<p style="text-align: center;" align="center">Questions by Russell Blackford, Sylvia Kelso, and Van Ikin</p> <p>Dr Darko Suvin F.R.S.C. was a full Professor of English at McGill University, Montreal until his retirement in 1999. His distinguished career - as academic, sf critic, writer, and poet - includes co-editing the journal Science-Fiction Studies from its inception until 1980 (after which time he was a contributing editor) and producing three books which the Clute/Nicholls Encyclopedia of Science Fiction describes as "one of the most formidable and sustained theoretical attempts to define sf as a genre": Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (1979), Victorian Science Fiction in the UK: The Discourses of Knowledge and of Power (1983), Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction (1988). Suvin played a major role in fostering academic interest in Science Fiction in the USA, and is credited with introducing the concept of "cognition" to modern SF criticism. He was awarded the coveted Pilgrim Award (for services to SF scholarship) in 1979.</p> <p>The following "colloquium" arose when Darko Suvin kindly agreed to be interviewed for Science Fiction. Russell Blackford and Sylvia Kelso joined the editor in submitting a series of questions by email, and Professor Suvin responded as set out below, sometimes answering related questions together. </p> <p>The following were included amongst the questions were put to Darko Suvin:</p> <p>Ikin: Let us begin by getting to know something about Darko Suvin as person. In your first email, which sparked this interview, you happened to say �my 1st violin is theatre�. Is all your expertise in SF and literary theory a destiny chosen for you, rather than by you? What started Darko Suvin on the path toward the pinnacle of international 20th-Century SF criticism?</p> <p>Blackford: As a cultural theorist you have been notable for your overt political engagement, and I'd like to ask you some large questions about how you see the relationships among science, politics and the work of theorists in areas such as language, literature and general culture. Two contrasting images that come to mind of politically engaged intellectuals in these fields are those of Chomsky and Foucault, who notoriously showed little connection with each other when they met in the 1970s. Does either image attract you in any sense? </p> <p>Kelso: "Novum is as Novum Does" suggests a shift in the view of SF originally constructed in Metamorphoses, as a rationally based, cognitively organised, "intellectual" genre, implicitly superior to the less intellectually rigorous form that is now sold as fantasy. Having in mind the proviso that contemporary fantasy is almost as heterogeneous as SF, has your view of the former genre changed with your re-assessment of SF?</p> <p>Blackford: More recently, there appears to be a division in the SF community about the relentless philosophical materialism of Greg Egan's work, in particular, but also in stories such as Brian Stableford's "The Pipes of Pan", which seems to suggest that human nature itself will be changed quite fundamentally by a future science--and that this fact (as Stableford evidently sees it) must be accepted. Some would question whether this sort of Homo proteus vision of the future (to use Edward O. Wilson's term) is not deeply offensive to morality in some way. Politically and morally, what do you

make of such transhuman and post-human scenarios?</p> <p> </p> <p>Ikin: Finally, looking at the field of SF criticism as it stands at present, what do you see as its most significant weakness or oversight? What are the aspects which we are most pressingly still struggling to grasp? What specifics would you like to see addressed in the next few years?</p> <p> </p> <p>Excerpts from some of Darko Suvin�s comments and answers:</p> <p>�...the most important shaping came from my mother, a strong and worldwise personality, who from a young bourgeois lady before WW2 evolved into somebody saving her nuclear family during the war under three Fascist states (Croatia, Germany and Italy) and a chief secretary of a research institute - one of those really running the place - in socialist Yugoslavia.�</p> <p>�... I joined the still mysterious and hush-hush Young Communist League in high school, and in 1948, during Tito's break with Stalin, I was as it were drafted - protesting my unworthiness - into a Communist Party preparing a mass basis for that tough struggle (which also meant that if the Russians occupied Yugoslavia, as was quite possible, I would have been a good candidate for one of the grapes on the city lamp-posts). I did get, as I discovered later, both into the KGB and the CIA files at the time. Well, you sheltered and cossetted people from the upper "Western" 10% of the globe can maybe see this is a quite normal - or indeed an extraordinarily lucky - East (or better Southeast) European biography: a German bomb fell 50 meters from me, and if their technoscience had been up to the Vietnam War standards (never mind today), I wouldn't have gone on to "the pinnacle of international 20th-Century criticism" as Van Ikin flatteringly puts it, or anyplace else but a small rocky grave for my pre-teen fragments. Living on borrowed time your whole life - and seeing that other children like me in Korea or Vietnam or Angola or indeed the black ghettoes of the US of A may not be so lucky - wonderfully clears the mind.�</p> <p>�... And how did I get to SF? Not by way of Sumatran jungles like Brian Aldiss or the skyscraper bureaucracies of New York like Fred Pohl or the campus oases into which a dying Native wanders like Ursula Le Guin (to mention only three people I know well enough to speculate biographically about), but by way of having lived in say six years (1940-46) in 5 regimes: a monarchist despotism, several Fascist militarized states, the "Western" allies in Italy 1943-45 with some insight in the corrupt business of profiting from feeding hungry Italy, the peasant communist revolution in postwar Zagreb.... And I have no words, even after a lifetime, to describe the outrageous sense of annihilating psychophysical anxiety and heart-constricting persecution a small boy in fear for his existence can feel when subjected to the monstrous threats from which the Revolution was the only salvation. Thence I guess my assiduous reading of utopias from More on (eventually SF from Lucian on) to Wells, of course preceded at age eleven or so by every European child's hefty dose of Jules Verne. I wrote an extrapolative mini-utopia of a united classless world for a high-school homework in I think 1948 (just an anatomy, I fear, though I think it did have a point-of-view narrator zooming around daringly in an airplane) which may still exist among the school papers my wife Nena retrieved last year from a friend in Zagreb.� </p> <p>�... The welfare-state transfer of wealth from one class to another goes on in spades but for the rich. The latest report to have percolated into public domain tells of the US

Congress and FCC handing $70,000,000,000.000 (yes, seventy> billion> dollars) to the TV conglomerates in free space on public airwaves ("Bandwidth"). No wonder the number of US-dollar millionaires has from 1980 to 1988 risen from 574,000 to around 1,300,000 and of billionaires 1982-96 from 13 to 149, so that by now the "global billionaires' club" of 450 members has a total wealth much larger than that of a group of low income countries comprising 56% of the world population. Whole generations, as well as the planetary environment for centuries into the future, are being mortgaged to an arrogant fraction of 1% on the top and a faceless world money market.�</p> <p>�... Posthuman? It seemed d��vu: Foucault at end of the 1960s? and then the interminable tomes of everybody else in Paris recycling their Nietzsche, best in the Guattari-Deleuze hundreds of pages jumping from plateau to plateau amid the playful rhizomes? Well, there's a limited number of fashions, so after recycling those of (say) the 1920s and 1930s why not advance to the haute couture of the 1960s - especially when you can disguise this in the shiny new material of teflonized cyberspace when walking down the catwalk and hoping to rake in millions from the New Yorker yuppies? So where are now the discussions about the death of SF after the Hiroshima bomb, or after landing on the Moon, or after the end of US protests from Selma to the Kent State University shootings (say 1961-73, the true Golden Age of US SF in that quarter-revolution)? But where are the snows of yesteryear? What will you discuss, Russell, when you get (as I hope you do) an equally brilliant panel in 2002? I'd lay you a little bet: not "Posthuman Nature in SF"....�</p>