts. Its cognitive logic is based on its appearance as it strongly resembles mundane oil of our own planet. By form it is simply black

liquid, supporting the cognition. In its function, however, the oil-like substance is quite different. First of all, it has taken twenty years for the alien character Christopher Johnson to gather what looks like just a couple of decilitres, from what is understood as different parts of alien devices scattered useless on the alien slum area *District 9*. Secondly, the process of manufacturing the fuel from the found liquid is a chemical laboratory process, in which the liquid behaves rather differently from that of a mundane chemical process. Thirdly, the oil has the ability to turn humans into aliens, in other words it is able to alter DNA. These three facts make up the estrangement of this novum.

The third novum category of the film is here labelled as that of alien physics. In general, aliens can be regarded as the most common novum of all SF. Despite their similarities in all SF, their function as a novum differs greatly between different SF texts. In fact, the only indisputable similarity of the alien novum is the idea of something other than human. As a visual media, an SF film can exploit the appearance of the aliens better than its literary counterpart. *District 9* has realised the alien novum by linking it to familiar, by binding it to our cognitive logic. Firstly, the appearance of the aliens reminds us of insects, particularly those species that pester our gardens. This link to mundane reality is furthermore strengthened by naming the aliens as "Prawns" (*District 9*). This alien hypocorism will be looked at more closely in chapter 5.4.2. Secondly, the aliens resemble humans in their ability to speak and in their appearance as they walk on two legs and have four limbs. Therefore, as a novum they are bound to our cognitive logic and knowledge. However, their biological abilities and functions separate them from our mundane pests and humans.

First of all, the breeding methods of the aliens form a novum of their own. Like many insects, the aliens multiply through eggs. However, these eggs are not incubated in any familiar way, for they are explained to use animal carcasses for nutrition. These carcasses are linked to the eggs by tubes, through which the nutrition is carried to the alien embryos inside the eggs. Again, the cognition of the novum is supported by a link to reality and the estrangement is formed by this new method off the traditional breeding of animals. Secondly, the aliens are stronger in physical strength than humans.

They are able to produce more damage just by sweeping their hands. However, the two main character aliens, Christopher and his son, are depicted as having humane emotions. The existence of these emotions is supported by the visual media (see Example 9, page 96), which also strengthens the credibility of the humane features of the two aliens. The former aspects estrange the aliens from our mundane world and the latter forms the cognition of the alien, validating the novum.

In general, the nova of *District 9* as the vehicle of cognitive estrangement seems to be based on the idea of the new in the form of biologically based differences from the known reality. In particular, the DNA of the alien as the difference maker is emphasised. Johannesburg as a cognitive setting is estranged from reality through these interrelated nova that are not possible in terms of science today. However, the film has explored the method of foregrounding the background by explaining for example the nova of breeding methods of the aliens and the chemical fabrication of the black liquid more elaborately than simple eggs or fuel would be explained. Therefore, even though the nova are not possible, they are elaborately explained as if they were a scientific truth. As a result, the nova of the film is indeed a device for exploring our existing reality rather than a world of fantasy.

This function of *District 9*'s nova as a device for exploring the reality will be demonstrated later on in connection to the realism and transrealism in the film. After the previous demonstration it can be concluded that the novum in *District 9* is a genuinely fictional device validated by cognitive logic. The basis for the novum lies in the mundane world, producing the cognition or at least a cognition effect. The new features which differ from our world produce the estrangement. What is significant and unique in the use of these traditional like SF nova in *District 9*, is their metaphorical and symbolical meanings, which relate them to realism and transrealism.

4.2 The Label of Science Fiction in *District 9*

The novum as a material device separates SF from its generic others. *District 9* prefers the material rather than supernatural or physical rationalisation as the material is emphasised by foregrounding the novum. Therefore it answers the before mentioned requirement of plausibility in SF. However, this importance and centrality of the nova has provoked critique against the SF genre, which has been accused of concentrating too much on the superficial novum in the expense of development and depth of characters. Hence detailed and subtle characters have not been considered as a feature of the genre. Whether these accusations are legitimate or not in the context of SF literary novels, the SF film as such might prove to be an exception to this. *District 9* has proven to utilise the medium of film by using both visual and audio techniques to strengthen the characters. Whereas the visual is the unique feature of SF film, the audio has a link to written text. The lines in a film could as easily be the lines on a page of literary novel. Therefore, by looking at these character strengthening features in detail, *District 9* can be claimed to invalidate the claims set against SF's capability to produce detailed and subtle analysis of characters both in the field of the visual and the written media.

District 9 uses its characters to demonstrate technology's effect on the human condition and at the bottom of all this is the study of different forms of character traits in different situations. These issues are addressed on a superficial level of the smaller supporting characters in order to strengthen and support other features of the story itself and its plot. Here, the two typical character traits are categorised as inhuman and human ones. Examples of this can be found from the actions of the human characters of Piet Smit (main character Wikus Van De Merwe's father in law), Tania Van De Merwe (Wikus' wife), Koobus Venter (a military leader) and several other minor characters' actions.

The character of Piet Smit is a managing director of the "MNU South Africa", a private company which the government has assigned to be responsible for the alien affairs. Piet is the father in law of Wikus, the MNU alien affairs civil officer who is promoted to be responsible for delivering the alien eviction notices. Thus, after Wikus starts to metamorphose into an alien, the humane emotions that could be anticipated from Piet

turn into ignorance and greed. He orders Wikus to be killed for the benefit of MNU's studies of his condition, and promises to lie to his own daughter and Wikus' other relatives on behalf of the MNU. In the background the reasons for this greed are revealed, for the MNU's real interest in the aliens is explained by a "UKNR Chief Correspondent" to be about weapons. He reports that: "MNU is trying to move the aliens for humane reasons, but the real focus, just as it has been right from the beginning is weapons... MNU is the second largest weapon's manufacturer in the world..." (District 9, chapter 3). As the character of Wikus starts to metamorphose and his DNA starts to change, he is able to operate the weaponry and as the MNU finds that out, the greed and inhumanity of the MNU's workers are revealed as they try to take advantage of Wikus' new ability.

The character of Koobus Venter represents an inhuman mercenary, who enjoys his job as a killer of the aliens and anything that stands between him and his job. His cowboyish mercenary style represents inhumanity and disinterest in everything except his paycheque. Therefore, even though it manifests in a different way, his motive seems also to be greed. If SF has anything to do with western films and their heroic cowboy representations, Koobus and his soldiers are the representative of this in *District 9*. The final battle between Wikus and the soldiers is full of cliché expressions like "You want me?" and "Is that all you got?" (District 9, chapter 15). There is even a phonetic analogy between the name "Koobus" and the word "cowboy". The film itself wants to make a distinction between the bureaucratic MNU workers and the soldiers and stress the cowboyish image of the soldiers as Wikus comments in the beginning of the film that "Koobus and his cowboys" are always wanted and "You see now, these are the cowboys. They shoot first and then they answer the questions." (District 9, chapter 2)

All the minor characters do not, however, exploit the effects of greed or direct inhumanity. The other half of them is represented by Tanya Van De Merwe and Wikus' other relatives, who function as representatives of weak human characters incapable of action and easily lead by the stronger inhuman characters. They represent the human form of character traits (compassion, grief, et cetera) in the situation they are confronting, who are willing to help Wikus but too weak to resist the inhuman

characters or have their own opinions. Interestingly, it seems the women characters are represented as weaker than men. As an example, Tanya can be seen as a woman who is strongly lead by the opinions of male characters, as a character incapable of thinking on her own. Another example of a woman character is Wikus' mother, who settles for the information given to her and is only sorry she cannot know the truth about Wikus. Thus she is also a character incapable of action. On the other extremity of these weaker woman characters stand the cowboys and the strong men. Thus it seems the characters can also be suggested to be divided according to their gender. Here it must be mentioned that these kind of gender issues in an SF film could be studied further in the context of exploration of gender related otherness, but as the focus here is only on the character analysis and as these gender issues are not relevant enough for other parts of this study, they are merely mentioned here as an example of determiners of character traits.

If *District 9* explores character traits the way SF is described as doing, it also offers a deeper character analysis of its main character Wikus Van De Merwe. At the beginning of the story Wikus seems to belong to the category of the inhuman characters, but his development as a character leads towards humanity at the same time he metamorphoses into an alien and becomes less a human. In other words, the less he looks like a human, the more he expresses human character traits. Wikus becomes more compassionate and emotional as his metamorphoses progresses.

Wikus begins as a strongly bureaucratic character, whose inhuman traits are revealed as he is appointed to lead the operation of serving eviction notices for the aliens living in *District 9*. His motive seems to be the same as the before mentioned inhuman characters as his attitude towards the aliens is understood to be of hatred and ignorance. As a tool of a bureaucratic organisation, he hides behind the laws and does not show any sympathy. He has been ordered to serve the notices and apparently he is incapable of any independence of character at this point. Clearly he is a trusted person, for his father in law has pointed him as a leader.

Wikus seems to be, however, brainwashed to the MNU's purposes and the weakness and lack of the character's independence in the beginning of the film is the feature, which enables this brainwashing and the apparent inhumanity of his character. As he comes into contact with the black alien fluid, he starts to metamorphose slowly into an alien. The metamorphosis, which is based on the nova of the film, starts to change his character from outside and inside. He is no longer a shallow weak character, his emotions are pictured by both audio and visual techniques (see Example 7, page 86). His emotions are stressed as the character's metamorphosis and its effect on the character are studied throughout the film. The metamorphosis awakens emotions in the character, it changes him from the inhuman to a human one. His fear of changing into an alien is emphasised in his horrified looks and gestures throughout the changing process. The depth of the character development is emphasised even by the diversity of the character. Even though he is horrified of his own change and finds an alien that could stop the metamorphosis, he still produces a part of his old self. Wikus' character's diversity and depth is supported as the main alien character, Christopher Johnson shows him a hiding place, a buried alien drop ship with all its equipment that could help to stop Wikus' metamorphoses. He first appears excited and hopeful, but he starts to doubt and asks "What is this place? You've been hiding this under your shed for twenty years. This is very illegal. ... Are you going to start this, you sneaky prawns." (District 9, 57:09). Before the metamorphoses started and Wikus was serving the notices in the area of District 9, he mentioned many mundane matters that are illegal and which the aliens need a license for, for example having an offspring or possessing certain (seemingly innocent) objects. He also showed his ignorant attitude and inhumanity towards the aliens by destroying their eggs and describing it as "the little guy going to nice little sleep now... that popping sound that you're hearing, it's almost like popcorn. What the egg does it pops up and what's left of pops out there..." (District 9: 16:26) As explained, the traits of the old character appear even as he changes.

