Now suppose.

The future approaches, it comes in from all around, and there is a crowd of promises, menaces and questions which advances towards the present. As for ourselves, some of us try to advance into that crowd, in order to take advantage of the promises, avoid the menaces, and answer the questions. Now this is a curious situation: The future advances toward the present, (tomorrow tends to become today), and still we feel that time flows in the opposite direction, (from today toward tomorrow). And we try to advance toward the future starting from the present, and still we know that we are always present. This knot of curious contradictions and absurdities is called the "dialectics of freedom". How can we find our way out of this knot and do something about it?

There are methods to do this. One of them is to try and stand on one's tip-toes, in order to see what goes on beyond the crowd which mills in the immediate proximity of the present. But this is a posture which is not easy to maintain: one soon tires of it and one sinks back into the crowd, (into "commitment"). Instruments have been invented lately which permit one to maintain that posture. One no longer, needs to stand on tip-toes, but one can use finger tips instead, if one wants to look beyond the immediate future. What one sees, sitting comfortably in front of one's terminal, are extrapolated curves which diverge, cross, cancel each other out, or form bundles. This is called "futurisation", and it avoids falling back into commitment. But it is a dubious method. It does not do away with the tiring gymnastics, it only transfers it from people to apparatus. This is why some of us, (like the essay to which this text is an introduction), prefer the archaic method of tip-toe dancing. They are interested just as much in the tiring gymnastics as they are in the view to be gained thanks to it.

This is the view one gains: A swarm of virtualities which approach the present coming from an empty horizon, and getting denser as they do so. This is of course a familiar situation: like iron filings surroundig a magnet. One is tempted to propose a field theory of the future. But this cannot be done, because, while standing on tip-toes, one is still within the field, and does not have a theoretical distance. As long as we do not possess a machine to transcend existence, (a metaphysical crane), all theories concerning the future should be distrusted. And, besides, the comparison with the magnetic field is not a very good one. Unlike the filings, the future virtualities may turn around and disappear from vision. As they approach, they become ever more probable, the moment they present themselves they become real, and if they turn around and disappear, they become impossible, whereas iron filings are incapable of such ontological somersaults. The future does not look so much like a magnetic field, as it looks like a congress of ghosts, some of which disappear into thin air, and some of which materialize, while most of them just press against each other and against the present. The problem is precisely: how to get hold of the spectrs.

"Proximity" is the answer. The closer the future, the more it is probable, and the farther away it is, the less it is urgent. As we approach the empty horizon in our attempt to see the future, the virtualities become less and less dense,

they concern us less and less, and the future becomes ever more open. But unfor-
tunately "proximity" is not the whole answer. Because I find that I am not alone
and that there are others who are here with me. Each one is the center of his own
future with his own empty horizon, and those futures overlap to form zones of com-
mon futures. Some of those others stand close to me, (our futures are almost con-
centrical), others stand near the horizon of my own future. Thus there are virtu-
alities which concern me, although they stand very near my own empty horizon, becaus
they stand near the center of somebody else's future, and that somebody else con-
cerns me. "Proximity" is a good answer only, if it embraces the proximity of other,
(what used to be called "love of one's neighbor").

The futurizing instruments have solved this problem. They have constructed a
gray zone of overlapping futures, and they apply the principle of proximity to this
abstraction. Two things happen if one does this. The open horizon disappears from
vision, and "proximity" may now be mathematically formulated, (this is called "pro-
xemics"). It now becomes possible to calculate the future, although there are, ad-
mittedly, margins of error to those calculations. (Those margins of error may be
progressively reduced, and they may be themselves mathematically formulated.) The
principle on which this whole enterprise stands is this: the crowd of virtualities
which approach an abstract "common present" may be simulated in an image, (a scena-
rio), and this simulation may be manipulated. To illustrate the result, take the
following example:

A terrorist with his machine gun runs through the landscape. He does so in
the belief that he is running into the future, but of course: he does not stand on
his tip-toes, he is committed. A programmer sits at his desk, and his terminal show
him the terrorist's progress from the future toward the present. The instrument
calculates when the terrorist will present himself and kill the programmer. It als
shows other virtualities, which may collide with the terrorist and stop him. By
putting into motion a very complex machinery, the programmer may mobilize those othe
virtualities and thus cancel out the terrorist, who will thus never become real.
But, since there are margins of error, the terorist may jump out from the terminal
on the desk, and kill the programmer. It is thus only when the margins of error
come into play that the terrorist becomes real.

However, it is not because of the many ontological and epistemological con-
fusions involved in futurizing that this essay has decided against its application.
It is out of an ethical, (political), consideration. The programmer can never talk
to the terrorist, either because the terrorist stays unreal, or because, if he indee
becomes real, he kills him. We can well imagine what the terrorist would say to the
programmer: "I have to kill you, because you stand in my way toward the future, and
this "having to kill you" I call my freedom". But it cannot be imagined what the
programmer could say to the terrorist, unless it were: "I reckon with you". Now a
method which excludes dialogue, because, having built a gray zone of common future
it cannot recognize any other, cannot be a very good one. It is preferable to use
the archaic method of tip-toe dancing, because, although uncommitted, it permits
dialogue with those who are committed.

