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Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-Semiotics of Extraterrestrialism

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# EXTERMINATING FETUSES: ABORTION, DISARMAMENT, AND THE SEXO-SEMIOTICS OF EXTRATERRESTRIALISM \*

ZOË SOFIA

*'Cause when love is gone, there's always justice.  
And when justice is gone, there's always force.  
And when force is gone, there's always Mom. Hi, Mom!*

*So hold me, Mom, in your long arms. So hold me Mom,  
in your long arms.*

*In your automatic arms, your electronic arms.  
In your arms.*

*So hold me, Mom, in your long arms.  
Your petrochemical arms. Your military arms.  
In your electronic arms.*

– Laurie Anderson, "O Superman,"  
*Big Science* (Warner Bros., 1982)

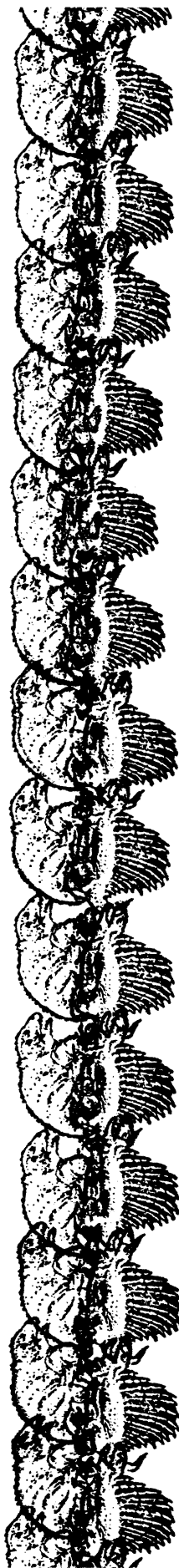
The unthinkable has never been innocently unthought: the extinction question's conspicuous absence from all but the most recent American political discourse has been maintained by the condensation of extinction anxieties onto ambiguous symbols, and their displacement onto other political and moral issues.

This paper considers the New Right's cult of fetal personhood and a 1968 science fiction film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke) as aspects of an ideological apparatus which addresses extinction fears only to distract us from the exterminist practices of the military-industrial complex. The film is read as part of the debate on reproductive politics, while the pro-life position is understood in relation to science fiction culture. The paper also aims to find arguments to counter the charge that it is morally inconsistent to condone abortion – the termination of individual pregnancies – while opposing nuclear weapons, which could bring about extinction, defined by Jonathan Schell as the death of all unborn generations.<sup>1</sup> The perspective forwarded here

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Avon, 1982), Part II, "The Second Death."



rejects this death-oriented moral absolutism in favor of an ethics of reproduction which accords different moral weights to the scales and types of reproductive choice which are exercised by corporations as well as individuals. Abortion maintains reproductive potential in individuals and populations, and is of far less consequence than nuclear war, which would represent an irrevocable choice against life's continuance.

This perspective might be called the *sexo-semiotics of technology*, a type of psychoanalytic ethnography concerned with the poetics and erotics of tools. *Every tool is a poem*, not only because it serves humans in unconscious and metaphorical as well as conscious and rational ways, but also because it is *in itself* the work of poetic operations which hollow out, displace, condense, re-work, re-present, and over-work matter and energy across space and time.

The poetics of high-technology culture proceeds via devices which scope and scoop out the world, and technologies of transport, communication, and information which together allow the object to be constructed and separated from its appearance, and the source to be hollowed out into re-source. Along with those organizational and topographical strategies which allow the Earth to be cannibalized at a distance, these devices of space and time travel provide the temporary illusion of escape from the bad side-effects of high-tech production.

Radiation's fast travel through space and time forms the paradigmatic instance of the *displacement* particularly emphasized in the culture of science fiction. Radiation itself appears as the essence of that which sets up and mediates the objective distance across which objects are penetrated and inscribed in a kind of devouring enlightenment by the cannibaleyes of science, and terminally dissolved into the abstracted lattices of over-rationalized masculinist consciousness. In science-fiction iconography, communications, transport, and information devices are frequently pictured as the spermatic tools and seeds which inseminate the hyperreal terrain I call *Jupiter Space*, whose contours are elaborated in visual complexes which equate the male brain, the womb, outer space, city landscapes, grids of lights, microcircuits, the interiors of computers, skyscraper façades, and so on.

Consistent with that Einsteinian cosmology which represents matter and energy as interconvertible around the astronomic constant of the speed of light squared—that world-picture which is centered around travel through space and time—high-tech artifacts are regularly depicted as extraterrestrial and futuristic. But instead of delivering us the glamorous other worlds and exotic futures it promises, science-fiction culture forces the extraterrestrial into the terrestrial and collapses the future onto the instant. In this connection, we might meditate upon the nuclear technologies which could explosively thrust us into the enduring absence of extinction, and think on the enduring presence of extraterrestrial elements in radioactive wastes, those luminous fission daughters whose consuming emissions will continue to score our monstrous messages into the bodies of those in distant futures.

Through these poetic operations which condense, displace, and overwork matter into simulations of the extraterrestrial, our planet has been edited and rearranged to read like the imagined interior of a masculine brain; we live in the set of a science-fiction horror movie. We exist, like our artifacts, in a state of suspended animation; our high technology is extraterrestrial technology, with deadly impacts upon us Earthlings.

The juxtaposition of abortion and nuclear questions may seem shocking to some, but it is normal within the *sexo-semiotics of technology*, where every tool has reproductive implications and represents a form of reproductive choice: *every technology is a reproductive technology*.

To the list of technologies we commonly think of as reproductive, like abortion, birth control, and other more exotic techniques like gene-splicing and -editing, cloning, etc., we add artifacts like radioactive wastes and toxic poisons which also directly intervene in life chemistry and embryology. In resistance to ideological efforts like those of the Atoms for Peace program which try to convince us that every new invention is life-sustaining, that their bad side-effects are worth the cost, or that bad tools can be put to good uses, the *sexo-semiotics of technology* recognizes the two-faced character of modern technology, which generates for every desirable, legitimate and supposedly practical tool a pile of useless, toxic wastes and uninhabitable lands for which no one wants to take responsibility; for every *shiny good* product there's a *slimy bad* by-product expressive of the irrational and excremental fan-

tasies which have always sought cover under the crystal abstractions of masculinist thought. For in science-fiction culture particularly, technologies are perceived as modes of reproduction in themselves, according to perverse myths of fertility in which man replicates himself without the aid of woman.

