Introduction

Science fiction is a literary genre that is often used for analysing political implications of technology in society by projecting trends and fears of the contemporary into a future scenario. There are different opinions on where the history of science fiction begins. Some would argue that it is something that evolved out of the industrial revolution and see Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as the first literary work of science fiction (Aldiss & Wingrove, 2001). Others would argue that the genre is much older, seeing satirical and reflective tales made during the age of enlightenment, such as *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Candide* as works of science fiction, while others again would go even longer back in time by arguing that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is where it all started. Then again there are those that would go back to transformation from mythos to logos in Greek culture and see the Homeric *Odyssey* as belonging to or related to what we today would describe as the genre of science fiction.

Typical of all these tales is that they emerged at times of social change and deal with the impact of science and technology for stimulating, controlling and sustaining such change. Sometimes science fiction reflects technological optimism, as can be seen in certain aspects of the works of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, but mostly it is a genre that is used for expressing critical views on how the evolution in science and technology changes society in unpredictable and often unfortunate ways. George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* are well-known examples of political reflections on contemporary society that have survived as science fiction classics and continue to be dramatised and adapted for stage and screen with regular frequency.

The United States of America has played an interesting part in the development of science fiction. Dish (1998) starts his book with the polemic claim that, “America is a nation of liars, and for that reason science fiction has a special claim to be our national literature, as the art form best adapted to telling the lies we like to hear and to pretend we believe”. Although this doesn’t necessarily mean that he believes American science fiction is void of critical and political self-reflection, there may be natural reasons for why *Flash Gordon*, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* are American creations. Of course, these comics, films and television series also dealt with socio-political subtext, but unlike Jules Verne they did not typically make the representative of science and progress into a lone and disillusioned Captain Nemo sailing beneath the waves while contemplating the negative consequences of how the world was developing, and neither do they resonate all that well with H. G. Wells thoughts on the possibilities of science and technology as tools for the oppressed to break down the barriers of class struggle and social injustice.

The politics in *Flash Gordon* film serials of the 1930s and 40s are more like the politics of *Superman* comic books in the sense of Flash being a representative of American pragmatism fighting the evil of Nazism and Communism in a context reflecting that of the Second World War. In his commentary of this genre as a whole, and comic books in particular, Wertham (1954) sees *Superman* as a symbolism of fascism in the sense that the ideals of “truth, justice and the American way” through military power and as a means for global domination is a perfect mirror of the villainous regimes the hero is fighting against. According to Sawyer (2008), the *Star Wars* series can be interpreted in a similar way. Unlike *Planet of the Apes* and other science fiction films made in the late sixties and early seventies, *Star Wars* does not reflect a critical perspective on the consequences of American foreign policies, the effect of unregulated industrial progress on the environment, social injustice in the domestic arena, and other themes that were important for the counterculture movement. On the contrary, Sawyer argues, *Star Wars* can be interpreted as a reaction against the previous period of critical self-reflection and a return to the fascist nature of the *Flash Gordon* serials with George Lucas and Joseph Campbell’s monomyth about the “hero’s journey” of Luke Skywalker going from being a politically unaware representative of the Midwest to becoming an engaged supporter of US global interventions in the service of capitalist interests.

Space: 1999, on the other hand, was at the time of its release, shortly after Star Trek had run its course and just before Star Wars took the world by storm, the most spectacular science fiction series ever made for the small screen, and a series with a different political message. At the time of its release, Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey was the benchmark for cinematic science fiction, and in the view of some of the television critics (e.g. Asimov, 1975; Emmett, 1975; Waters, 1975), the special effects of the show were almost as impressive as what Kubrick had achieved. In a comparison of Kubrick’s 2001 and Andersons’ 1999, Keazor (2012) interprets 2001 in the context of the Homeric odyssey as a metaphor for a shipwreck, while 1999 relied on the structure of the odyssey, only exchanging different planets for islands. Although used in different ways, both 2001 and 1999 use the same foundational text of the Western canon as a basis for storytelling. Space: 1999 also benefited from having popular actors Martin Landau and Barbara Bain from Mission: Impossible as a leading pair, supported by top quality British actors from stage and screen in regular supportive roles and as guest stars. Furthermore, it was written by politically engaged writers who continued in the tradition of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells of reflecting on the role and impact of science and technology in contemporary society, relating the discourse to contemporary debates within psychology, philosophy and social science. Finally, at the time of release, the production company ITC managed to have Space: 1999 successfully sold and shown in over 100 countries.