In the end, however, Wikus seems to have left his old character behind him as he decides to unite with the alien Christopher in order to help him and his son at the expense of his own life. Wikus' character's strength and diversity builds up as he fights against his own kind together with the alien, cheats the alien to get what he wants and in

the end shows true humanity as he almost sacrifices his life to help the two aliens escape from earth. The weak bureaucratic character has changed into an independent hero character, who fights against the injustice that he used to be a part of.

All this goes to show that the SF film *District 9* has been able to produce a detailed and subtle analysis of a character. The development of Wikus' character from a weak inhuman into strong human character is the basis for forming the thematic of the film. In other words, the film is a detailed story of a character, through which the film's theme of otherness is revealed. However, this argument against SF's capability to produce a story of a character has been claimed to be the result of an over-emphasised and shallow novum. In this case the effect of the novum is completely reversed, for it is exactly the interrelated nova (or the novum of the metamorphosis) that produces and enables the detailed and subtle analysis of the character of Wikus Van De Merwe. The novum is the basis of the metamorphosis and therefore the basis of the development of the character. It produces self-examination in the character of Wikus as he tries to adapt to his metamorphosed self. Thus rather than concentrating only on the superficial novum, *District 9* uses the novum of metamorphosis to strengthen the study of a character's development. To explain this metamorphosis' relation to the novum of SF, the metamorphosis of the main character Wikus in *District 9* can be compared to the metamorphosis of the main character Gregor in Franz Kafka's novel *Metamorphosis* (Kafka 2009). Kafka's novel cannot be considered as SF because it does not explain the metamorphosis and thus it is grounded on the supernatural rather than material (Roberts 2006: 5). The demand for logically validated material novum is met in *District 9*, which in the same manner as Kafka's novel is also a study of a metamorphosing character. Therefore, as the study of character traits in different situations is already granted as a feature of SF, the film has dealt with deeper issues of character analysis than is typical for SF.

Lastly and as an introduction to the following chapters, the italicised parts of Ursula Le Guin's definition of SF (see page 26) need to be revised in relation to the film. *District 9* answers to the definition of *technology conceived as intensive industrial development* as described earlier in this chapter. This important role of technology can be seen as a

motive for the actions of the characters and thus a motivator for the racial segregation based on otherness. As mentioned before, the MNU's real interest is not the alien affairs but the alien technology and weaponry. The level of technology and thus industrial development can also be seen as an indicator of the level of the difference between two cultures, as an indicator of technological advancement, which may affect the power relations between the two cultures (see chapter 4.4.2 for detailed discussion). The following chapters of transrealism and realism and otherness will delve on the film's relation to *Multiculturalism* and *multispeciesism*, which are the basis of the theme of otherness in the film. The two terms cannot be separated, for multispeciesism seems to be almost synonymous with multiculturalism in the SF of *District 9*. The aliens and humans are two different species with distinct cultures. This theme of otherness is further explored by *the idea of gender, race, behaviour, belief as culturally constructed*, for the idea of the difference between the other and the self is built on this assumption (see chapter 4.4). The idea of *mind, person, personality, and body as objects of investigation and manipulation* is related to the theme of otherness in which the metamorphosis of the main character is interrelated (see chapter 4.4.1).

4.3 Transrealism and Realism in *District 9*

As noted in the previous chapter on transrealism and realism in SF, many critics have denied SF's capability to produce realistic fiction. The purpose of this study is not to prove this wrong when it comes to SF in general. Keeping in mind Johnson-Smith's suggestion of considering realism afresh in every discourse, the following proves that the subject film represents a form of SF, which can be considered as realistic fiction as such as well as through its transrealistic features. Broderick claimed that the best of twenty-first century SF has lived up to a deepening of the mode from the previous stereotyped SF narratives to the transrealistic narratives and pointed out the shortage of the analysis of transrealistic contribution to cinema. The film *District 9* can be seen as a model example of such development, bringing the realism of SF on the screen through transrealism. After all, transrealism can be seen as a tool of realistic fiction, for it draws its power and density from closely observed reality.

Before analysing the film's allusions to reality, the tools by which they are achieved need to be considered. The development of the science fictional genre seems to be headed towards the same trends that its generic others, most importantly horror, have already explored. With films such as *The Blair Witch Project*, *Paranormal activity* and *Cloverfield* (IMDb), the genre of horror has utilized the cinéma vérité style, a realistic style common to documentaries. *District 9* explores the documentary-style, hand-held cinéma vérité technique, which is clearly used as a tool to strengthen the sense of reality in the film. This documentary technique guarantees that the viewer assimilates and associates the contents better with the actual reality and message that the film is trying to suggest because he/she associates the style with realistic documentaries. Even though *District 9* can be considered as a Hollywood production regardless of the majority of its South-African based crew members, the cinéma vérité style is not considered a typical feature of a Hollywood film. According to Robert McConnel, the cinéma vérité style "stands at the other end of the spectrum from the Hollywood feature film." as a typical Hollywood film has a complete script and is designed to entertain in order to attract a huge mass-audience (McConnel 1997).

Thus it is via the cinéma vérité technique that the twenty-first century SF film *District 9* is able to explore the sense of reality, of transrealism. The director, screenwriter, actors and other members of a film crew can be regarded as equivalent to author of a book. The subject film is said to be based on the director's previous short film *Alive in Joburg*, which is basically the predecessor of *District 9* (io9). Thus the idea and story of *District 9* comes from the Director and his team, who are therefore in the same position as an author of a book. If transrealism is said to reflect the author's empirical environment, *District 9* represents the cinematic form of transrealism. As mentioned before, the director and screenwriter Neill Blomkamp is of South-African origin (IMDb). As shall be explained, the realism of the film is based on South-African history. McConnel explains that realism and cinéma vérité film tries to "show man as he is and the world as it is because the film maker often has a social conscience and sometimes a political agenda." and that the film maker's purpose is to enlighten the audience by showing them the truth (McConnel 1997). If the genre of straight realism has truly lost its power, the

SF film *District 9* has responded to this by bringing the SF transrealism into cinema. A transrealistic cinéma vérité style Hollywood film is certain to get its message through to a bigger audience better than a straightforward documentary on South-African history. It is therefore clear that the transrealistic style of SF strengthens the realistic narrative by using the fantastic imagination as a tool of realism. It does this to estrange the viewer from the known reality in order to reflect it back more clearly.

The following three examples illustrate the documentary realistic style of the film. According to McConnell, hand-held cameras, actual locations and real people are typical for cinéma vérité style in contrast to Hollywood films (McConnell 1997). Example one illustrates the "real" people that are interviewed in "actual" locations. Example two illustrates the documentary use of "specialists" that are used as narrators of the film. Their purpose is to open up and bring forth the realistic issues surrounding and supporting the plot of the film. Example three illustrates the documentary style use of news footage.



Example 1. The "real" people interviewed in *District 9* (District 9: chapter 2)

The people of Johannesburg are represented in clips, in which they are interviewed. The majority of the interviewed people are black and these short clips have been shot with the documentary style hand-held camera, on an actual location. Even though the film uses the cinéma vérité style, the real people are actors playing their part. However, these factors strengthen the sense of reality. Keeping in mind South-Africa's racist history of

apartheid, the film brings the racist question to a new level, as humanity is against the alien other in a unitary way regardless of their skin colour.



Example 2. The documentary style specialists narrating *District 9* (District 9: chapter 1)

The film is based on the narrative of specialists who analyse the film's plot for the viewer by explaining the situation in a documentary style. Their purpose seems to be to participate on telling the story and to open up the plot in order to lead the viewer towards a certain analytical conclusions. The man in the left hand picture is titled as "UKNR Chief Correspondent" and the woman in the right hand picture as "Sociologist, Kempton Park University". These titles and their status suggest that the specialists have studied the facts they are representing and that their opinions are based on neutral conclusions. Their purpose is to open up the plot and give additional information in order to bring fourth ideas from which the viewer must draw his/her conclusions. These independent specialists are reliable as narrators, for they clearly base their analysis of the situation and their own conclusion on neutral facts. These factors common to documentary narrators must be regarded as evidence of the realistic style of *District 9*.



Example 3. The documentary style news footage (District 9: chapter 1)

In example three the plot and story of the film are supported by the use of these kind of news footage clips and headlines, which are typical for a documentary. These support the feeling of reality of the story and plot. These *cinéma vérité* tools are used in combination with the transrealistic style. The SF novum is linked to this realistic style, accomplishing the transrealism of the film; the second picture of example three shows an alien in news footage, shot with a hand-held camera, in a "real" life situation. Therefore, the film uses the *cinéma vérité* style, which we are accustomed to associating with realistic narration, as a tool to strengthen its transrealism. It reflects our own reality back to us by producing the transrealism via these realistic tools.

Even though loose familiarity to empirical reality might have proven to be commercially successful before, *District 9* has aimed at breaking this rule. *District 9* aims towards a sense of documentary verisimilitude and is able to raise philosophical issues about the South-African history. It delves on the questionable issues of modern world. By realistically estranging the viewer from the reality, it uses metaphors and symbols to reflect the reality back to us. Hence, a slightly alternative term for Suvin's cognitive estrangement might be suggested. If the genre of straight realism has truly lost its power as Rucker suggested, the SF of the Hollywood production *District 9* has used the transrealistic *cinéma vérité* technique to create cognition through estrangement. As the next two sections will demonstrate, it has reflected the reality back to us. As a Hollywood production it has reached an audience bigger than a documentary would.

Even those viewers that knew next to nothing about South Africa's history, apart from the existence of something racially segregating called apartheid, before entering the cinema (including the present author), are able to recognise the transrealism of the film and possibly learn from and about it. Therefore, it might be apt to call the SF of *District 9* cognition through estrangement besides of cognitive estrangement, for it is not just the estrangement that is cognitive in *District 9* but the estrangement is also an element through which the viewer is able to make his/her cognition.

4.3.1 The Metaphor, Symbol and Parable of a Transrealistic Film

The denial of SF's capability to represent reality is also visible in the preference of vague symbolism over metaphor that has been granted for it by its critics. The earlier discussion of SF's metaphorical and symbolical nature seems to deny its capability to present metaphors in their most unique form and prefer symbolism as such. Suvin even mentioned that SF presents a precisely aimed parable, preferring analogy and denying its capability to present anything straightforwardly allegorical. However, the transrealistic realism of the subject film has turned these notions of SF upside down by exploiting the whole spectrum of emblematic choices. As a result, *District 9* grants SF a new standpoint. As an example of twenty-first century SF it proves, that the time of a systematic preference of symbol and parable over metaphor and analogy over allegory is over.