Like many science-fiction films, *2001* begins out in space and homes in on Earth in a move which establishes the extraterrestrial perspective. The essential features of science-fiction culture are visualized in the scene of a large, black rectilinear monolith that appears amidst the primordial landscape which forms the setting for the first part of "The Dawn of Man" segment: the monolith's appearance is as much a sign of the extraterrestrial on Earth as it is of the incursion of twentieth-century skyscraper culture into the paleontological past; the collapse of the future. Inspired by his encounter with the monolith, an ape-man picks up a bone and uses it first to kill food, and then to murder the leader of a rival horde at their shared waterhole: the primal tool may sustain or destroy life. Hurlled into the air in a fit of orgiastic rage and triumph, the bone is transformed by a stunning jump cut into an orbiting nuclear weapon; evolution climaxes in the arms race.

The bone and weapon are first in a series of signifiers of high technology which float throughout the film. Other terms include a dart-like spaceship which disappears into a quadrated circular space station in a sperm-and-egg routine, a spherical lunar shuttle, the gigantic nuclear-powered Discovery which journeys to Jupiter, the little space pods it discharges, as well as monoliths and logic circuits, a floating pen (the spermatoc communication apparatus, the *logos spermatoc*), spacemen, and finally, the Star Child, a huge *ex utero* embryo which returns to the scene of the orbiting bomb [see Fig. 1].

The film sustains without resolving the conflict between good and bad tools. We get a computer-goes-haywire scenario, but once man regains control of the good tool which turned rotten, we're still left with an intact spaceship of the same genre as the nuclear bomb, and the film's end, as we shall see, leaves us uncertain whether the ultimate floating signifier lies on the side of life or death.

The embryological imagery which abounds in the film provides many examples of technologies which repeat the performances of living creatures, and illustrates the extent to which high technologies are forms of masculinist reproduction. The egg-sperm pair mentioned earlier is succeeded by a spherical lunar shuttle, womb-like on the inside with exterior markings suggesting a head with eyes and mouth. As the euphoric swirls of the Blue Danube Waltz gain momentum, this head-womb passes through a circular *vagina dentata* whose teeth retract to let it implant, blastocyst-like, on an illuminated landing platform which draws it down into the pink-lit, pear-shaped space of a sublunar station; another technological womb.

In the film's second segment, "Jupiter Mission: 18 Months Later," we find scenes of astronauts hibernating in cryogenic amnia, and the head of the Discovery – itself a sperm-shaped device – gives oral birth to pods which from the rear look like eyeballs, but from the front appear as head-wombs with mechanical arms and a yawning *vagina/mouth*, from which astronauts emerge to be born into space. After one of these space births, the computer takes command of the pod, which becomes a "bad mother" and advances menacingly to snip the astronaut's umbilical air line with its metal hands. HAL is acting vengefully after an earlier scene, where, through the window of the pod in which the two astronauts had attempted to isolate themselves from the computer's ubiquitous sensors, he lipread their plans to disconnect him if he made any more unaccountable, or seemingly "human" errors.

While Bowman is out retrieving his companion's body, HAL locks him out and terminates the cryogenic pregnancies. In a reverse birth sequence, Bowman blasts his way into an emergency air lock and climbs up into the red-lit room housing the computer's circuitry, entering in a scene visually similar to previous space births. Only he's not in outer space, but a magical inner brain space contoured by the parallel grids formed by the banks of logic circuits lining the room. After removing those circuits which had endowed the computer with speech and subjectivity, the floating astronaut attends a prerecorded video message which announces "that you are in Jupiter Space" and goes on to reveal the mission's true purpose: to follow the path of a strong radio signal emitted at Jupiter by a monolith excavated on the moon.

The Discovery, whose name already suggests the scoping and scooping cannibaleyes of