Considering the effort and thought that was put into the series, one might expect that it in retrospect would stand out as one of the milestones in filmed science fiction. The reason it does not, Muir (1997) argues, is because it was a British-made product that never aired on any of the major American television networks. The major problem with the series, he argues, is that it appeared at the wrong time. It was sandwiched between Star Trek and Star Wars, resulting in being attacked and ridiculed by Star Trek fans when released and forgotten after Star Wars had changed the nature of the genre. Iaccino (2001) comes to a similar conclusion. By reviewing the series through the lens of Jungian archetypes, he identifies some similarities between the first series of Space: 1999 and Star Trek, but believes that it was unique in the sense of being completely different from American science fiction television series of the period, including Planet of the Apes, The Starlost and Logan’s Run. What made the series fail, however, was the decision to revise the original format when they made a second series, thus making it more similar to the original Star Trek series. By doing so it lost its individuality, became less authentic and was eventually forgotten.

For Keazor (2012), these explanations are interesting and useful for understanding the legacy of Space: 1999 from the viewpoint of American popular culture, but it is not sufficient for explaining Space: 1999 in a wider context. In order to map out this wider context, Keazor balances the views of Muir with those of French intellectual Fageolle (1996) and tries to bridge the different perspectives by using the views of British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm as an integrating factor. Although this gives voice and authority to Fageolle’s views as a European counterbalance to the views of Muir and Iaccino, Keazor only touches the surface when it comes to explaining the political subtext of the series. He uses Hobsbawm for characterising the shift between the period from 1945 to 1972 as the ‘golden age’ of economic expansion, which is part of the context for the original Star Trek series, and then the ‘landslide’ and ‘crisis decades’ that followed, which was the historical context of which Space: 1999 was made. It is an important move in the right direction, but it is more like a rough sketch than a fully elaborated map.

Neither Fageolle nor Keazor discuss the political subtext of Space: 1999 in full detail, but they identify important gaps in the existing literature on Space: 1999 by finding themes that need to be discussed for gaining a deeper understanding of how the series reflected and contributed to discourses of the period. As a part of this analysis they also show how Space: 1999 is still relevant, perhaps even more relevant in some ways, for understanding how the political discourse of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as picked up by science fiction television drama, has relevance for political discourses today.

In 1997-98 these issues were discussed on the Space: 1999 Mailing List in the form of a week by week discussion of the episodes that make up Space: 1999. An edited version of the discussion is available.
on the internet (Welle, 2007), and is referred to by some of the websites that Keazor uses in his analysis, although he does not refer to the discussion himself. A possible reason why the 1997-98 discussion is often referred to by fans of the series but not mentioned within the scholarly literature may have to do with the way it was edited. As can be seen from Welle’s introductory comments to his edit, the purpose of the online document was to present an objective account of what was said during the discussion without making intrusions that would silence the voice of certain participants or raise the voice of others. Although this makes the online edit important and useful as a historical document, it also shows the need for an alternative edit that makes it accessible for the contributors in the scholarly debates within domains like art history, popular culture studies and studies of the technology/society interface.

The way this book tries to fill this need is by presenting an extract of the 1997-98 debate in a format that makes it easy to quote specific themes, discussants or opinions by referring to chapters and page numbering. In order to fit the size of a publishable book, the paperback edit corresponds to about 75% of the online edit. This means that the online edit is still essential as source material, but for each discussion of an individual episode a short editorial summary is added in order for the reader to get a quick hint at some aspects of the episode discussions that could be seen as relevant in the context of what has been introduced so far. Although the book could have been made shorter by making a heavier edit, some of the debates concerning issues like political subtext are interlinked with debates dealing with totally different issues. Furthermore, in order to make it easier for the reader to understand the nature of the 1997-98 discussion and more easily understand some of the more essential comments and analyses, only seldom have individual messages being shortened or edited. As with the online edit, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors have not been corrected.