The symbolism of *District 9* does exist on its own but more importantly it enables the metaphorical and allegorical nature of the film. A symbol may exist on its own, but a metaphor demands the existence of some kind of a set of cultural values or knowledge to exist and to achieve its purpose. A metaphor is a one-to-one comparison, which replaces one phenomenon with another, whereas a symbol allows the interpretation more freedom. The subject film's symbolical nature is based on the novum and its consequences. The nova of the film is a set of material symbols, which can be interpreted as metaphors. Those metaphors may be interpreted either as independent symbols or as a body of interrelated ones, which enables a deeper, subtle and complete analysis. In the case of the subject film it is clear they are meant to be interpreted as a

body, for the purpose of the symbolism is to provide the basis for an allegory based on realism. However, the film seems to speak out for many empirical present-day issues. Therefore, keeping in mind the big picture of an allegory, we may safely start to analyse the symbolism from its most basic level before moving on to the bigger picture.

First of all, the film's usage of the *cinéma vérité* style ensures the linkage between the metaphor and its literal background. As an example, the consequences of the novum of alien weaponry in itself is an example of bringing forward the present-day situation. As mentioned before, a specialist narrates the situation as he mentions that instead of helping the aliens, the real focus of the "MNU" has been the alien weaponry. The specialist strengthens his claim by noting that the "MNU" is the second largest weapons manufacturer in the world. The government of South Africa has handed over the managing of the alien affairs to this private company, which seeks to benefit from the situation. This development can be seen as a direct metaphor for similar circumstances in our present-day world. The privatising of government services and government responsibilities "has been promoted in developed and developing countries alike since the 1980s." (Parker & Kirkpatrick 2005: 513) and the question of privatisation certainly evokes doubt and questioning where and whenever it is been considered. In short, the morality of a private company, which produces government services, can always be questioned. Even though the specialists in the film do not claim it as such, this privatisation has lead to the situation, which the plot and story of the film describes. This linkage to the present day situation is further supported by the fact that the MNU is a multinational corporation and according to researcher Aikins Adusei, multinational corporations are said to be the new colonisers of Africa (Adusei 2009). Those multinational corporations are said to operate for the benefit of few rather than many, circumvent legislation, increase the debt that benefits the company instead of the country and promote weapons sales (Adusei 2009), which correspond to the way the MNU is described to operate in the film. The MNU was mentioned to be interested in weaponry and thus only in the benefit of the few owners of the company rather than the many or the country of South Africa. As it is explained few paragraphs onwards, the MNU also circumvents legislation with its illegal alien genetic research programme.

The aliens are evicted from their home sheds in their home area *District 9* with the excuse of moving them into better place. At the same time every place in the aliens' home area *District 9* is searched from top to bottom in order to find weaponry or other alien technology. As it turns out, the MNU has had a secret program for exploiting alien weaponry from the beginning of its intrusion to alien affairs. However, it seems the character of Wikus has not known about MNU's weapons testing, as he is sincerely surprised when he himself is tested at the MNU laboratory after he has started to metamorphose. Once again, the documentary style strengthens the transrealistic plot. In the beginning of the film, Wikus introduces himself to the camera and explains the purposes of the MNU. In this scene he seems only to be repeating something he has been taught, it seems he has rehearsed speaking to the camera and media to tell them what they want to hear and what the MNU wants the media to know; "We built a nice new facility where the prawn can go, can be comfortable, they can stay there. The people of Johannesburg and South Africa are able to live happily and safely, knowing that the prawn is very far away." (*District 9*: 06:24) After he has started to metamorphose and after the humans (the MNU workers, including his father in law) have deceived him only to use him for their purpose to use the alien weaponry, Wikus convincingly reveals the truth about this new and better home for the aliens, as he tells the alien character Christopher that "You don't want to go to the tents, they're not better. It's like a concentration camp." (*District 9*, 103:20). The metaphorical link to reality is clear, a privatisation of governmental activities has turned out the actualisation of its most feared consequences. This link is achieved through estrangement from the known; the aliens as the metaphor for a group of people combined with the documentary style ensure the viewer is able to look at the plot events from neutral grounds.

These separate, yet connected actions are a metaphor of reality, but as a whole they also denote a parable meaning for the film. The parable teaches what might happen when governmental services are privatised to multinational corporations. Yet in the manner of SF, the film has also literalised the metaphor. Another example of such a metaphor producing a parable, the novum of the oil-like substance, must be mentioned. As mentioned before, the substance has a physical resemblance to the actual oil used as a fuel in reality and it likewise has to go through a chemical process in order to become

fuel. The scarcity of the substance is evident as it has taken years for the alien Christopher to gather it. As the MNU workers confiscate the little bottle of fuel, it becomes impossible for the aliens to return home as the little bottle is all there is left of the substance. The substance seems hence to be the most precious matter for the aliens. This is clearly a literalised metaphor. The reserves of oil in our empirical world are not interminable and there will inevitably become a day when they are as scarce as the alien oil-like substance. This parable teaches what happens when there is no more oil left in our empirical world. It teaches about the day when the shareholders of the oil companies can no longer richen, about the day our precious oil is no more than a memory.

In conclusion to the discussion of the film's nature as a producer of parables, a part of the film's first and last scenes must be mentioned. One of the people in it interviewed in documentary style is a former MNU worker Fundiswa Mhlanga. His character is also seen as a part of the MNU field operation team beside Wikus, serving the eviction notices to the aliens. At the end of the film, a documentary style text appears on the screen, which states that "Fundiswa Mchlanga is currently awaiting trial for exposing MNU's illegal genetic research programme." (District 9: 140:52). This makes him a reliable narrator as he states at the beginning of the film: "I just want everyone watching this right now to learn from what has happened." (District 9: 06:20). As a former MNU worker he most certainly has broken his promise of confidentiality and thus he probably is on trial for that. A company as big as the MNU most certainly has its revenge and even when exposed of illegal activity, it tries to turn the situation around to its own benefit by attacking against the exposor. The fact that the character of Fundiswa wants everyone "to learn from what has happened", suggests that the metaphors of the film are meant to be seen as parables. More significantly, they form an extended metaphor in the form of allegory.

A part of the diverse symbolism of the film is based on semiotic practise. The following example four demonstrates the film's usage of basic level semiotic signs and what Broderick proposed to call "Signs Fiction".



Example 4. Signs in the film (District 9, chapter 1)

Example four demonstrates how the film uses signs as symbols of reality in a transrealistic style. Here these new signifiers, based on the novum of a literal alien, must be signified on the basis of other signifiers in order to understand the meaning of the signs. In other words, these signs demand speculation between reality and the novum. However in this case, this speculation can hardly be described to be open to various interpretations as Johnson-Smith suggested. When these actual plaques are interpreted on the basis of their real life correspondents, the interpreter is once again faced with a one-to-one comparison metaphor instead of a vague symbol, for the interpreter is used to connecting such signifiers to certain real life signifiers.

The red, white and black colours and their relationship to each other, which are used in the plaques are typical for signs, especially for traffic signs intended as a warning, or as a prohibition or an admittance of a right to do something. These signs typically use the colour red as a warning against something, as a colour of attention. The dangerous object is typically either highlighted inside a red circle or it is crossed over with a red line. Hence these real life signifiers determine the interpretation of the film's signifiers, for the only exception to plaques in reality is the replacement of a familiar (for example a human figure) with a similar figure of an alien. This way the signifier plaques of the example refer to real life signifiers and as shall be demonstrated in the next section, the signified refers to the real life signifier's signified. Therefore these signs are used

mimetically as they refer to the empirical world and the writer's realistic record of events in the manner of transrealism. The relation of the signs in example four to the author's empirical environment is explored further with another example in the next section in connection to the discussion of the film's allegorical denotation. As a conclusion to the discussion of the symbolic signs in the film, it must be noted that as explained, they can be interpreted to have a one-to-one connection to reality. As demonstrated, instead of vague symbols with multiple interpretations, these symbols can be interpreted as direct metaphors. Broderick was unquestionably right, for in this way *District 9* is indeed a film of "Signs Fiction".

4.3.2 Allegory of a Historical Transrealistic Film

The previous chapter made it clear that according to the assessments of the critics of the genre, the debate on SF's relationship to reality seems to lean towards its denial. The subject film has been proven to use metaphors, which are also used to form parables. As such they do represent the reality, for such an interpretation would not be possible without a clear one-to-one comparison. This use of symbols, metaphors and parables represents cultural criticism, for together they make up an allegory of South African history of apartheid. It is a truism that the apartheid was in no way a positive phenomenon and therefore describing it and its consequences can only be seen as criticism, or at least as an attempt to keep alive critical historical consciousness, in the allegorical manner of the film.

Suvin's claim against SF's allegorical nature was based on the existence of a vague symbol and the previous section questioned this argument of his for as demonstrated, the film has used metaphors. Even though it has used estrangement in the manner of SF to negate classical realism, it has brought realism to the twenty-first century with the practise of transrealism. Instead of allegory Suvin preferred analogy. The film cannot be seen as analogy, for this would mean that there are no direct one-to-one metaphors and that the whole story and plot could be interpreted in multiple different ways. Instead the film is allegorical, for its story and plot is composed of interrelated metaphors which unite into a body of metaphors, and an allegory in its most simple form is and extended

metaphor. An allegory cannot be detected or understood by simply figuring out the possible metaphorical denotations and connotations of a story. Instead the interpreter needs to know or recognise what has been replaced or substituted. This recognition starts from the previously mentioned notion that the story is surprisingly based in Johannesburg of South Africa instead of New York or Washington of the United States. The viewer of the film is forced to recognise the new setting and the process of recognition may begin, for the transrealistic allegory of the story of *District 9* refers to actual incidents in South African history.