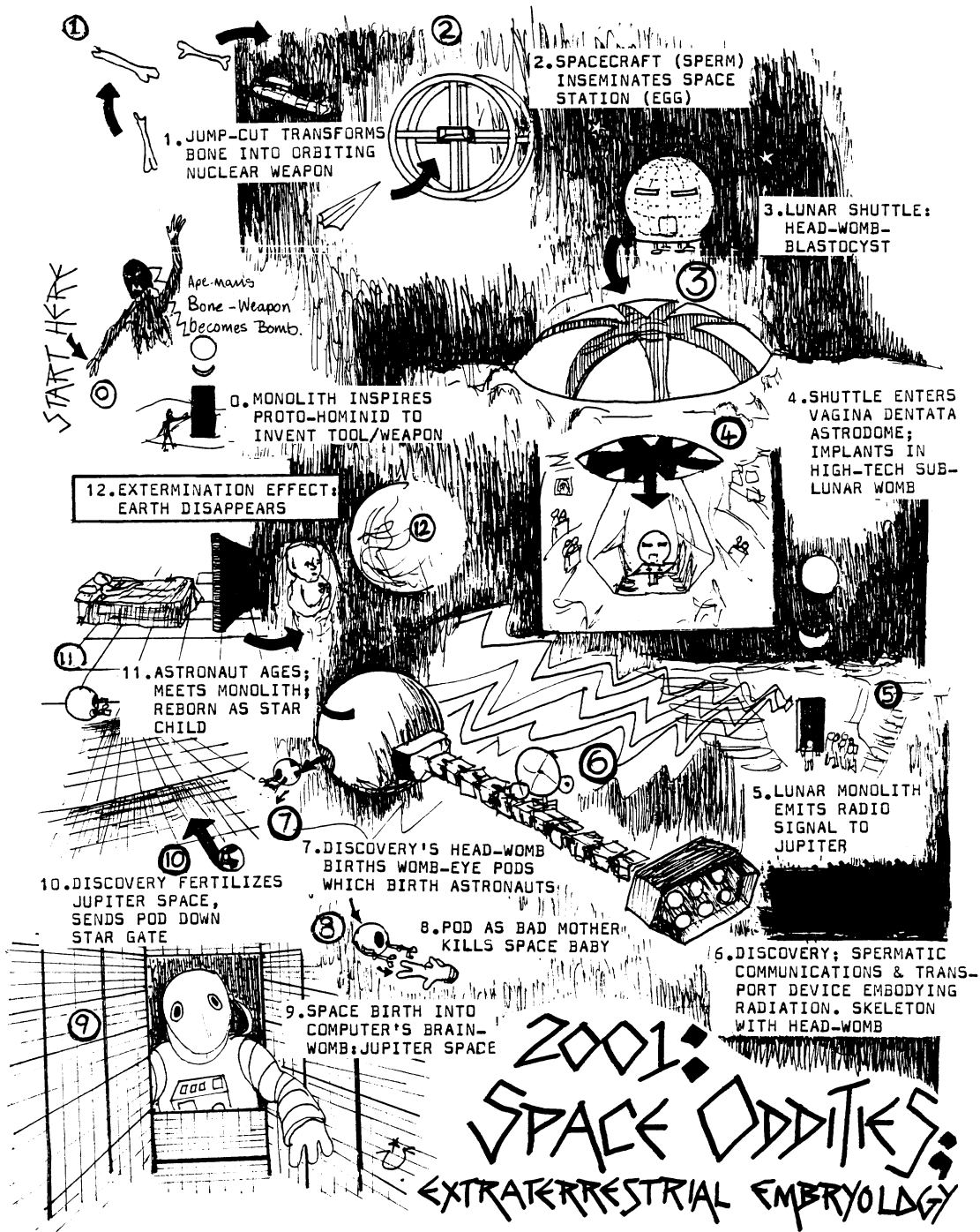


Figure 1

the military-industrial complex, is now decipherable as the spermatoc embodiment of the radiation of an extraterrestrial artifact in the form of a communications, transport and information device: in short, a direct descendant of the orbiting nuclear weapon.

The term "Jupiter Space" not only names the outer space near Jupiter, but the womb-like brain space shown on screen. Shortly after this sequence, we're treated to further elaborations of the spatial oddities of embryogenesis in Jupiter Space. The Discovery ejaculates its last pod down the Star Gate, in a visual orgasm of grids of light, images of electronic circuits, alien landscapes, births of stars, and organic looking mushroomings suggestive of the film's last image.

The fertilization of a womb-like space by a spermatoc emission is played out at several moments: monoliths generate ideas in ape-men's brains; tools fly off and fertilize high-tech wombs; the Discovery crosses space and time to come into Jupiter Space and generate a cyborg fetus.

"Jupiter Space" references the myth of the birth of Athena, one name of the Discovery's computer, which had a female voice in an earlier version of the screenplay. The goddess Athena was an unnaturally born brain child, springing fully grown and armed from the head of her father Zeus, who had earlier devoured the pregnant Methis, goddess of wisdom [see Fig. 2]. This myth does not merely assert the supremacy of masculinist fertility, and the confinement of female generativity within the bounds of the patriarchal family, but also shows masculinist production to depend upon the prior cannibalization of women, and the emulation of female qualities.

The scene of fertility is displaced upward in a move which serves a triple function: it disguises male dependence on females; it draws attention away from the excretions which are the only true children of male bodies, and glosses over the cannibalistic excrementalism of masculinist production by representing it as an attractive mental projection.

Athena's full growth at birth denies the historically achieved quality of masculinist invention, though her war-like aspect still signals the fundamental aggressivity of the project. Athena is the cannibalized mother reconstituted as a cyborg goddess, tooled at birth, and sibling to the automata said to work at the forge of Hephaestus (Vulcan), who in some versions of the story played midwife to Zeus with his anvil.

We have the beginnings of a story about the Jupiter Spaces of science-fiction culture if we make the following substitutions [see Fig. 3]. Zeus becomes Pac-Man, the omnivorous eye-head-mouth of corporate cannibalism who swallows life, lands, and futures; the computer endlessly hungry for more raw materials to digitalize, pretending it can eat without ever excreting, or that its waste is as good as food. ("Caviar in, caviar out," says the advertisement for some computer games.)

Methis becomes the mute computer Mother of *Alien*, a tool of the military-industrial complex. Superman has incorporated and taken over female functions to become a high-tech Supermom, who feeds and fertilizes us with junk food, spermatoc images, and silicon chips, and who tempts us with terminal apples.

Mother's remains are worked over and up into animated suspensions of matter: the spermatoc communications and transport technologies mentioned earlier, as well as Athena figures in the form of human and biomechanical daughters of male inventors: Rotwang's Maria in *Metropolis*; Mr. Morbius' Alta in *Forbidden Planet*, Tyrell's replicant Rachel in *Blade Runner*. As in the earlier Jupiter Space myth, the stories of science-fiction culture cannot avoid recognizing the destructive component of masculinist invention. For every shiny good mechanical servant like Robby the Robot – the obedient housewife – there's a cannibalistic penis-headed Monster from the Id which runs around chewing up cities and people.

The displacement from female uterus to male belly to paternal brain is continued upward and outward into the off-world and futuristic, and inward to become the microstructural and atomic. Where excrementalism was once glossed as mentalism, now, on a broader scale, exterminism is glamorized under the abstracted rectilinearity of that hyperreal ground in which the Earth itself appears as limited, disposable, and reproducible as the ideas and artifacts of masculinist invention: the planet as a construct of Jupiter Space.