When it comes to the 1997-98 discussion itself, neither were the discussants acting as scholars nor was the discussion made for the purpose of scholarly examination. A total of 84 people contributed to the debate. Some participants made only one or two comments during the whole 14 months of debate. Others contributed several hundred messages, averaging up to 3 or 4 messages per episode. The discussion group was varied in terms of age, gender and nationality, including members from France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Finland, Norway, the UK, Brazil, Canada and the US. However, similar to what was identified by Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) in their study of science fiction audiences, the group consisted of certain predictable subgroups such as technologists, fan fiction writers, and people who for various reasons saw themselves as ‘aliens’ in society. Due to this diversity of reasons for being part of a Space: 1999 discussion forum, the episode by episode discussion was not specifically designed to deal with issues relating to the political subtext of the series. On the contrary, there were no restrictions on the input and contributions for discussing a particular episode beyond inviting people to share their understanding. As this diversity of motives for belonging to the group appears to be a general pattern within science fiction audiences, Jenkins and Tulloch investigated to which extent participants in such groups were generally able to grasp the political subtext that typically dominate science fiction stories. As their sample was from Star Trek and Doctor Who enthusiasts, they focused on Doctor Who and asked members of the group to which extent they were able to see how characteristics of certain episodes of the series reflected social challenges in the UK of the period, such as high unemployment rates, mining strikes and double-digit inflation. In the cases they discuss, the sample groups were generally able to make such connections, at least when being able to discuss together or being able to interact with the researcher. On the whole, however, it was clear that getting confirmation on political views when watching a series like Doctor Who or Star Trek was not always the prime reason for watching it.

Similar patterns can be seen in the 1997-98 Space: 1999 discussion. One aspect of Space: 1999 that perhaps makes it more political than other science fiction series is the stylistic and possibly ideological conflict between the two seasons. The first season was made in 1973-74 and was to a large extent based on European assumptions of what makes science fiction interesting, reflected by the way it was made in Britain with financial support and supporting cast from Italy, although it was also designed to fit the needs and expectation of the American market. In order to make sure the series would succeed in the US, American actors were hired for the leading roles, they tried to get American writers to
contribute scripts, and American directors to give the series the right edge. For various reasons, the American directors and writers did not get too well along with the production, and people like Mission: Impossible director Lee H. Katzin, and award-winning writers like George Bellak and Edward di Lorenzo withdrew from the project after having made their initial contributions. This could have strengthened the dominantly European nature of the first series, but scripts were constantly sent to ITC New York for approval or identifying needs for rewrite.

Nevertheless, as documented in the reviews compiled by Muir (1997), the series got a mixed response upon its American release in 1975. Not only were newspaper and journal critics unimpressed with the reflective and philosophical nature of the series, but Star Trek fans who were feeding on reruns and animations expressed hostility towards the series because it felt similar to Star Trek on one level while feeling like the opposite of Star Trek on other levels. Wood (2010) confirms how the reviews of American and Canadian critics have remained mixed as the series has been released on laserdisc, VHS, DVD and Blu-ray. What is perhaps more surprising is that Space: 1999 also got somewhat lukewarm reviews in the UK and still remains controversial (e.g., O’Brien, 2000). While the Americans felt that the show was too British, the Brits apparently felt it was too American. In other countries, however, it became an instant hit. In Germany the demand for the series was so big that they commissioned Space: 1999 novels, specifically written by German science fiction writers, to feed a hungry market that was in need of more than what could be provided in terms of television episodes and the ITC-based Space: 1999 novelisations (e.g., Tubb, 1975; Ball, 1975; Rankine, 1975). In Italy the series was also a sustaining success, symbolised by Chris Drake having to publish his 1994 book on Space: 1999 in an expanded edition especially for the Italian market in 2000. In France the cult took on new dimensions as the French Cosmos 1999 club invited people like Johnny Byrne and Barry Morse to fan conferences, and intellectuals like Pierre Fageolle and Pierre Bannier started to analyse the series by contextualising it through the use of art theory, literature theory, political theory, psychoanalytical theory and so on.