The film's story is based on the situation in which the aliens are being evicted from their slummy home area, District 9 in South Africa's Johannesburg, in which they have lived twenty years since their arrival on earth. Even before the eviction, the documentary news headline states that "Non-humans violently evicted from townships" across Johannesburg by the people of Johannesburg (District 9, chapter 2). A headline also describes the alien crime level to have risen, which has led to retaliation by humans. As mentioned before, the aliens as well as the media are given the expression that they are removed to a "nice new facility, where the prawn can go, can be comfortable..." (District 9: 06:20) but at the same time they are reminded that ""the people of Johannesburg and South Africa are able to live happily knowing that the prawn is very far away." (District 9: 06:20). The new facility is located two hundred kilometres from Johannesburg and it is said to be a safer and better location for the 1,8 million prawns living in District 9. This contradictory situation is in detail an allegory of an actual incident in South African history.

During the apartheid period the South African government passed "the Group Areas Act (1950), under which residential and trading zones were segregated by race." (Beck 2000: 127). The "Native Resettlement Act" from 1956 nullified property rights and ordered the areas inhabited by black people for decades or centuries to be zoned only for white people, which forced millions of blacks to leave their homes (Beck 2000:127). The government of South Africa claimed that these removals of black people from their homes were voluntary, but instead the government workers intimidated the people and used force against them if they resisted (Thompson 2001:194). A black witness of these

forced removals told an interviewer that "they came with guns and police..."(Thompson 2001:194). These subjects are addressed in the film as the private corporation MNU (authorised by the government) serves the aliens their eviction notices from the area of District 9. The actual serving of the notices is partly at least a paramilitary operation. The MNU has its own mercenaries who carry guns. The whole team, including the MNU civil workers, is dressed up in protective gear, bulletproof vests and even helmets. The documentary style news headlines announce that "Militarized evictions of alien residents begin" (District 9: 10:50)

The attitude of the MNU workers' towards the aliens is clearly a negative one for they force the aliens to sign the notices by threatening them and persuading them with cat food, to which the aliens are explained to have a catmint like obsession in many cases throughout the film. If the aliens resist in any way, they are explained to have no other option than to sign and then the team of MNU workers comes up with a crime they have committed in order to let the mercenaries step in and use violence on the aliens. These "crimes" are nothing more than excuses based on prejudice, for as they enter the alien home sheds, the character of Wikus immediately finds something that must be stolen or something the alien does not have a permit for. As an example, as the team approaches the alien Christopher's friend's shed, Wikus points out a painted shape on the wall of a shed and explains it to be a gang sign on the wall of a "classic kind of gangster shed"(District 9: 22:13), in which he announces to be certain to find weapons inside. However, as he does not find any weapons inside the shed, he comes up with the small vial of black fluid and immediately announces that he does not trust it and that even though it is not a weapon it is dangerous and that is why he will check it in and take it to the lab. The owner of the shed, the alien with yellow stripes on his chest, does not like the team to investigate his shed and starts to act violently, throwing a person in the air. As a consequence, the leader of the mercenaries shoots him in the head after asking "Do you wanna piss me off?" and getting the answer "No" (District 9: 25:31) from the alien that is on his knees and has his hands behind his head at the moment as gesture of surrendering. Hence the link between the reality of the described apartheid removals and the removals of the aliens becomes clear, since both of them wanted to give the expression of a peaceful removal only to cover up their behaviour in reality.

Before the above mentioned "Native Resettlement Act", the South African "Parliament passed the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act" in 1953 to legalise the unequal segregation of different racial groups in public facilities such as waiting rooms or railroad stations (Thompson 2001:190). Signs for "Whites only" and "Non-Whites only" "appeared on facilities ranging from train cars to park benches" (Beck 2000: 128). *District 9* has addressed this correspondingly by assimilating the aliens to black people during the time of apartheid. The next example illustrates an unquestionable link between the apartheid reality and the reality in *District 9*.



Example 5. A sign from *District 9* and a sign from the apartheid era (*District 9*, chapter 2) (juggle)

The right-hand picture illustrates a plaque that is shown in *District 9* and the left-hand picture illustrates a plaque from the apartheid era. The text on both plaques reads "These public premises and the amenities thereof have been reserved for the exclusive use of... By Order of Provincial Secretary". The most relevant difference between them is that in the apartheid plaque it reads "...use of white persons." and in the *District 9* plaque "...use of humans.". The main message of the apartheid plaque "For use by white persons" has changed into "For use by humans only" in the *District 9* plaque. Hence the message of this comparison is clear, "humans" is used synonymously to "white persons", making the aliens synonymous with the black people of South Africa as the targets of the prohibition of these signs. The *District 9* sign has even strengthened this message with the usage of the typical traffic sign colours black, white and red. Humans in it are

represented by typical universal black figures of a man, woman and a child, whereas the new black figure of an alien has been crossed over with a red cross associated with prohibition. Here the denotation of this "Signs Fiction" of SF is based on the borrowing of a signifier of a human to represent an alien. It follows the typical SF style of a signifier referring to another signifier in order to make up the new signified. The "humans only" text is also written in red. Thus the red here is used as a colour of attention and warning as in the previous example four. Example five also illustrates the link between the author's empirical environment and the story, implying an allegory of the apartheid era.

The forced removal of the aliens from their home area of District 9 has its counterpart in particular incidents in South African history. The two most notorious examples of such mass removals were from Sophiatown near Johannesburg and from Coloured District 6 close to the center of Cape Town (Beck 2000: 127). The most striking similarity is between the names of the alien District 9 and the coloured District 6, it seems the 6 has turned around into 9. By the time District 6 was declared a White area under the Group Areas Act in 1966, coloureds had lived there for half a century (Beck: 2000:127). By the time District 9 was declared to be emptied from aliens, they had lived there for twenty years. Hence, there is an allegorical connection between the two districts.

The relocation of the aliens also implies an allegorical connection to what the South African history knows as the "homelands". The aliens in District 9 are removed to a separate facility far from humans, two hundred kilometres from Johannesburg. After the 1913 Land Act, which systematically dispossessed the black South Africans from their access to land (www.sahistory.org), the apartheid government extended the act to create ten independent or at least semi-autonomous African nations termed "homelands", with a goal to make South Africa a country with a white majority as the coloured lived in these independent nations (Beck 2000: 125). The purpose of getting the aliens out of Johannesburg is similar, for the people of Johannesburg are described on many occasions as distressed and frustrated by the situation, literally hoping in front of the documentary style camera for the aliens to leave. An interviewed specialist in the film un masks this situation by stating bluntly that the eviction notices served by the

MNU were simply "whitewash notices", implying that they were served to the aliens in order to cover up their real purposes and hidden agendas. The purpose of the government of South Africa was simply to get the aliens as far from the people of Johannesburg as possible, to make South Africa a "humans only" country with the aliens safely located in their own "homeland". The coloured people of District 6 were relocated "miles away from Cape Town, in the sandy, windy Cape Flats" (Beck 2000: 127). In addition to the character Wikus' contrasting of the "tents" of the facility to a concentration camp, the pictures of the new facility for the aliens imply a similar fate for the aliens, for their new home area is a barren looking sandy area surrounded by fences with "No non-human loitering" signs. Example six demonstrates the connection between the District 9 area, the new but still empty "Sanctuary park" for the aliens and the real Cape Flats of Cape Town.



Example 6. The District 9 area (District 9, chapter 1), the new area for the aliens (District 9: chapter 2), Cape Flats (www.capetown.dj)

The first picture of the example demonstrates the slummy conditions of the District 9 area. The second example picture demonstrates the image that the MNU wants to give

to the media of the conditions in what they propose to call the "Sanctuary Park, Alien Relocation Camp". The third is a picture from the Cape Flats, the area where the coloured were relocated from District 6. The area of District 9 is described in the film by a specialist to be a slum. It is said that the first reaction was to give the alien a proper status and protection and that District 9 was meant as a temporary holding zone for them, which ended up as a fenced up slum. The woman specialist of the previous example number two mentions that "where there's a slum, there's crime and District 9 was no exception." (District 9, chapter 3). The violence inside the District 9 is evident in the film. In addition to the violent and harsh body language and behaviour of the aliens, a Nigerian criminal gang has taken up a ruling position inside the area, selling food to the aliens at exorbitant price and collecting the alien weaponry. The gang's leader is even described to be "a very powerful underground figure in Johannesburg" (District 9: chapter 3). These conditions correspond to those in the South African homelands. The mass removals of the coloured had an impact on the coloured community as poverty increased and crime rates skyrocketed (Beck 2000: 128). In the example number six, the picture of District 9 represents the general idea of a slum. Thus, as the District 9 area is already a fenced area with high crime rates, it resembles the densely populated townships of coloured people, which were started by the government of South Africa alongside existing urban complexes and treated as parts of homelands (Thompson 2001:193). The before mentioned District 6 and Sophiatown are examples of such townships, the people of which were relocated in the more distant homelands.

The example picture of the Cape Flats bears an undeniable resemblance to District 9 for it too represents slummy conditions. As mentioned before, the new location for the aliens in the reality of the film is a concentration camp rather than a peaceful area. At the end of the film, the alien relocation camp is named District 10. It is stated that "District 9 was demolished after the alien resettlement operation was completed. District 10 now houses 2,5 million aliens and continues to grow." (District 9: chapter 17). It is therefore clear that the number of the aliens has grown intensively throughout the film, especially in the new location, for it is said that there were only about a million of them when the relocation started. The removals of coloured into homelands in South Africa resulted in similar circumstances, into "a great intensification of the

overpopulation problem in the Homelands" (Thompson 2001: 194). Hence overpopulation and dense population were a problem of the coloured townships and homelands of South Africa and a similar problem is faced in the film's District 9 (township) and District 10 (homeland). Another similarity is the fate of District 6 and District 9 after the removals. The homes in the District six were razed after the relocation of the coloured (Thompson 2001: 194) and "The area remained an empty barren patch for decades, bearing silent witness of the sterility of the apartheid system." (Beck 2000: 128). Similarly, as mentioned before, the film's District 9 is demolished after the relocation of the aliens.

In connection to violence and increased crime rates, a specialist mentions also the problem of interracial prostitution between the aliens and humans. Interracial sexual relationships are seen throughout the film as extremely culpable and illegal. During the apartheid, legal boundaries between the races were also created by "The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act" and "the Immorality Act", which made marriages and sexual relations across the colour line illegal (Thompson 2001: 190). For now it is only important to notice this common factor between the film's story and the apartheid's reality, which strengthens the allegorical relation of the two. This issue will be dealt in more detail in connection to otherness in the next section.