Some important connections between exterminism and extraterrestrial embryology are articulated in the final segment of *2001*. The astronaut Bowman emerges from the traumatic journey down Jupiter's Star Gate to find himself in a hotel-like room where he ages by quan-

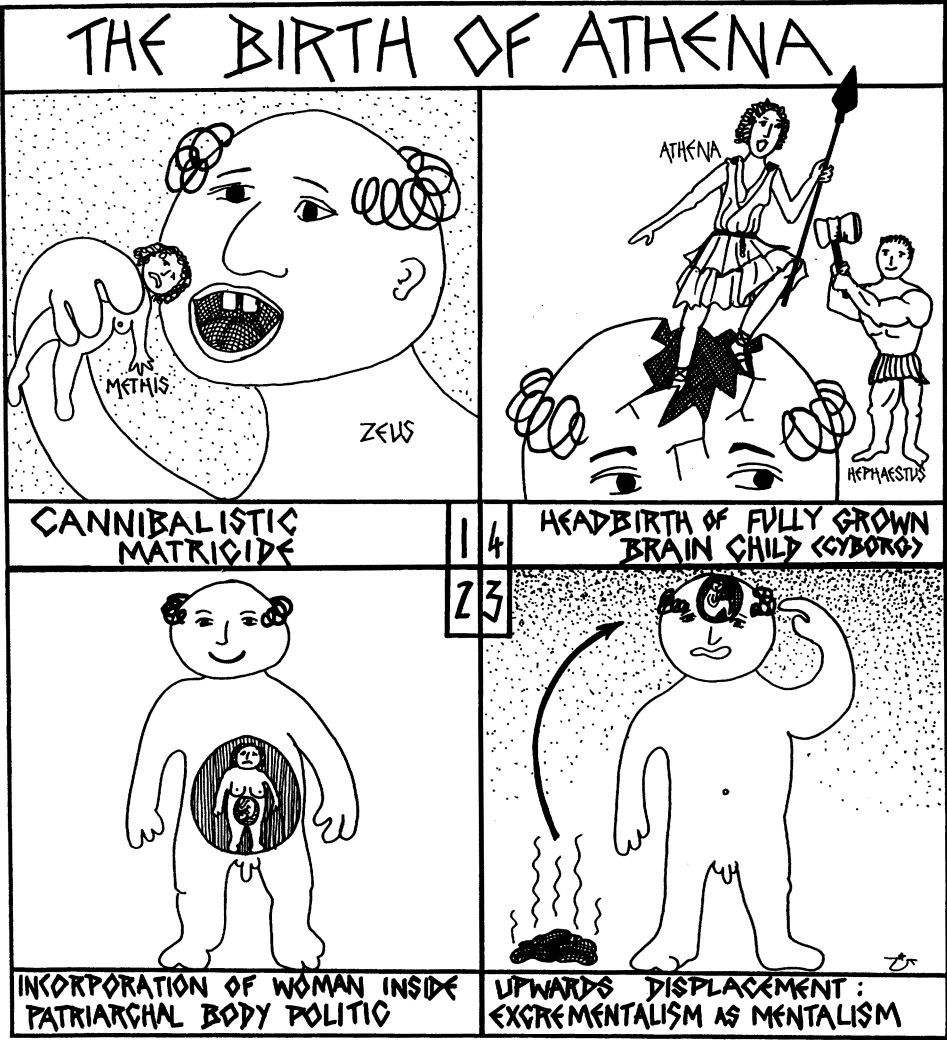


Figure 2

tum leaps. In the last moments, the ancient withered spaceman strains toward a monolith which appears at the foot of his deathbed. He is suffused with light and turns into a giant fetus within an amnion. All sense of scale is lost; the monolith's blackness becomes outer space and the fetus is shown facing an equal sized Earth. The Earth disappears off screen and we are left contemplating the luminous upper body of the Star Child.

This extraterrestrial embryo is a perverse and misleading symbol whose engaging organic appearance invokes maternal fertility and belies its origin in the unholy union of man with celestial powers and the tools he's brought to life out of the excremental remains of his cannibalized mother, the planet Earth. The apotheosis of the high-tech trajectory, the Star Child in its wondrous aspect invites consideration as the good tool, the happy end which justifies the means, which included bad tools like the terminating computer and the exterminating bombs.

But like HAL, the Star Child is a biomechanism, a luminous creature of special effects technologies; a cyborg capable of living unaided in space. And like the orbiting bomb, in whose place it stands, the astral fetus is also a sign of extinction. The Jupiter Space fetus has no simple relation to life. It is the product of a resurrection, that is, it arises as the negation of death, which is life's negation. It signifies not life, but deathlessness. Deathlessness here has the meaning of immortality, with all of the usual connotations about masculine ambivalence