In Norway, Space: 1999 played a major impact on the development of a 1978 television mini-series Blindpassasjer (“Stowaway”) written by Professor Jon Bing at the Research Centre for Computers and Law (University of Oslo) in collaboration with science fiction author Tor Åge Bringsvær. While HAL-9000 from Kubrick’s 2001 and the computers of Star Trek have been analysed from scientific and sociological perspectives (Stork, 1997; Gresh & Weinberg, 1999), Bing appears to be the only academic who have looked at Space: 1999 in a similar fashion, although only indirectly as an inspiration for the critical discourse in Blindpassasjer. Professor Kristen Nygaard at the Department of Informatics (University of Oslo), one of the founding fathers of the Scandinavian school of information systems research, was also deeply concerned that his students and colleges read and watched science fiction, especially of the type represented by Space: 1999, but made no explicit reference to this particular series in his seminal paper on science fiction and information systems research (Nygaard, 1996).

Despite the international success of the original series, the mixed reception in the US resulted in a different approach when developing the second series. As already mentioned, Iaccino (2001) identifies the failure of Space: 1999 with the second series in terms of how it was too focused on meeting audience expectations and consequently lost integrity and authenticity with respect to the ideals and style of the original series. This is a view that is also shared by Space: 1999 producer Gerry Anderson himself and most of the people who participated on both sides of the camera (cf. Mallett & Pearce, 1991; 1996; Wood, 2001; 2010). Perhaps not unexpectedly, as the second series was redesigned to meet the expectations of an American audience, European fans responded with disappointment (Mallett & Pearce, 1991; Fageolle, 1996). In many countries where the first series had been a success, such as in Scandinavia, the second series was considered trash and was not aired at all. In France it was reluctantly shown ten years after it was made (Fageolle, 1996), although the French thought the world had been a better place if all the negatives had been burned and the ashes sent into outer space to prevent it from ever being shown again (Fageolle, 1998).
The tension between the two seasons of *Space: 1999* is also present in the 1997-98 discussion. This is reflected in two ways. Firstly, although there were participants who were equally engaged in the discussion of both seasons, many participated more or less only in the discussion of one of the two seasons. Secondly, there was an ongoing tension between those who preferred the first year to the second and vice versa through the whole debate. However, as Welle (2007) points out, never did the debate develop into ‘flaming wars’. The general tone of the debate remained friendly, engaged and creative from beginning to end. One aspect of the tension between the two series that is only hinted at by Muir (1997), when he says that *Space: 1999* was sandwiched between *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, is the way the two seasons of *Space: 1999* were developed during a historical period that marked the conclusion of the counterculture movement and the transition into neo-liberalism. This perspective fits in with the Marxist analysis of history that shapes the backbone of Keazor’s (2012) analysis of *Space: 1999*, although his analysis is somewhat underdeveloped in this respect, probably due to space limitations when designing his argument to fit the size of a book chapter.

In the 1997-98 discussion, there is an ongoing awareness of the critical perspectives found in most episodes during both seasons of the series, although not in all. When reaching the episodes written by producer Fred Freiberger under the pseudonym of Charles Woodgrove, a discussion develops concerning how the political subtext in those episodes could be seen as contrary to the political core values of the series, expressing neo-conservative views that functioned as intellectual sabotage of the series as a whole. While commentators like Wood (2010) analyse the influence of Freiberger in a critical but balanced perspective, people like Fageolle (1996) express extreme hostility towards the Woodgrove episodes by describing them as an absolute low point and being of zero value. Although the 1997-98 discussion does not go deeply into the issue of political subtexts and how there may be a political misalignment between the two series, such issues are mentioned or hinted at and could be a good starting point for further debates and scholarly research.