The difference between the European colonialists' concept of land ownership and the original native African one is also encountered briefly in the film. Martin Nelumbu points out that "Most Africans believe that the land does not belong to anyone but God alone." (Nelumbu 2011). The European perspective is known to be based on individualised ownership, but the indigenous perception among South Africans is that "Land, as the most vital resource is considered as belonging to the group with each individual member having access to it according to need" (Yanou 2009: 143). Therefore the words of the character of Wikus have an echo of this European colonialist perspective as he states that "The prawn doesn't really understand the concept of property, so we have to come there and say this is our land, please will you go, will you go." (District 9: chapter 2). It has already been demonstrated in the previous paragraphs how the aliens (prawns) are connected metaphorically to the coloured native South

Africans. Humans as the counterpart of the European colonialists force their concept of ownership to the aliens, who are the counterpart of the coloured indigenous people of South Africa. Hence this is an example of the colonial allegory, which was the base for the apartheid and thus the base of the story of the film.

These racial segregation issues during apartheid were executed with "rigid and increasingly sophisticated controls over all black South Africans." (Thompson 2001: 193). The black South Africans were not even allowed to visit an urban area for more than seventy-two hours without a special permit (Thompson 2001: 193). The aliens in the film are under similar or even more rigid control, for they need a licence for practically anything they do or possess. As the MNU team is serving the eviction notices and entering the alien sheds, "Does he have a licence to this?" is always the first question in their mind. As an example, when Wikus confronts the alien Christopher for the first time, he asks whether Christopher has a licence for having a son. Next, he enters Christopher's shed and explains the following to the documentary camera: "He's definitely a criminal, there's computers here... You can see stolen computers that he's decorating his place with. He doesn't have a permit for this." (District 9, chapter 5). Wikus is automatically assuming that the computers are stolen and it is clear the aliens have to have a permit for owning computers as an example. If the aliens need a permit for having a child or owning a computer, one can only imagine the length of the list of different kind of things the aliens need a permit for, and whether such a list even exists in the reality of the film.

With these examples the allegorical rather than analogical denotation and connotation of the film becomes clear. A viewer of the film needs to know the South African history of apartheid in order to be able to recognise the actual allegorical connections described previously. The film is composed of several interrelated metaphors rooted in the style of the SF genre. The common factor and basis for these allegorical metaphors, the metaphorical novum of alien will be considered in the next section. At this intersection of South African history of apartheid and colonialism in general, and the thematic tendency of SF to discuss racial issues and the experience of the colonised in the bigger context of otherness, it can be concluded that in the manner of the subgenre of historical

SF, *District 9* represents undisguised historical fiction. *District 9* encourages the variety of viewers of a popular culture film to recognise its allegory, from the level of most simple denotative connection to a deeper and elaborated one. It encourages the viewers towards cognition through its estrangement.

4.4 Otherness in *District 9*

As the film was proven to portray the violence of the empire building of the Dutch and British in South Africa by using metaphors in the form of allegory, the study of *District 9* in the previous section supports the claim that it is SF's tendency to revisit and confirm the complex power relations of European colonialism. The otherness of *District 9* is depicted on the claim mentioned in the previous chapter according to which SF also portrays the anxieties of otherness and models for encountering of otherness that are imposed by the empire on the imperial peoples. However, even if the film is considered to confirm the complex power relations in the form of allegory, it does not legitimise them in the eyes of the viewer. Instead it creates an inclusive criticism of the ramifications of eviction and cultural alienation of local communities based on otherness, by exploring the experience of dislocation and local colonisation in South Africa's Johannesburg. SF's long tradition in conceptualising themes of otherness and/through colonialism was acknowledged in the previous chapter. It has already been acknowledged that *District 9* does not require knowledge of the historical and geographical diversity of colonialism from its viewers. Instead it demands its viewers to acknowledge that diversity while concentrating on the local experience of colonisation in South Africa.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the process of colonialism is based on the construction of the colonised as the other. It is through this notion that one may finally come to understand otherness as the main theme of *District 9*. The film explores this otherness from the basis of the typical SF novum of alien, which represents the ultimate stereotypical form of the other. This evidently different and monstrous alien as the other is based on SF's tendency to literalise the metaphor, nothing is more alien than an

extraterrestrial alien. Thus it seems that the almost self-conscious purpose of the genre and the film is to represent otherness by basing it on the Freudian idea of otherness, according to which the more foreign the other is, the more suitable to carry the shadow of the unconscious it is. Hence the film has used SF's tendency to literalise the metaphor to reflect the reality of otherness back to us clearly. As a metaphorical novum, the alien is a tool of cognitive estrangement. The alien is the ultimate scapegoat other (cognitively estranged from the other of the empirical world), awakening the fear of the strange in ourselves and causing the return of the repressed in the form of demonising the other. The alien as a metaphor for otherness will be analysed in detail in the last section of this chapter but for now it needs to be linked to the other aspects of otherness, which confirm its metaphorical status as such.

The thematic of SF is henceforward assumed to be based on three themes. The first two themes, the other and the self demand mutual existence; as the other is no more than the self in disguise, the two are interrelated. The third one, the representation of human experience is explored through these two. The self is constructed and identified through and against the other, a process which is identifiable in the subject film. The aliens of *District 9* represent a common enemy against which humanity is opposed. This allows the film to represent otherness in unitary terms as the humanity is opposed the alien in a simple and uncomplicated way. The two interviewed "real" people of the previous example 1. represent this unity of humans against the alien. The first picture is of a black man, who explains that "If they were from another country we might understand, but they're not even from this planet ..." (*District 9*, chapter 2). The second picture is of a white man, who explains that a virus needs to be released near the alien to get rid of them. The other people, all of them black, interviewed in the same context also express their wish for the aliens to leave. One of them, a young woman concludes by saying that "at least they are kept separate from us" (*District 9*: chapter 2). These interviews represent the mutual attitude of the people of Johannesburg towards the alien other. Before them a news clip is shown where the headline reads "non-humans violently evicted from townships" and the picture shows humans shooing the aliens away violently from what seems like a gas-station. In connection to the news clip, the specialist woman of example two explains that "where there's a weapon there's crime.

Tensions rose and rose, people became more fed up and eventually the rioting started." (District 9: chapter 2) The rioting of people against the aliens is also shown in the "news clips", but as in real life, there is also what seems like a small minority of people, who defend the rights of the alien, but their existence is barely mentioned in the film.

The examples of the previous paragraph are examples of the self against the other. They illustrate the unconscious process of reflecting the fears about the self into the other. As the aliens arrive on earth, they are helpless and in need of help from the humans. The humans have been described to have helped them for humanitarian reasons but also because the whole world was watching South Africa's reaction to the aliens' desperate situation, the woman specialist states that "a lot of international pressure...we had to do the right thing." (District 9, chapter 1). The situation changes as the difference of the aliens in comparison to humans becomes apparent. The examples of the previous paragraph illustrate the new situation, which is the starting point of the plot of the film. What is apparent from these examples is, however, that humans stand together as "we" or "us" against the "they" or "them" of the aliens.

As the racial differences in appearance, habits, behaviour and other cultural aspects between the aliens and the humans become apparent, the 'self' of the humans becomes to fear that those strange and feared alien aspects might exist in its unconscious self and starts to protect itself from them. The humans are forced to encounter the uncanny in themselves by encountering the alien, which forces them to recognise the repressed material in themselves. Hence the return of the feared and repressed material in the selves of the united humans is reflected on the aliens, who are demonised on the basis of the fear of the other, which is ultimately nothing more than the fear of the self's unconscious for the alien other is nothing more than the self in disguise. The reaction of the humans to this is to protect themselves by disabling the alien enemy and thus preserving themselves once more from the alien inside themselves. This disabling in the film happens in the form of evicting the aliens and removing them far away from humans so that the humans would no longer need to be aware of the present of the strange among them. As the main character Wikus puts it, "the people of Johannesburg and South Africa are able to live happily and safely knowing that the prawn is very far

away." (District 9, chapter 2). In other words, after the removal of the aliens, the people of South Africa can happily continue to repress the strange in themselves, for there is nothing left to remind them of that feared strange in themselves. They have disabled the strange in themselves by removing the possibility of the encounter with the alien.

As suggested earlier, the process of negating the alien is based on the process of negating the strange in ourselves. These aspects of the self are visible in the behaviour of humans in *District 9*. The descriptions of the aliens lead to the conclusion that all the aliens are violent and criminal. A woman standing before an alien who is scavenging a skip explains that the aliens can steal everything from a human from sneakers to mobile phone and kill him after that (District 9, chapter 2). It is explained that the people of Johannesburg had had enough and wanted the District 9 area to be removed and the controlled more intensively. The South African government's decision to remove the aliens is explained to be based on public pressure, for the people of Johannesburg are said to "demand the removal of all extraterrestrials" (District 9, chapter 2) according to a news clip showing rioting and protesting people. The first picture of example three demonstrated a news clip in which the headline reads "Alien violence spreads downtown". The news clip headline may express the spreading of the violence committed by the aliens, but the picture shows only people, one of them holding a handgun. The second picture of the example three with the headline "Tensions mount as alien crime increases" shows a human pointing a gun towards an alien.

As it can be noticed, the humans see the aliens (the other) through their stereotypical view of them as violent and criminal. Here the typical aspect of SF to base otherness on stereotypes becomes evident in the subject film and the previous chapter's notion of stereotypes being the basis of racial discrimination becomes justifiable. At the same time the violent nature of the humans (the self) is revealed as the humans use violence against the aliens. The "Alien violence" may thus be seen as the return of the repressed of the humans caused by the encounter with the other. The stereotypical alien turns out to be the stereotype of the strange and feared self. Another example to support this claim is that of the Nigerians living in the area of District 9. The woman specialist explains that "Where there's a slum, there's crime and District 9 was no exception. The

Nigerians had various scams going. One of them was the cat food scam where they sold cat food to the aliens for exorbitant prices... not to mention interspecies prostitution, and they also dealt in alien weaponry." (District 9, chapter 3). The example is supported by example footage of the mentioned scams, of for example the Nigerians selling cat food to the aliens inside the District 9 area. This example demonstrates that the real problem of the criminality in the area of District 9 might not originate from the alien other. The Nigerians are humans and their behaviour as criminals is acknowledged and their use of violence is demonstrated in their killing of aliens. Yet, the Nigerians are not the ones to be evicted. The woman expert's comment on the typicality of crime inside a slum is followed by a description of the crimes of the Nigerians, not the aliens. Hence it might be suggested here, that the criminality inside the alien District 9 actually originates from the self. As the humans are not willing to face the strange and feared uncanny side of themselves, they reflect it to the aliens. Here the Nigerians represent the uncanny of the self, whose denial leads to the demonising of the alien other. The previously mentioned comment made by the example two's black man also supports this assumption; the Nigerians are just from another country (they are still humans and belong to the group of 'us') and can therefore be understood, the aliens instead are not even from our planet (they are not humans and belong to the group of 'them').