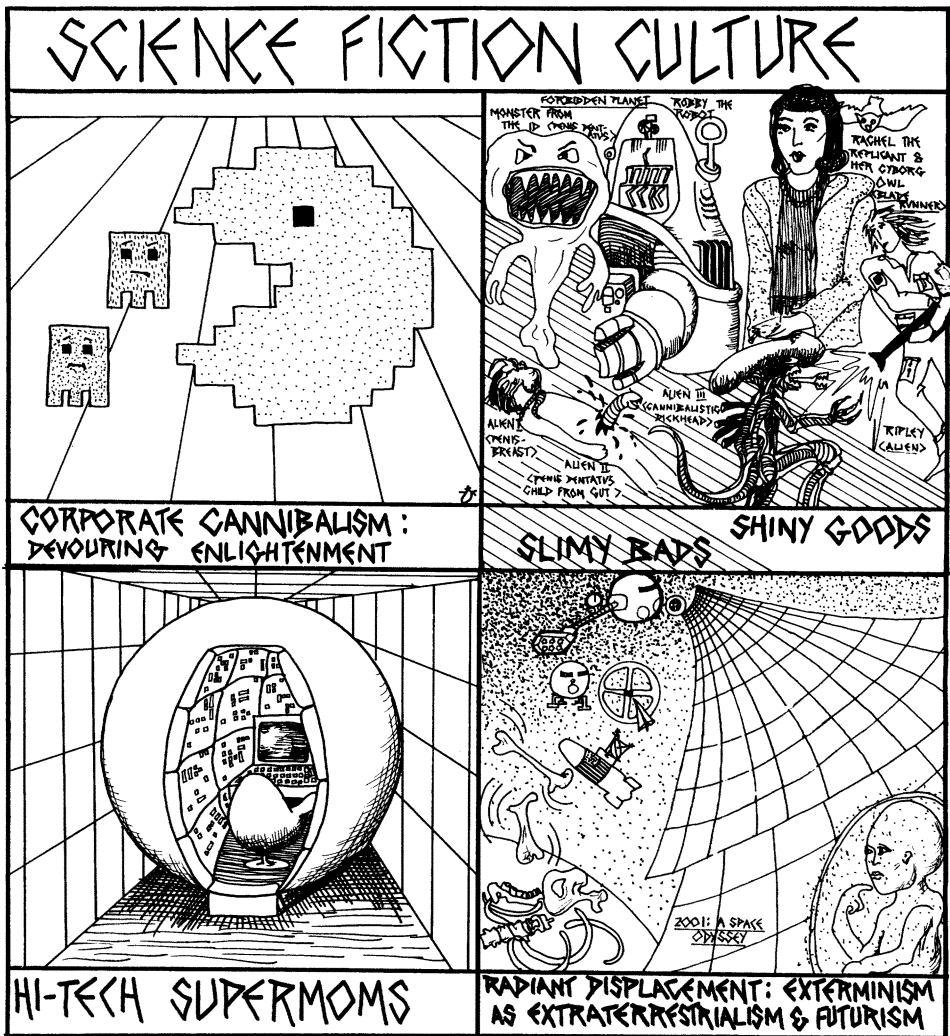


Figure 3

to life, death fears, etc. But it also carries the nuclear meaning – extinction. You might ask: but if life’s negation is death, why is extinction considered the negation of death? Because death only negates individual life; life in general persists after death. By extinguishing life generally, extinction would cause the death of death. All it would leave are those shadowy half-lives of unborn generations which once might have come into existence, those same half-lives which haunt the movement to protect fetal personhood, and which are here represented by the exterminating fetus.

So when we see the Earth-fetus dyad replaced by the fetus alone, we are to read the move literally: the Star Child bumps off (i.e., exterminates) the Earth, fulfilling the nuclear project by disappearing life into the circle of megadeath.

The ending of Arthur C. Clarke’s novel also suggests the extermination effect in the ambiguous words “He [the Star Child] put forth his will, and the circling megatons flowered in silent detonation. . . .”<sup>2</sup> Because most readers cannot imagine nuclear weapons detonating without causing harm, the ending is usually interpreted as world destruction. But the incomparable Clarke is more imaginative, and claims the idea of nuclear annihilation

<sup>2</sup>Arthur C. Clarke, 2001 A Space Odyssey (New York: Signet, 1973), 221.



. . . never occurred to me; it seems clear that he triggered the orbiting nuclear bombs harmlessly, because "he preferred a cleaner sky."<sup>3</sup>

Clarke is in love with his monster, and probably with its monstrous progenitors as well. One suspects the Star Child is the exterminating fetus, the new Superbaby which renders the human race irrelevant.

Clarke immediately proceeds to deny his denial of exterminist intentions:

*But now, I am not so sure. When Odysseus returned to Ithaca, and identified himself in the banquet hall by stringing the great bow that he alone could wield, he slew the parasitical suitors who for years had been wasting his estate.*

*We have wasted and defiled our own estate, the beautiful planet Earth. Why should we expect any mercy from a returning Star Child? He might judge us as ruthlessly as Odysseus judged Leoides, whose "head fell rolling in the dust while he was yet speaking"—and despite his timeless, ineffectual plea, "I tried to stop the others." Few indeed of us would have a better answer, if we had to face judgement from the stars.<sup>4</sup>*

Love, justice, even force are expended, the mother is wasted, and we're left with the brain child of the extraterrestrial Supermom. What fully grown, fully armed fetus would have use for the Earth anyway, if it knew how to proliferate itself out of the light and the dead things of Jupiter Space?

Clarke's oscillations on the question of whether the bombs were harmlessly exploded symptomatize his unwillingness to come straight out and say he loves the idea of extinction—though this message is clear in other works, like *Childhood's End*—and suggest his intention was probably to *explode the bombs without harming the fetus*, which remains at a safely extraterrestrial distance. This fantastic construct denies that nuclear holocaust would exterminate fetuses—cause the death of unborn generations—and in a wish fulfillment which reverses the terms, the fetus survives as the judge and exterminator.

A deathless pre-life who is also an after-life, an individual who survives world destruction: the Star Child emblemizes the character of modern power identified by Foucault, who in the *History of Sexuality* suggests that power's ancient right to put people to death has been superseded in the atomic age by the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence, which has as its underside the capacity to exterminate whole populations and species.<sup>5</sup> A world of its own which stands at the interface of individual and species life, the fetus can quite easily become the representative of this dual-level power. As we now turn to the abortion debate, it will be with the suspicion that the right-wing movement to protect fetal life has as its underside the military-industrial potential to bring about the death of the cosmic unborn.

In the lead up to the last presidential election, the New Right's anti-abortion campaign was part of a general conservative strategy to reprivatize health and welfare services while freeing up more resources for arms build-ups. Pointing out that these moral extremists are funded by conservative interests, one leading feminist analyst of the abortion debate has argued that the pro-life campaign was not a mere case of moral hysteria, but a deliberate attempt to stir up moral fervor which could then be channeled into support for other political goals, such as opposition to the ERA, environmental deregulation, and military escalation.<sup>6</sup> However, this moral hysteria bears closer scrutiny. For like the Star Child, the pro-life fetus may be a "special effect" of a cultural dreamwork which displaces attention from the tools of extermination and onto the fetal signifier of extinction itself.

On the face of it, there are contradictions on both the right and the left with regard to

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<sup>3</sup>Arthur C. Clarke, *The Lost Worlds of 2001* (New York: Signet, 1982), 239.

<sup>4</sup>Clarke, *Lost Worlds* 239.