The 1997-98 discussion does not only concern itself with the political subtext of individual episodes and the series as a whole. Different themes and issues were discussed, often reflecting the nature of the three typical subgroups within science fiction audiences that Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) refer to. Consequently, parts of the discussion and analysis deals with science and technology, sometimes building on Asimov’s (1975) comment that errors with respect of science and technology is acceptable if it serves some dramatic service but is unfortunate if it is a consequence of ignorance. Although much effort was put into the first series of *Space: 1999* to generate a believable and authentic looking environment for producing intelligent drama, the producers of the series did not engage scientific advisors. As a consequence of this, there are perhaps more scientific errors and technological implausibilities in the series than would have been strictly necessary. However, when issues like how shock waves cannot be produced in vacuum or explanations or how the colour of the sky is affected by the level of oxygen and nitrogen, such issues were debated in the 1997-98 discussion on a factual level to enlighten those who were less aware of the of mistakes, and thus not necessarily as a criticism of the series itself.

A second type of contributions were those made by fan fiction writers commenting on episodes by discussing characters and events as though they were real and thus projecting their own subjective understanding of situations and personalities for investigating and sharing. These contributions could be seen as the extreme opposite to the objective technical and scientific commentaries. The subjective nature of the fan fiction would be more like a discussion and exploration of how characters within the series would respond to situations outside of what was seen on the screen (Sokol, 2012). Due to the nature of this kind of analysis, some of the contributions tended to be extremely long, but sometimes they could produce interesting psychological insights that were helpful when looking for the deeper meaning of the series in the sense of political subtext.

The third subgroup mentioned by Tulloch and Jenkins are the alienated individuals. While there are a couple of instances in the discussion where an individual admits to using or having used situations or characters in *Space: 1999* as models for solving social or psychological problems, the best example of
existentialist discussions are perhaps in the case of a theologian, who was an active participant during the discussion of the first series, using the series for reflecting on moral dilemmas and aspects of religious existentialist philosophy. Another member of the Online Alpha community shared Iaccino’s (2001) interest in Jungian psychology, and made several interesting contributions along a similar existentialist line, although not represented in this book as he did not engage actively in the episode by episode analysis. During the Year Two discussions, however, an anthropologist from the University of Montreal made contributions using anthropological archetypes and structures. As Marinaccio (1994) argues, it is possible to use a framework like Star Trek to develop a complete philosophy of life, but no attempts on such a scale were made as part of the Space: 1999 discussion.

Although the 1997-98 discussion was not designed as a scholarly discussion, and did not set out to explore Space: 1999 from a particular theoretical perspective, in retrospect it can be seen to provide data that can be used as a starting point for completing gaps in current scholarly research on how Space: 1999 gives a unique view on cultural and political changes in the post-wake of the counterculture movement of the late sixties and early seventies. Although Keazor (2012) makes important contributions to the history of art and popular culture by contextualising the series in this manner, his research could also be seen as a call for further investigations.

When revisiting the 1997-98 discussion, it is also clear that much has happened on Online Alpha since this was conducted. In 1993, when the Space 1999 Mailing List was established, not much literature on the series was available. There were various newspaper reviews, fan magazines, commentaries and novelisations from the time the series was made, including Tim Heald’s important book about the making of Space: 1999 from 1976. In the early 1990s, however, there was a revival of the series due to release on laserdisc and VHS, and conferences started to be held in the UK and France (Mallett & Pearce, 1991; Fageolle, 1993). Also, as a part of the VHS release campaign, Chris Drake was commissioned to write a book (Drake, 1994). This was the first English language book dedicated to the series since the TV release and related books 20 years earlier.