Another aspect of otherness in *District 9* manifests itself with the example of interspecies prostitution. The Nigerians living in District 9 are said to be responsible for it and the film sees it as self-evidently culpable. The aliens are said to spread a sexual disease, which is once again based on stereotypes as a poster behind an interviewed police officer promotes the following: "Infected? Don't risk it, they're all carriers" (District 9, chapter 2). As the character of Wikus starts to metamorphose and becomes a fugitive, the MNU tries to catch him by invoking fear of him through media. They claim that he has contracted the alien sexual disease through sexual activity with aliens, because of which he has been recently apprehended. People are advised to stay twenty metres away from him, for he is said to be contagious. When people recognise him from the news, their immediate reaction is disgust and loathing towards him. Including Wikus' own relatives and friends, the people start to believe the media instead of Wikus himself. The idea of interspecies sexual relations seems to awaken horrified disgust in

everyone. It seems that this crossing with the alien other is a taboo, which can be seen as a betrayal towards us humans. A comment by an interviewed MNU worker supports this notion: " I don't think he can be forgiven. It feels like a betrayal." (District 9: chapter 2). The comment clearly refers to Wikus' growing sympathy towards the aliens. By the end of the film his metamorphoses is complete and in the eyes of the interviewed people, he has switched his side from ours to theirs, hence he has betrayed his own kind. Throughout his change of appearance he has become the feared externalised strange in the self, the alien other. Here the link between the notion of otherness in *District 9* and that of the apartheid era needs to be remembered. During the apartheid era of South Africa "the Immorality Act" made sexual relations across the colour line illegal, which corresponds to the situation in the film. The implications of the metamorphoses, the relation and reactions to the self as other, will be analysed and explained further in the next section.

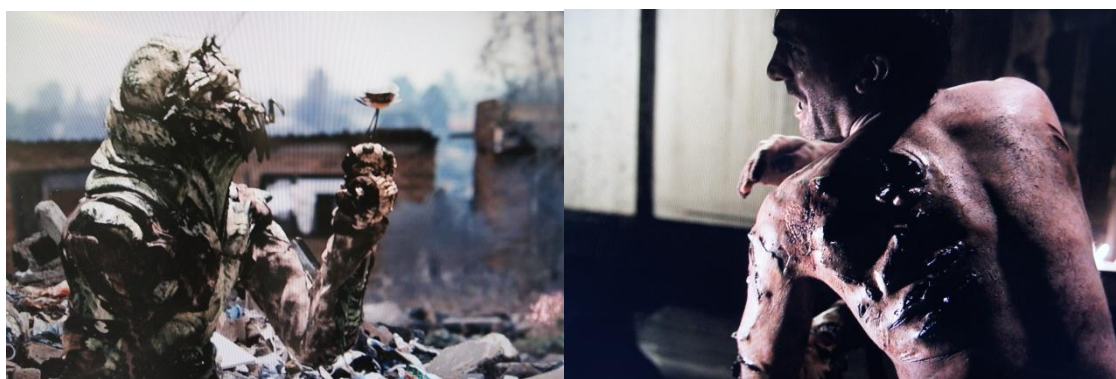
The previously mentioned DNA -based nova of oil-like substance and that of DNA-based weaponry strengthen the otherness in the film. The other is clearly not like the self in its physical existence, its DNA is different. DNA represents the scientific method of defining the human species against others. In the SF film of *District 9* it represents the science of the fiction, it explains the nova related to the alien in terms of science. Therefore, the film corresponds to the demand of SF to logically and materially explain its nova, which supports the difference between the human self and the alien other. The other is given a scientific explanation. The fear of not being able to understand the other or use its technology based on that otherness, is once again a basis for demonising the other. The fundamental commonplace understanding of DNA is that it determines our appearance. Stereotypes are based on such presumptions that, for example, people with certain skin colour are labelled as belonging to a certain group and hence carry out the stereotypical behaviour denounced to that group. Stereotypes are clearly based on otherness for their formation is based on the assumption that they represent the other and not the self. Further on, stereotypes are the basis for racial discrimination as noted before. When the DNA -based nova of the film are analysed this way, an assumption can be made that these nova as metaphors support the notion of otherness in the film.

The allegorical link described in the previous section strongly links the otherness of the film to the colonialist apartheid era. Because of the allegory, *District 9* can hence be seen as a portrayal of the colonialist perspective of the colonised as then other, as a mode of post-colonial critical historical fiction. The alien other in the film is synonymous to the colonised other of South Africa and the human self is synonymous to the coloniser self. This section has delved in the notion of self as the other, through the xenophobic behaviour of the self in the film, in which the existence of otherness is based on. SF was said to be criticised of its capability to represent more than what has been described (for example subtle characters or reality) and its capability to represent more than a literature of self as the other. The subtle character of Wikus in *District 9* proves that SF is capable to produce both the before mentioned and a study of the other as such (independent of the same). Analysing the process of metamorphoses and the aliens proves *District 9's* capability to sympathise with the alien, to portray what it feels like to be the other. To conclude, the theme of otherness is based on the notion of what it is and means to be human. The opposite of that is nothing more than the self in disguise, for the human is incapable of imagining anything that does not originate in the same. We are incapable of imagining anything that does not already exist.

4.4.1 The Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis in SF is a tool for exploring the theme of otherness. It explores the reactions of the self when the self becomes the other. Moreover it explores the otherness from the perspective of the other. In the case of *District 9*, the metamorphosis of Wikus Van de Merwe describes the reactions of the self to the otherness (of the self) from the point of view of Wikus' close relatives, co-workers and other humans. It also describes the subtle feelings and reactions of the other from the point of view of Wikus, who used to be part of the self. The character's development from the same into the other is a process in which he becomes to understand the perspective of the other. When the metamorphosis is complete at the end of the film, the final scene demonstrates that the only actual changes from the human self into the alien other are external. If the character had had a chance for final words to describe his completely metamorphosed state, he would have stated that the only internal change inside him is that he has come

to understand the other. The first picture of example 7 shows the final scene of *District 9*, which portrays an alien in a slummy area, making and holding up towards the sky and gazing thoughtfully at something that seems like a self-made flower made of rubbish. Before this final picture in the film, it is stated that Wikus has vanished and that there are only speculations of what has happened to him. His wife Tanya shows the camera a self-made metallic flower and explains that "I found this at my front door, as though somebody had just left it there. My friends say that I should throw it away, cause it's just a piece of rubbish that it couldn't possibly come from him. I know it's true." (District 9, chapter 17). The flower looks like the same one the alien is making and holding up in the last scene. Earlier Wikus' wife has told the camera that he used to make presents for her by himself. This shows that the character has not changed internally through the metamorphosis, for he still engages himself in the same activities and appreciates the same things in life as before the metamorphosis. Thus, it shows the return of the repressed as the strange inside has peeled off its metaphorical protective surface, the human skin.



Example 7. Wikus fully metamorphosed and Wikus metamorphosing (District 9, chapter 17 and 10)

The second picture of example 7 shows the peeling of the skin of the metamorphosing Wikus, who watches himself from a mirror and curses his appearance. The human skin is literally peeling off and letting the alien strange out. Again in the manner of SF, this is an example of literalising the metaphor. This metaphor of otherness is revealed

through the horrified and disgusted reaction of other characters towards Wikus and Wikus' own reaction to the peeling of the human skin and other changes in him. In terms of otherness, the alien bursting out of Wikus is nothing more than his feared and repressed self coming back to haunt him. Through the reactions of his relatives and co-workers he comes to understand what it is to be the other as he clearly starts to have sympathy towards the alien Christopher and his son. His motives for helping the father and son may be seen as selfish at the beginning as his only motive seems to be to get rid of the alien inside him and become human once again. This motive supports the idea of bursting out of the feared repressed other inside Wikus, for in order to preserve oneself from the other, the self must disable it. In other words, Wikus wants to get rid of the alien inside himself in order to once again repress and preserve himself from the strange other inside himself.

As noted before, the character of Wikus changes throughout the plot. He develops from a bureaucratic MNU worker to a fugitive, from the 'same' into the 'other'. His development is slow and interweaved with the process of the metamorphosis. The reactions of his fellow humans drive him towards his mental changes as he becomes to recognise himself as the other through them. After his co-workers, father in law and other family abandon him and start to treat him as one of "them" rather than "us", his mental process of sympathising with the alien starts as he takes refuge inside the alien area District 9. A documentary style specialist even notes that "So he had nowhere else to go. He ended up hiding in the one place he knew no one would ever come looking for him" (District 9, chapter 8). At this stage of the film, the dissolution of the Wikus' self has started. As the metamorphosis progresses, he goes through the process of self-alienation, in which his repulse towards himself (or the strange other) is interweaved with the continuous re-recognition of the enduring self. This dissolution can be identified in his behaviour. As he pleads for refuge inside the alien Christopher's shed and is lead inside the underground dropship of the alien, his old self surfaces as he starts to question the legality of Christopher's buried dropship: "This is very illegal... you sneaky prawns." (District 9, chapter 10). At the same time Wikus still makes the distinction between the human and the prawn, asking "Are you saying that you can turn this prawn hand into a human hand? (District 9, chapter 10). At this point his

assessment is clearly that the appearance of the prawn and the human are different, but he is beginning to understand that the difference may be nothing else than the appearance. Yet he tries constantly and persistently to reassure himself of his humanity and the otherness of the alien. When the alien child points at Wikus' metamorphosed hand and says "we are alike", Wikus angrily responds "No, we're not the same" (District 9, chapter 10). What starts as a battle against the otherness in the self slowly turns into acceptance of the otherness as Wikus's metamorphosis proceeds and as he begins to see the sameness of the aliens.