<sup>5</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality—Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 137.

<sup>6</sup>Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Antiabortion, Antifeminism and the Rise of the New Right," *Feminist Studies* 7:3 (Summer 1981), 206–46, esp. 207–8.

the question of unborn life: the patriarchal forces protect individual fetuses while supporting military escalation; the feminists oppose nuclear technologies while permitting the termination of pregnancies. Since the 1980 election, moderate churches have started to openly oppose nuclear weapons, and we hear more from groups like Pro-Lifers for Survival who criticize the "moral inconsistency" of the pro-choice, anti-nuclear line. A "consistent" ethic of life, they claim, would regard abortion as the moral equivalent of murder, capital punishment, euthanasia, torture, genocide, and nuclear war; some point out that abortion and nukes both involve threats to unborn life.<sup>7</sup>

Pro-life and pro-choice parties to the abortion debate are deadlocked in relation to the conventional separation-unity paradox, with Right to Lifers portraying the fetus as an utterly separate person who must nevertheless remain united with its mother, and the National Abortion Rights Action League claiming it as an entirely dependent but potentially detachable part of the woman's body.<sup>8</sup> As is characteristic of separation-versus-unity arguments, each side is locked into a rhetorical position which necessarily denies truths in each other's claims: pro-lifers stress biology and downplay female subjectivity, while feminists argue for abortion rights using a conventional model of a volitional subject which avoids reference to essential qualities of female embodiment.

The absolutist logic of the Pro-Lifers for Survival line, and the dichotomies structuring the abortion debate, are symptomatic of the very mode of thought which has placed extinction within our reach: that peculiarly masculinist mode which has stubbornly devalued the visible orderings and multiply-embedded character of terrestrial life in favor of the decontextualized abstractions of Jupiter Space. The binarist logic of masculinist thought is stumped by contextual relations like that of the fetus to the woman's body, and on the subject of reproduction, it still employs an Aristotelian model which accords *all* of the transformative, generative power to males and reduces females to mere nurturant vessels for male seeds. 2007 is clearly working on this model: all of the embryological imagery is associated with men and their tools, and Mother Earth keeps getting left out of the picture.

Pro-choice activist Janet Gallagher complains about the level of abstraction which arises in discussions with pro-lifers, and observes:

*There's a way in which the fetus is discussed as though it were not within a living woman. As if that woman didn't exist. . . .*<sup>9</sup>

Dr. J. C. Wilke from the National Right to Life Committee has claimed that pro-choice forces "do violence to marriage by helping remove the right of a husband to protect the child he has fathered in his wife's womb."<sup>10</sup> This statement expresses the kernel of the masculinist fertility complex, which disappears the woman/wife/mother into the protecting superwomb of patriarchal culture and accords male semen all the fertile power.

This same Dr. Wilke in 1973 copyrighted a lurid anti-abortion flyer containing graphic depictions of dead fetuses and sensational descriptions of unborn life. The back page of this flyer is interesting on several counts. The far right panel, which claims that "abortion-on-demand laws give to one person (the mother) the legal right to kill another (the baby) in order to solve the first person's social problem," brings forward an aspect of the abortion question which tends to be glossed under the legalist rhetoric of "choice," namely, that social and economic conditions are so unfriendly to children and mothers that many women feel they have *no choice* but to terminate their pregnancies. The flyer's middle panel, of babies dead in the garbage and the title "Human garbage," can be read as symptomatic of anxiety over the wastage of life which would result from a nuclear war. The New Right's rhetoric of

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<sup>7</sup>See for example "Excerpts from Cardinal Bernadin's Appeal for a 'Consistent Ethic of Life,'" New York Times, December 7, 1983, 12; also Mary Meehan, "Abortion: The Left has betrayed the sanctity of life – Consistency demands concern for the unborn" in *The Progressive* (September, 1980), 32–34.

<sup>8</sup>National Abortion Rights Action League pamphlet, "Legal Abortion: Arguments Pro and Con" (no date).

<sup>9</sup>From a debate between pro-choice and pro-life feminists published as "Abortion – A Question of Survival?" in *WIN* 16:13 (August 1, 1980), 15–28, esp. 19–20.

<sup>10</sup>Petchesky, p. 221.

“defense” and “protection” of fetal life is similarly resonant with militaristic scenarios. But of particular interest here is the origin story which appears on the left panel. Its text is as follows:

*Did you “come from” a human baby?  
No! You once were a baby.  
Did you “come from” a human fetus?  
No! You once were a fetus.  
Did you “come from” a fertilized ovum?  
No! You once were a fertilized ovum.  
A fertilized ovum? Yes! You were then  
everything you are today.*

A line is then drawn across the column, and underneath it the following words appear in heavy type:

*Nothing has been added to the fertilized ovum who you once were except  
nutrition.*

The fetus here is all mouth, the mother all food, and the pregnancy entirely spermatic. The line between these last sections is particularly interesting, given what we already know of Dr. Wilke’s attitude to fathering. The text here “draws the line” at a point where biological knowledge constrains it from asserting something it really believes. If we put this line under a microscope, it would probably read as follows:

*Did you “come from” your father’s sperm?  
No! You once were your father’s sperm.*

Where does the pro-life fetus exist, if not in living woman’s body? The front cover of this flyer gives us one answer: the dead fetus is in the man’s hands. One pro-life lawyer has been quoted as saying “the fetus might well be described as an astronaut in an interuterine space ship.”<sup>11</sup> He is correct: the fetus is a decontextualized abstraction of Jupiter Space, which here means patriarchal consciousness. It is an overblown symbol of the parasitic male ego, and more generally, of the corporate Superbabies which feed off the Earth while pretending it doesn’t exist.

Its associations with an anti-erotic repressive morality and pro-militarist sentiments make the movement to protect the fetal person seem less about life and more about preventing its termination: the New Right is not so much “pro-life” as “anti-abortion.” Like the Star Child, the pro-life fetus arises as the negation of life’s negation, through which the male ego resurrects itself as a spermatic creation. And like the Star Child, this other inhabitant of Jupiter Space may also stand for extinction.