As the 1990s developed, the Internet became an important medium for sharing information. In addition to the Space 1999 Mailing List there were also various fan sites devoted to Space: 1999, and articles from newspapers, science fiction journals and fan magazines were scanned or reproduced on the web. Although Space: 1999 was occasionally mentioned in various books discussing science fiction on the screen, the books by Fageolle (1996) and Muir (1998) seem in retrospect to have been the first attempts to investigate Space: 1999 as a unit by itself. A related phenomenon in 1997-98 was the release of films like Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery, which looked at recent history of popular culture from an ironic perspective, with Mike Myers commenting on how both revolutionary and reactionary attitudes of the late sixties looked almost incomprehensible in a 30 year retrospect (Oake, 2004). In other words, the 1997-98 discussion was carried out in a cultural environment that was characterised by how cell phones and internet changed society and made people look at popular ideas from 20 or 30 years back with curiosity.

Although discussion forums like Online Alpha and Cosmos 1999 continue to stimulate reflections and debate, the 1997-98 episode by episode discussion was unique. This does not necessarily mean that new long bursts of similarly creative, critical and passionate debates about Space: 1999 episodes may not happen again. Much has happened since 1998. On the discussion forums better understanding of individual episodes, such as using Tarkovski’s Solaris and the final parts of Kubrick’s 2001 for understanding MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH have evolved, and there has been a stronger interest in investigating the political subtext of Space: 1999 from different perspectives. It is the hope of this book, however, that the publication of the 1997-98 discussion may contribute to further debate and exploration of Space: 1999 both from within the fan community and the scholarly community.

The book version of SPACE: 1999 – Episode by Episode is structured more or less exactly the same way as David Welle’s online version. Apart from removing his editorial remarks and removing about 25% of the messages to make the discussion publishable as a book, the text and overall editorial
structure is more or less identical. In the same way as Welle went through each of the email messages
and edited the fonts to make them more readable for an online readership, the paperback text has been
reedited to make sure the original messages are readable within the format of a paperbased book.

The main part of the book starts with an overview of the Year One discussion. The overview includes
email statistics and an excerpt from the Year One wrap-up that is used to introduce the first part of the
discussion rather than to conclude it. The discussion was initiated when Mateo Latosa suggested on
November 24th 1997 to discuss all the 48 episodes of Space: 1999 on a week by week basis. This
resulted in positive feedback from a dozen members, and Latosa volunteered to moderate the
discussion and suggested a discussion format. None of these emails have been included in the book,
however, and neither have the administrative posts from Latosa that were usually published as a
reminder of which episode to discuss for a given week. The discussion of each of the 24 episodes
from Year One is presented one by one in the same order as in Welle’s online edit.

The second part of the book is structured in a similar manner to the first by initially presenting a
general overview of the Year Two discussions and then presenting the discussion of each individual
episode. As there was not sufficient space for including the total wrap-up discussion, a few messages
from the discussion are used for giving an introduction and overview of the Year Two debate and a
few other messages are used for a condensed wrap-up, expressing a couple of views and opinions that
could be seen as relevant in the context of the goals established in this introduction. This editorial
decision reflects some of the challenges in the production of a book like this as the wrap-up was both
extensive and contains relevant data that could be used for filling gaps concerning the
contextualisation of Space: 1999. On the other hand, it could also be seen as an invitation for further
use of the online edit of the 1997-98 discussion, and further invitations for making use of the public
domain data available in the Online Alpha archives and the Online Alpha and Cosmos 1999 discussion
forums.

An important inclusion in the paperback edition is the index at the back of the book. The purpose of
the index is to aid the reader in identifying themes, people, books, films, television series that are used
for contextualising the discussion. The number of references for each indexed item can also be used
as a rough indicator for comparing themes, episodes and people being discussed. For instance, the fact
that Muir and Fageolle are referenced about equally much, according to the index, indicates that they
could be seen as an equally important influence on Alpha Online, although individual members may
have strong preferences for Muir to Fageolle or the other way around. The index also shows that
BREAKAWAY and RING AROUND THE MOON are the most popular or controversial episodes in
terms of being referenced the most. On the other side of the spectre we see that A MATTER OF
BALANCE is the least referenced episode.

As being one of the most active participants in the 1997-98 discussion, it has been interesting to revisit
the debate to be reminded of what was said, what was left unsaid, and how publishing the debate will
hopefully stimulate further debates both among scholars and fans of the series.

Petter Ogland
Oslo, November 2014