In the end, Wikus becomes the warrior companion of the alien Christopher as he fights against the mercenaries at the risk of his life in order to give Christopher and his son a chance to fly home. At this stage of the metamorphosis he understands that he will become an alien and that his only companions are the aliens. He has come to accept the other as he has seen the sameness of the alien Christopher. Wikus has recognised the humane emotions of the aliens as he sacrifices himself and encourages Christopher to leave without him as he protects their departure against the mercenaries. Wikus has turned into an alien, he has accepted that the only difference between the human and the alien is in their appearance. His significant others have abandoned him and he has redefined his self according to his newly found knowledge of the alien as the same. The humane emotions of the aliens and thus their sameness will be dealt more closely in the next section, but at this point an example of Wikus' and Christopher's companionship as equals proves how the two are part of the same "we" in the end. As Wikus tells Christopher to go as he protects him from the crossfire of the mercenaries, Christopher answers "No, we stay together. I will not leave you." to which Wikus responds, "Take your boy and go home. Don't make me go through all this and not make it." (District 9, chapter 16). Before Wikus and Christopher go their separate ways, they have both used the word "we" to describe their equal existence and comradeship a number of times. Wikus has forcefully accepted his new appearance and has ended up on the side of his former 'others'.

The result of Wikus' metamorphosis, his turning against the same in favour of the other is grounded on the previously mentioned understanding of the other. However, part of

that sympathy is Wikus' newly found ability to relate to the others as pariahs of the society. From the beginning of his metamorphosis, his human relatives and friends abandon him and start to relate to him as if he is no longer the same person, as if he has instantly turned into the demonised alien other. Their attitude towards Wikus is same as towards the aliens, which represents the attitude of the self towards the other as feared and strange. These other people in Wikus' life are his significant others. According to Stella Ting-Toomey, identity stems primarily from the internalisation of the viewpoints of our significant or relevant others (Ting-Toomey 1999: 27). Therefore, the basis of a person's self-esteem lies in the reactions of his significant others. As mentioned before, Wikus is abandoned by his significant others, who are horrified of his new appearance and as they see it, his changed self. Wikus' most significant other, his wife does not want to believe him and rather believes her farther, Wikus' father in law. Wikus speaks to her on a phone a few times during the film, but her disbelief in Wikus is a sign of distrust for Wikus. The abandonment and hatred he feels from his significant others lies the foundation for his becoming aware of what it is like to be the other.

Even though Wikus' relatives are given false information as Wikus is claimed to be guilty of having sexual relationships with the aliens, these attitudes of disgust and hatred stem from the fear of the other, which has suddenly become part of the self as a member of "us" has become the other. Hence Wikus' significant others deny the strange in the same by demonising him and abandoning him. Afterwards many of his co-workers claim that they always saw something wrong with him and his close family members announce their hatred and disappointment in him before the documentary style camera. Before ordering Wikus to be cut into pieces to enable the study of his metamorphosing body, Wikus' father in law says it all. By noting that "He's going to turn into one of them, prawn." (District 9, chapter 7) he makes the distinction between the humans and the aliens and lays the foundation for Wikus' abandonment and racial discrimination. In the beginning and at the end of the film Wikus' mother tells in tears that "Wikus was a wonderful son." (District 9, chapter 2) and "Wikus sadly is gone, but I'm the one who stays behind with all the questions. I can't get answers." (District 9, chapter 17). This shows that the mother is aware that she has not been told everything, but at the same time she denies his existence by announcing that he is gone. His

wonderful son has turned into the strange other and to her he is thus as good as dead. Wikus' father goes as far as to say "He died in my mind a long time ago" (District 9, chapter 17), by which he refers to the previous events of the film. Even though he has just disappeared, Wikus died in his mind when he became one of "them" instead of "us".

Wikus' co-workers are clearly not aware of the truth about his metamorphosis, they seem to believe in the MNU's story about his interracial sexual relationships. One of them sees an opportunity to split hairs in front of the camera by announcing that "I think I was disgusted with the way he worked. There was always just a hint of something not quite kosher with Mr. Van de Merwe." (District 9, chapter 2). Right after this another of his co-workers says that "None of us had any idea what he was doing" (District 9, chapter 2). These examples of Wikus' co-workers show that they are willing to believe the worst and the worst is obviously any kind of idea of the other. Wikus' metamorphosis, and the sexual relationships with the aliens he is accused of, are clearly automatically a negative issue.

The only one who speaks for Wikus is Fundiswa Mhlanga, who is waiting for trial for exposing MNU's illegal genetic research programme. Even though he seems to be on Wikus' side, his words reveal the same feeling of otherness for he too speaks of Wikus in past tense and notifies that "he didn't deserve what happened to him" (District 9, chapter 17). By these words he clearly refers to the metamorphosis instead of the reaction of other people towards Wikus. Thus, even though he has sympathy for the devil, he still sees the other as negative. In his mind, Wikus did not deserve to become one of them.

As Wikus tries to contact his family and friends, their previously mentioned attitudes become clear to him. Either they do not believe him or they scream at him to stay away, even from his own house. Wikus feels abandoned and contemptible, his dissolution of the self is therefore grounded by these reactions of the significant others, who rather believe him to be dead than part of the other.

The story of metamorphosis of human into the other is not an unfamiliar one. As a tool for studying the ramifications of otherness, it has also been used by texts that cannot be labeled as SF. The previously mentioned Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (2009) may not represent SF, but in the manner of the subject SF film, it uses the metamorphosis of a human into an insect as a metaphorical tool of exploring the concept of otherness. The two are alike in many ways, both of them study the reactions of the significant others towards a metamorphosed family member and the reactions of the metamorphosed self. They use the metamorphosis as a literalised metaphor of otherness in exploring the self as the other and the feelings of the other itself. In that process, the metamorphosing characters of Wikus in *District 9* and Gregor in *Metamorphosis* both come to understand that the distinction between the self and the other is based on external rather than internal differences. Differences in appearance determine the same from the other for as soon as the self's appearance has changed into that of the other (which is a stereotypical representation into which the self has poured all its feared, strange and suffocated traits), the self is ready to abandon its former part and to apply the stereotype to it. Wikus and Gregor are both abandoned by their significant others, who no longer believe that the unfamiliar shell of the other holds the familiar inside. Instead their significant others invoke in stereotypes of the other and apply them to their metamorphosed and now "unfamiliar" same. The significant others of both characters consider the original human self to be dead or at least replaced by a disgusting other and are not ready to accept its new external form. Synonymously they are not ready to accept the strange and repressed part of themselves and therefore they aim to preserve themselves from this unfamiliar familiar by disabling it.

4.4.2 The Alien

Aliens in SF are a perfect literalised metaphor of the other. With its cognitive estrangement, SF uses the extraterrestrial alien to reflect the reality of the other back to us in a fantastical way. The aliens of *District 9* are the archetype of a literalised all-purpose other. Their simple and ugly insect like otherness achieves its purpose, because the more unfamiliar and strange the other is, the easier it is to demonise it. This simple demonised other is the perfect all-purpose other against which the humanity is united.

South Africa's history repeats itself as the racial discrimination of the apartheid times has now found a new subject against which the humanity unites forgetting its own racial issues. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the SF alien is claimed to be a vehicle to comment empirical world without representing a particular identifiable group of people. However, as demonstrated before (chapter 4.3.2), the alien of the subject film is an allegorical metaphor of the aboriginal people of South Africa whereas the humans represent the European colonisers.

The appearance of the aliens of *District 9* has its origins in reality. The humans have started to call the aliens "prawns", which they are even said to look like by an interviewed man. Their appearance has a strong resemblance to what is called "The Parktown Prawn", which is a common unwanted pest in Johannesburg's gardens (Intekom 1999). The following example 8 demonstrates the similarity between the alien "prawn" and the "Parktown Prawn".



Example 8. The alien "prawn" of *District 9* (District 9, chapter 14) and the "Parktown prawn" of Johannesburg (io9, 2009)

This similarity of the alien and an unwanted pest is a perfect enforcement for creating the unpleasant picture of the unwanted alien for it is easier to demonise the alien if it resembles something other that already has a negative image. This similarity creates a metaphor, for the two have in common their appearance and their reputation as

annoying nuisance. The name "prawn" which the humans have given to the aliens is described even by a documentary specialist in the film to suggest that "the derogatory term Prawn is used for the alien, and obviously it implies something that is a bottom feeder, that scavenges the leftovers." (District 9, chapter 2). The term is derogatory indeed and the attitude of the humans towards the aliens is reflected in the use of such a term. An interviewed man explains that the term is used because "That's what they look like, right? They look like prawns." (District 9, chapter 2). This is once again connected to the stereotyping of the aliens. Humans clearly see no difference between two actual prawns on their dinner plate, which is then reflected to the aliens named as such. The only alien in the film that has a name is the character of Christopher, the others are referred to just as prawns. They have no distinctive features and thus they cannot be distinguished from each other. This usage of a stereotypical name for all the individuals can be reflected back to racial issues. The 'self' has a tendency to see the 'other' as a stereotype group, which has no individuals. The "Prawn" is an example of a nickname that is based on a stereotype and is used for every individual of a group of the "other". The alien Christopher forms an exception to this stereotype, for he is the key to unlocking it and revealing the truth behind the stereotype.

The appearance of the aliens and the name "Prawn" reflects the way the humans see them. The prawn are explained to be nothing more than workers of a colony, which has lost its leader. The viewer is thus tempted to compare the "Prawn" to drones of an ant colony, which has lost its queen. In the eyes of the humans, the aliens seem to have no culture. As can be noted from these assumptions, the aliens are not considered to be individuals or appreciated as such and they are not considered to be on the same intellectual level with humans or to be able to think by themselves without a leader. The previously mentioned description of workers of a colony would hardly have been used for describing humans. It is suited only for describing animals or insects, whose intelligence cannot be compared to that of humans. This is another example of the manifestation of the otherness of the aliens in the minds of the humans. The derogatory image is supported by Wikus' first reaction to the alien Christopher. When Wikus demands Christopher to sign his eviction notice, he addresses him as Christopher Johnson and when the alien claims that "This is illegal", Wikus turns to his co-workers

and notes that "This guy is obviously a little sharper. So we are going to try something else." (District 9, chapter 5). After treating the aliens like animals; laughingly burning their eggs in the name of population control and persuading the aliens to sign the eviction notices by offering cat food in return, Wikus is forced to see underneath the stereotype. Still he insists on comparing the aliens to animals as he threatens to take Christopher's son away to the child services so that "He'll live the rest of his life in a one by one metre box" (District 9, chapter 5). In the empirical reality, no child service would force a human child to live in such a box. Only stray animals or confiscated animals would be forced to do so. This situation can be compared and considered similar as the following example in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The description of an African aboriginal in this novel uses the same assumption of a less intelligent other as the intelligence of the aboriginal is described to be limited based on the stereotype of aboriginals in the novel, even though it is said "He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler." (Conrad 1994: 52). The same way as "workers of a colony", the word "specimen" cannot be used to describe a human being. The otherness in this novel is thus reflected through the same image of a stereotype of a less intelligent species. Keeping in mind *District 9*'s aliens' allegorical relationship to South Africa's aboriginal people, the similarity of these two descriptions of otherness is striking. Here the stereotype of less intelligent other truly forms the basis of racial discrimination.