Instruments which futurize do not live: they just reckon. They reckon well, and they do it ever better, but the future they calculate is a gray, tasteless, unsavorable one, which is why it cannot be swallowed. Still: there is something interesting, even fascinating, about this method. The terrorist may jump out from the terminal and upon the desk, like Escher's lizards which creep out from a sheet of paper. Now you may say, of course, that there is nothing very remarkable about it. Every virtuality tends to become real, which is a nice ontological puzzle ever since Aristotle. But in the terrorist's case, something new has been added. The terrorist does not jump from the virtual into the real, but from the terminal into the real. And the terminal is a place of virtuality simulations. The terrorist jumps from a fiction into the real. As if, all of a sudden, Dmitrij Karamazov would jump at you and kill you. Futurizing cannot be as tasteless as all this, if it results in such miracles of transfiguration.

It should be asked what sort of fiction is involved here. It is a supposition. What the futurizing instruments do is to pick trends out from the crowd of virtualities, and then to extrapolate them. They suppose that those trends will keep their shape as they approach the present. Now suppositions, (in Greek: hypotheses), are characteristic of the tip-toe position. The view one gains when thus disposed is one of a hypothetical future. It is quite different from the way one experiences the future in commitment. To see that difference, consider the following conversation: I say to a friend: "suppose that two and two are four", and he answers: "you are rigt", or "you are wrong". This is a nice example for unsuccessful communication. My friend is committed to arithmetical theses, while I stand on my tip-toes. He believes or disbelieves in those theses, while I doubt them. He who is committed cannot suppose, and he who supposes cannot be committed.

Suppositions can neither be right nor wrong, because they are not concerned with what is, but with what may be. "Truth" is a relationship between what is and what is said about it, and this relationship does not apply to suppositions. Instead, there are good and bad suppositions. This essay, which intends to offer several tip-toe views of the future, will be a series of suppositions. It therefore will be neither right nor wrong, but more or less good and more or less bad, and this is, of course, a problem. Because the categories "true and false" are neat, and the categories "good and bad" are fuzzy. The reason ist that virtualities are not neat like hard facts, but spongy.

There is a further question: how can I distinguish between a good and a bad supposition? The futurizing instruments have the answer: a supposition is the better the more it is probable to become real. This is why those instruments simulate the future, and then eliminate, one by one, all the less probable suppositions, until they only show good suppositions. This is called "probability calculus", but it does not entirely prevent the terrorist from jumping on the desk of the programmer. Probability calculus tries to approach truth, and it admits that it can never reach it. It is a fiction which does not want to be one, but which admits that it is one.

But this is not the only way one may distinguish between good and bad sup-

positions. One may hold,.(and this is what the following essay will do), that a supposition is the better, the more it is surprising. It is better, because it shows virtualities which cannot be seen without it. This is of course to say that it is an improbable supposition, because virtualities unseen must be far away from the present. If we consider this we can see why futurized futures are so insipid: they are probable, while man is an animal who feeds on improbabilities, in order to render them real. Since this essay will be made by a man, and not by an instrument, it will consist of improbable suppositions, and any critical effort to prove that the are improbable, (and therefore bad), will miss the point altogether.

It goes without saying: this whole discussion of suppositions has to do with the relationship between art and science. Suppositions go on in the gray zone between art, (the realm of the false), and science, (the realm of the real). This distinction is of course utter nonsense. There can be no science without suppositions. Newton is wrong in saying "hypotheses non fingo", (I do not **feign** my suppositions). What he means to say is that he is feigning probable suppositions. On the other hand there can be no art without something real to start from. There are three postures which one can assume if one inhabits the gray zone between art and science. One may tend toward science, (like in science fiction). One may tend toward the improbable, (like in surrealism). Or one may try to pull art and science together, and thus solidify the gray zone. This is the intention of this essay: it will be a sort of surrealistic science fiction. Because it will rest on the following supposition: The distinction between art and science will become ever more difficult to make, and we shall all inhabit the gray zone between them.

Thus this essay will consist of a series of improbable science fictions. It hopes to be surprising. And it says so now, in this introduction, in order to whet the curiosity of the reader. Curiosity is what has us stand on tip-toes. Another word for "future" is "adventure", (that what is coming). Therefore curiosity is quit unlike commitment. Commitment is interested in the future for the sake of the present. Curiosity is interested in the future for the sake of adventure. Which does not exclude, of course,that a terrorist may not jump out from curiosity into the present. Which is another way to say that curiosity is a manifestation of that absurd knot of contradictions called "freedom". This essay wants to serve freedom. Now sup pose that this is the only possible way to serve freedom in the present situation, where we have committed people on the one side, futurologists on the other side, and and a vast majority of indifferent people in the middle. If you can hold on to this supposition for the duration of this reading, this essay has served its purpose.