One pro-choice activist has claimed that the notion of fetal personhood is a relatively new one, which is “taking a form that has its own energy, almost like a religious cult.” We look again to the film *2001* for clues to the source of this energy. The astral fetus is visually equated with the planet, and in the last frame, substituted for it: it becomes a world of its own. At one level, then, the fetus is working as a symbol for the Earth. It is a cosmic symbol.

It is not entirely inappropriate that the planet be represented by a signifier of unborn life, for it presently contains all of the possibilities for future life forms. From this perspective, disarmament might be seen as an act to prevent a cosmic abortion.

But there are three major dangers in using the fetus as a cosmic symbol:

1) If the cosmic associations are left unspecified, then anxieties over the fate of the Earth can be unconsciously expressed in hysterical or abstract discussions of individual fetal life, while leaving untroubled that part of the belief system which favors further development of doomsday machines. The cult of fetal personhood can thus serve as a safety valve for the right’s bad conscience over its exterminist policies. More generally, the individualist rhetoric

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<sup>11</sup>Quoted by Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology: The Meta-Ethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), p. 58.

on both sides of the abortion debate prevents proper recognition of the radical reproductive choices being made daily by the military-industrial complex, and tends to keep questions of reproductive morality confined to the private sphere.

2) Even where the connections between cosmic and individual unborn are explicitly recognized, as in the Pro-Lifers for Survival position, there is no guarantee that extinction anxieties won't continue to be displaced onto the more manageable issue of abortion, a tendency already encouraged by moral absolutism, and which may gain further impetus as people lose hope of dismantling the nuclear apparatus.

3) The Earth is usually pictured as a Mother, and there is something disturbing about its image as fetus—the profound individualism of it perhaps, and the way it appears at the moment we're threatened with nuclear abortion. But there is also a space oddity involved: for if the Earth is an embryo, then *its* womb is space. Although we know of no other living worlds, centuries of extraterrestrial fantasies capped off by several decades of off-world practice have encouraged us to think of space as a good womb, full of inhabitable planets. From this view, the Earth is just one of many cosmic pregnancies. It doesn't really matter if we abort it, for we can always escape to one of the new Star Children we pluck from the vacuum; we might even mutate into extraterrestrial cyborgs.

Apart from the space oddities it shares with *2001*, the cult of fetal personhood employs temporal distortions remarkably similar to those of science-fiction culture. Dr. Wilke's embryological catechism attempts to persuade us that we did not just "come from" an embryo (the *future conditional*), we "once were" that embryo (*collapsed future*); that embryo was always already what we are now, an adult person. The embryo faces no alternative futures, but one single destiny, which is moreover collapsed back onto all previous states of being, allowing the conceptus to be spoken of as a "tiny person" and the deliberate arrest of its development equated with homicide. Contrasting with this *collapsed future* tense of anti-abortion rhetoric is the *future conditional* of feminists, who understand conception as an occurrence with a number of possible outcomes, to be determined by the future events or decisions which might influence or terminate its development.

The collapsed future tense lies at the heart of our culture of space and time travel. It is the "bound to be" of the ideology of progress, operative in the discourse of those who tell us that since nuclear reactors, deep-sea mining, Star Wars, and space colonies are inevitable parts of our future, we might as well quit griping about their bad side-effects and get on with making the future happen; after all, there's no time like the present. Trouble is, the collapse of the future leaves the present with no time, and we live with the sense of the pre-apocalyptic moment, the inevitability of everything happening at once.

The perversity of the collapsed future tense lies in its ability at once to invoke and deny the future. For if the future is already upon us, we have no need to consider the survival needs of future generations: we *are* the future generation. The collapse of adulthood into the fetus-world symbol helps render extinction conscionable by reductively equating the megadeath of the cosmic unborn with the individual deaths we all know we must face. The pro-life position is therefore continuous with all of those other discourses of future collapse which work to paralyze people into inaction in the face of the extraterrestrial and exterminist technologies which seem destined to take over our lives.

Conventional criticism has often concerned itself with recuperating the determining past of apparently ahistorical and naturalizing texts. Nuclear criticism, by contrast, must concern itself with reclaiming a diversity of futures from the overdetermining futurelessness of science-fiction culture. My concern with exterminism and the extraterrestrial fantasies which feed it lead me to criticize the science-fiction genre for glamorizing the dystopia we already inhabit, and for ridiculing those not enamored with the monsters of the nuclear Id. Yet ironically, nuclear criticism might effect the shift from the collapsed to the conditional future not by rejecting the science-fiction mode, but by moving nearer to its ideal. For as its fans enthusiastically point out, science fiction is, at its best, based on the speculative and often utopian "what ifs" and "maybes" of the future conditional, the imagination of alternatives.

What other "saving power" might the science-fiction mode possess? I have so far criticized the Jupiter Space construct for the way it disappears the mother and works her over into an extraterrestrial artifact, yet the brain-womb metaphor harbors the seed of a model of parenthood which may be politically valuable.

Debate over the ethics of reproductive choice is obstructed by the individualistic focus of the abortion debate, which cleaves to a conventional model of parenting represented by the asymmetric pair, motherhood/fatherhood. The latter implies a nominal, spermatic, and possessive relation, the former a socio-biological condition. Since women have done most of the childrearing, motherhood has come to stand for a more generalized notion of parenthood, so that parenting men are liable to be thought of as mothers, as symptomized in a recent film about male parenting entitled *Mr. Mom*. The conflation of mothering and parenting lets men get away with minimal childrearing responsibilities, skews the definition of parenthood to a narrowly biological pole, and deprives us of a vocabulary for describing the supermothering which goes on in corporate practice.