This comparing of the aliens to animals seems to be based on the assumption that they have no culture, for culture is something that only humans can be granted to have. The cultural differences between the aliens and the humans in *District 9* are scrutinised from the point of view of the humans. The woman specialist of example 2 mentions one of them: "What for an alien might be seen as something recreational, setting fire to a truck, derauling a train, is for us obviously an extremely destructive act." (District 9, chapter 2). This implies that the view point is human and the humans are not ready to consider that the aliens might not understand this cultural feature which is so obvious to humans, because the original culture of the aliens might be different. Instead, the humans are willing to demonise the strange other and judge it as a savage primitive species because they do not behave the same.

The overall attitude of the humans towards the alien other can be wrapped up by opening up Wikus' speech for the camera, in which he notes that MNU tries "to engage with the prawn on behalf of MNU and on behalf of humans." (District 9, chapter 2). If the previously mentioned real purposes of the MNU are left aside here, Wikus' statement has yet another feature that might imply something else than its first denotation would seem. The use of the verb "engage" might seem a feature of the formal bureaucratic language the MNU uses in the media. Even though the reasons for and means of removing the aliens from District 9 are explained to be humane by the MNU, the use of the verb "engage" might imply something else. In a formal way it does refer to communicating with the aliens, but often the verb is used in a situation in which it implies action towards an enemy. The aliens are seen as the enemy, which the MNU on behalf of humans must engage.

The previous chapter introduced the three categories of the SF aliens according to Sargent and Gunn. The aliens of *District 9* do not fall under just one of these categories, for they are both the superior and inferior of humans. The first to visit the other cannot be said to be the superior one, for even though the aliens do come to earth, they arrive in need of asylum. Superior aliens are usually fought back by the humans as the aliens of *District 9* are. In this sense the nature of the alien other in the subject film is a complicated one. The aliens are clearly superior to humans with their technological skills and knowledge, which should by logic be a good enough reason for the humans to consider the aliens something more than an uncivilized and savage animals. The reason for this illogical behaviour of the humans is simply the fear of the other. Hence, regardless of their technological superiority, the humans are able to categorise these others as inferior beings because of their distress at the time of the first encounter. The fear of the superior other has turned the situation around, for it is easier to disable the enemy by coming up with excuses about its inferiority to oneself. The aliens of *District 9* are an example of the SF other, which tries to teach us about ourselves for even though the human characters of the film try to convince the viewer of the evilness of the aliens, the picture tells the story of aliens with human emotions. Example 9 shows two aliens, one of whom is scared because he is the target for testing a weapon and another

who has just found out that his fellow aliens are tested on such a way and stands watching the dead body of one of them.



Example 9. A scared alien and a thoughtful sad alien (District 9, chapter 7 and 12)

The aliens of the example represent humane emotions and gestures. The left hand picture shows a clearly scared and nervous alien, who knows he is the subject of weapons testing. He beats the ground nervously with his legs, and holds his hands up in the gesture of surrender. The right hand picture shows an alien bending over and looking at his fellow alien's dead body. His thoughtful eyes reflect disbelief and sadness towards what he sees. These clearly humane emotions give the viewer a reason to wonder if the otherness of the alien is really such a self-evident truth. By looking at these aliens, whose humanity is revealed, the cruelty, ruthlessness and coldness imposed to them by the humans is no longer self-evident. Instead the situation in the example pictures implies that the cruelty, ruthlessness and coldness are in fact human traits, for here the humans are the ones who cold-bloodedly exploit and kill the aliens. The encounter with this helpless alien, humane and yet so different by appearance and culture has triggered the return of the repressed. The strange and feared treats of the self are imposed on the other to justify the self's return of the repressed.

This kind of alien, whose humanity is revealed, is an effective tool for representing racial and social issues. The superiority and inferiority of the aliens in the subject film is based on their allegorical transrealistic origins, which have been demonstrated and

proven in the previous sections. The aliens are superior, for they possess advanced technology, which might be suggested to be synonymous with the land of the aboriginals of South Africa during apartheid. The humans desire to use the alien technology similarly as the colonisers desired to own and use the land of the aboriginals. The aliens are helpless like the aboriginals, they stand in the humans' and colonisers' way of reaching their goal. But most importantly the aliens and the aboriginals are different from the humans and the colonisers. The difference is in the appearance and in the culture. The similarity between the situation of the aliens and the aboriginals explains the inferiority of the aliens. They are forced to be the inferior in the name of fear of the other. SF has studied humanity's war against superior aliens, which at many occasions has been won at the last minute by the humans because of a hero or a flaw in the aliens' defence. These originally superior aliens of *District 9* are fought against before they have even raised their finger on humans. They are forced to an inferior position, starting from their first encounter with the humans, due to the fear of the other. As the alien character Christopher leaves the earth with the alien mothership at the end of the film, it seems clear the aliens were never really our inferiors. Like the humans, they just have their weaker moments from time to time.

The Nigerians living in the alien area of District 9 were previously suggested to represent the other of the self. However, they are also the ones to recognise the superiority of the alien otherness. The woman specialist of example 2 tells that it is a belief of the Nigerians that by ingesting alien body parts, they are ingesting the aliens' power to use their weaponry. Thus the Nigerians are trying to get the alien inside of them instead of trying to get rid of the aliens. They are the opposite of other humans for they represent the strange in the self. Therefore they do not see the aliens as strange but rather as exotic and powerful, they do not fear the strange for what might be unfamiliar for the other humans, is familiar for the Nigerians.

As a conclusion to the discussion of the alien as the representative of otherness, it can be derived from the previous that the subject SF film does indeed reflect what it is to be the other. *District 9* is thus an SF film which sees both the self as other and the other as such. It sees the other as a strange part of the self but at the same time it teaches us what

is feels like to be the other. Thus, in addition to allegory, the film can be seen as a parable of otherness. It must be noted however, that the claim that SF is capable only to see the self as the other, has some truth to it. *District 9* was made by humans and as mentioned in the previous chapter, we (as human beings) are incapable of imagining anything else than what already exists. Thus the other of *District 9* and any SF text can be nothing more than the other of the already existing self. However, in our multicultural world, where racial discrimination has a long history, the alien other of SF is capable to teach us what it feels like to be the discriminated one. Through its allegorical roots, the alien other is a parable of otherness. This alien otherness of *District 9* teaches us to look at the world through the eyes of the other.

5 CONCLUSION

This study conducted a generic analysis of a SF film *District 9* using the previous theories of the field of SF as its basis. The close analysis of the film's main theme of otherness and its relationship to reality has brought the question of the direction of the genre of SF in the twenty-first century closer to its definition. The study has proven that the metaphorical SF novum of the subject film is a tool of transrealism, of representing the world of the writer in a fantastic way to reflect it back more efficiently in the manner of a popular culture genre. The essential novum of extraterrestrial refugee aliens is a transrealistic representation of the black people of South Africa during apartheid. The treatment of these extraterrestrial aliens corresponds allegorically to the treatment of black people during apartheid. The events in the subject film are an allegorical reprise of actual events in the history of South Africa during apartheid.

The use of the documentary elements of cinéma vérité style in the film has been proven to strengthen the transrealistic metaphorical use of the novum and thus, regardless of the previous emphasis of hesitant resistance among the genre critics, SF has been proven to be a fresh vehicle of realism. SF's previously claimed incapability to present reality in an allegorical way has been proven wrong with the linking of the subject film *District 9* to the history of South African apartheid. Otherness as one of SF's central themes has been studied by examining its relation to this established connection to reality. The study of otherness has opened up SF's ability to present the self and the other according to the theory of the origins of the phenomenon of otherness. Metamorphosis and aliens in this SF film have been analysed as representatives of science fictional literalised metaphor of otherness.

The analysis of the subject film *District 9* proves that the SF of today is capable of producing historical allegory and addressing the question of otherness through its generically typical devices and as a part of its identity as a twenty-first century transrealistic genre. As a constantly changing popular culture genre, it is capable of representing cultural issues of the past and present transrealistically and of implying and awakening criticism towards the existence of the notion of otherness and racial

discrimination. As a popular culture genre, SF changes through time, but at the moment *District 9* represents the current situation within the genre, which may not have been the same twenty years ago and may not be after another twenty years has passed. All in all, it can be concluded on the basis of the analysis that at least in the case of the subject film, it is truly in the nature of SF to be interrogative and open, to question the reality it represents without limitations. If the subject film is seen as an archetypal beginner of a new SF wave, the SF of the twenty-first century seems to be interested in telling the story of history and present rather than future, of interpreting our cultural past and present.

It has not been the purpose of this study to create a new definition of SF. This study has been based on a single subject film and as such it cannot be used as a sole basis of a universal definition of SF. However, as the genre of SF is constantly on the move, the study has succeeded in contributing in the generic debate and the generic supertext as a subtle analysis of a representative of the popular culture genre. Thus the study can be used as a model or basis for further studies on the nature of SF in the twenty-first century. It is also capable of providing the basis for the study of otherness, the idea of the other as part of the self.

As the study has demonstrated the subject film's capability to explore themes of otherness realistically, the study could be further expanded to apply to other SF films, possibly to create a definition of SF's characteristics in the twenty-first century or to see whether realism and study of otherness are the dominant feature of the genre's situation in the twenty-first century. The otherness in the subject film *District 9* could be further studied for example from the point of view of gender related otherness. More importantly, because the study has proven the popular genre to be capable of realistically interpreting, describing or mimicking reality and the notion of otherness, its potential to deal with interracial and intercultural issues could be further studied for example from the point of view of identity negotiation theory and stereotyping.

As a popular culture genre, an SF film is likely to reach bigger audiences than for example an educational film. In the course of film studies, the subject film's or the

whole genre's capability to represent the reality and otherness using the tools of popular culture for educational purposes (if not illustratively) or for spreading general knowledge about the implications of certain historical events or racism, could be studied. Furthermore, as the realism of the genre is portrayed via the metaphorical use of the novum, and as the intercultural issues via the notion of otherness can be seen as a main theme of the genre and thus the main basis of the metaphorical novum of SF, the novum could be further studied for example from the point of view of translation studies to examine whether the novum's role and metaphorical potential remains the same when it crosses cultural or linguistic boundaries.

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