Jonathan Schell has described disarmament as an act of parental love aimed at letting new life into the world:

*Universal parenthood, which would seek to bring life into existence out of nothing, would embody the creativity and abundant generosity of love, and its highest commandment, therefore, would be "Be fruitful and multiply." But this commandment is not the strictly biological one. The nuclear peril makes all of us, whether we happen to have children of our own or not, the parents of all future generations.*<sup>12</sup>

Although the idea of bringing life "into existence out of nothing" reveals Schell's attachment to masculinist fertility metaphors, the passage's basic idea is a profound and helpful one. The notion of a "not strictly biological" parenthood allows recognition of generative energies in non-heterosexuals and others who choose not to reproduce themselves, and opens the way to a consideration of non-biological productions as children (the brain-child idea). It further suggests the "non-biological parenting" of children, that is, the influences of technological choices upon future generations (the notion that every technology is a reproductive technology).

This model of parenthood avoids the good mother/bad mother opposition at work in the abortion debate, where women are either obedient, selfless, nutritive vessels, or willful monsters who deny their natures and murder their babies. With a more general model of parenthood, we can validate the liberation of women's nurturant and protective energies from the restrictive circles of domestic life, and encourage all people to crack open the entrapping matrices of Jupiter Space and dismantle its monstrous brain children.

By taking seriously the perverse fertility metaphors which pervade masculinist discourse, and which are embodied in the global anti-art of the state of Pure War, we empower ourselves with some embarrassingly vivid descriptions for the obscene practices and deadly monuments which presently pass themselves off as the rational, the practical, and the glamorously extraterrestrial. We might call on the cannibals of Jupiter Space to feed themselves on their own tools, and demand that the Supermothers take better care of their ghastly creations. We might warn the Pac-Men, those radiant incorporating heads who have our futures all scoped and scooped out for us, that if they don't start cleaning up all that waste they'd like to pretend they haven't created, we Earthlings will teach them some home truths about the role of recycling in the uroboric economy.

While we might reclaim the future conditional tense and technological fertility metaphors from science fiction, we find little saving power in its extraterrestrialism. True, the distant view of the world may help us appreciate its finitude, and the continued failure to find life in space may eventually help us revalue our own world's uniqueness. But meanwhile, simulations of extraterrestrialism falsely promise escape from the exterminist effects of corporate practice. The transport and communications devices which allow the cannibalization and re-presentation of the world at a distance; those skyscraping wombs-with-a-view which isolate the heads from the untidy bodies of the lands and peoples below; the many social strategies which separate the bland corporate clones from the poor, the young, the colored, the pregnant; the refined jargons like nukespeak which gloss over the gruesome bodily realities of megadeath and cancer; the special effects which separate, or gloss over the slippages between, the shiny goods and the slimy bads of industry: all of these are examples

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<sup>12</sup>Schell, p. 175.

of extraterrestrialism encoded into distancing devices which provide the illusion of escape from the moral implications and physical effects of the techno-reproductive choices we make.

In particular, we note that the recognition of technology as a mode of reproduction has been obscured by the various topographical and rhetorical strategies which maintain the separation between biological and non-biological children. The exclusion of human children from the Jupiter Spaces of the military-industrial complex supports exterminism, for with children out of sight, the survival needs of future generations can drop out of mind, leaving the big boys to get on uninterruptedly with the serious business of global technological imperialism. Would the exterminists have created such powerful anti-children like the Cruise or MX missiles if the crèche had been next to the weapons design lab, and simulations of apocalypse disturbed by children crying for food and cuddles, vomiting and pissing on the nice clean suits? Without children's imaginative and exploratory minds to remind us that no matter how earnestly we do it, we humans are always at play, we risk taking our rationalizations so seriously that we lose sight of the difference between fantasy and reality, only to find with dismay we have written ourselves into the set for the last great science-fiction horror show.

Clearly, we need to reverse the displacements which have turned our world into an extraterrestrial environment, and allowed mechanical monsters to devour the space into which new life might have been born. The feminist and anti-nuclear movements are already at work to reverse these displacements, developing styles of politics which reinsert human bodies into the spaces of power; consensus-based decision-making structures which allow both groups and individuals to make morally responsible decisions; a post-Copernican cosmology recentered around a finite Earth with its elements of fire, air, and water; songs and chants about interconnectedness and respect for the planetary parent. We might think of other possibilities: the development of a *hermeneutics of technology* aimed at unravelling the condensations and displacements behind the apparently unquestionable solidity of the tools which structure our lives; more radically perhaps, the reinstatement of male fertility rituals which allowed men to play out their ambivalent relations to life and death, women and children, upon their *own* bodies and minds, instead of sublimating them ever upward and outward to consume the world under the cover of a rationalizing instrumentality.

The question of displacement might form the basis for a reproductive ethics which distinguished the relative moral weights of different levels and types of reproductive choice according to such criteria as the *contiguity* of the decision makers to the implementers and the effects of their decisions; and the duration, the scale, and the character of these effects. By such criteria, abortion, though it might be experienced as a personal tragedy, scarcely seems a crime at all: the woman chooses it for herself and bears the psychological and physical consequences of that decision, which still preserves her own reproductive potential. By contrast, a nuclear war would be initiated by a handful of men, who would not even remain alive to bear the consequences of that decision, which are not entirely known or predictable, which are of the greatest possible scale, and which render the question of duration meaningless.

It seemed at first that a contradiction existed between the ruling conservatives' interest in military escalation and their espoused desire to protect fetal life, but both positions turn out to be articulations of the collapsed future. The "always already" in the cult of fetal personhood is identical to the "bound to be" in the ideology of progress; each is part of the ideological apparatus of exterminism, which collapses the future onto the present and prepares for the ultimate science-fiction spectacular, where the future evaporates into a fireball or freezes to double-death in a nuclear winter. The apparent contradiction of the pro-choice anti-nuclear position similarly disappears when we recognize each as a struggle to pry open the futureless spaces of futurism and open up the pluripotent space of the future conditional. A nuclear war, like a pregnancy, *can* be averted. If we let our actions be guided by the desire to let new life into the world, and bear a parental responsibility for *all* of our creations, children might again have the comfort of growing up on stories of a world without end, and the future may well manage to skirt its way gingerly around the decaying remains of experiments in celestial physics which were fortuitously aborted before going apocalyptically awry.