

# *More After More*

*Essays Commemorating  
the Five-Hundredth  
Anniversary of  
Thomas More's  
Utopia*

EDITED BY

KSENIA OLKUSZ  
MICHAŁ KŁOSIŃSKI  
KRZYSZTOF M. MAJ

FRONTIERS of NOWHERE





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## *Preface*

The book *More After More. Essays Commemorating the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia* is the first volume of the new publishing series "Frontiers of Nowhere" designed by Facta Ficta Research Centre in Kraków ([factaficta.org/en](http://factaficta.org/en)) to probe the boundaries of fictional world-building and contemporary narrative theories. *More After More* summarizes also three years of *His Master's Voice* research project run by the editors of this volume and featuring three conferences in utopian and dystopian studies (in 2014, 2015, 2016), supported by Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Polish Studies as well as AGH University of Science and Technology's Faculty of Humanities. In the special 2016 issue of the esteemed *Utopian Studies* journal, *On the Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's "Utopia"*, the project was recognized in the report *Utopian Studies in Poland: A Preliminary Survey* by a Prof. Artur Blaim from the University of Gdańsk, whom we would like to express our many thanks for such kind support. Additionally, our project has greatly benefited from help and guidance offered to us by Prof. Gregory Claeys, Prof. Anna Łebkowska, Prof. Barbara Gąciarz, Prof. Zbigniew Pasek and Dr Danuta Glondys. It is also the reviewer of the volume, Prof. Paweł Frelik, whom we owe our gratitude for taking care of high-quality, in-depth reviews of all chapters, which have greatly helped to deliver the very best value from the contributed manuscripts. Last but not least, those successes would not be possible without the attendees of *His Master's Voice* annual conferences, whose promising presentations were selected for further development as chapters for *More After More*. Thank you all and also to those of you whom we could not have included in this short list—you really help us shaping a true brave new world in the contemporary humanities.

The last edition of *His Master's Voice* conference, *More After More. Utopias & Dystopias 1516-2016*, as well as the publication of this book, were supported by Villa Decius Association, greatly involved in a plethora of successful research projects partnered with the Visegrad Group, as well as by Utopian Studies Society's international

initiative “Utopia 500” ([utopia500.net](http://utopia500.net)). We are proud to co-operate with people from both the academia and its outsides who support a community-driven spirit of research and work on transgressing the boundaries that lie foundations for walls and barriers—which are nothing but corner stones for future totalitarian dystopias and intellectual regimes.

Correspondingly, *More After More*, as well as the series “Frontiers of Nowhere”, is meant to be published in full open access and distributed freely in multiformat, as we believe that the current model of high-cost (for publishers, authors, and readers alike) academic publishing creates a false sense of elitism by restricting the access to knowledge only to the affordable few. Utopian studies deprived of the openness are an unintended contradiction—they rather shape a dystopia by walling off from the outside and enjoying a splendid isolation for a small group of beneficiaries.

We hope that this volume will grant the readers an insight to contemporary interdisciplinary research in utopian and dystopian studies across media, both in their philosophical and artistic dimension—and that it will inspire more research in this relatively small, but important branch of humanities.

*Editors*

## INTRODUCTION

### *Utopia at 500*

GREGORY CLAEYS

The little book we now familiarly refer to as *Utopia* was published five hundred years ago in Leuven, the capital of what is today the Flemish province of Brabant in Belgium<sup>1</sup>. As a work of fantasy it has had an astonishingly successful history. As both the no-place and the good-place, then eventually perhaps also the place-one-should-not-go, the dream which becomes a nightmare when we try to realise it, utopia has become inscribed in our vocabulary and our ideas. It means many things to many people, yet few would deny the power of the concept. So it is worth briefly revisiting just how this has mutated over the centuries.

Firstly then to Sir (or Saint) Thomas and his ideas. The text is presented to us in the form of a dialogue in which the central narrative about the society called Utopia appears in Book Two, when the travels of Raphael Hythloday are related to a rather sceptical Thomas More. (But which, we immediately ask, is the real More in this schizophrenic division?). More commences *Utopia* with an account of the desperation of the poor in the England of his day, in Book One. We are quickly made aware by the mention of Amerigo Vespucci that recent travellers to the new world have brought back fantastic but compelling tales of their discoveries. Some hinted that conditions were akin to the golden age of Greek mythology, the very opposite, thus,

<sup>1</sup> The substance of this introduction was presented at *His Master's Voice* annual conference at the Villa Decius in Krakow in March 2016. I am grateful to Ksenia Olkusz, Michał Kłosiński and Krzysztof M. Maj in particular for their comments at this meeting.

of contemporary England. More would have known of Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's *De Orbe Novo* (1511), a description of the natives of Cuba as having community of goods, and there were other assorted rumours of this type. Few would today describe Utopia's inhabitants as noble savages. But *Utopia* does appear to be just such a tale: it projects an island lying somewhere in the equatorial regions, founded both by shipwreck and the wise design of the great mariner Utopus many centuries earlier. When we recall that Columbus thought the earthly paradise lay just beyond the mouth of the Orinoco river More's postulate seems if anything less fantastic.

The constitution and mores of Utopia appear to owe more to classical antiquity than to the customs of the aboriginal Americans. Yet their peculiarities betray three features which some contemporaries supposed did define native life in the new world, and which have been attached to our image of utopia ever since. These are: community of goods; an apparent contempt for gold and silver and ostentatious pride generally; and the abolition of money. The discovery of the new world from one viewpoint could indicate that the turning away from apostolic communism had been a tragic error. As we are all aware, the travel literature which served as a backdrop to More's text—and most notably the tradition of Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*—was replete with fantastic lands. The names More gives, firstly to Utopia itself, then to its capital, Amaurot (obscure or unknown) suggests a satire on this tradition as such. But then the introduction of Vespucci returns us to a realistic set of presumptions. Yet Utopia, far from being the perfect society with which it is still too often confused, is not even the best possible society, given the prevalence of war and slavery in particular.

Whilst the ethos of friendship and trust which defines Utopia is always commendable, it is also by no means obvious that communism is the answer to the woes of England as described in Book One, where More laments the poor are being hung *en masse* as great landlords drive them off the land to enclose the commons for highly profitable sheep raising. Communism is the theme which appears to bring the Utopians close to Apostolic Christianity, or to being more Christian, in other words, than More's contemporaries. But communism is also what More, on balance, finds least plausible in Hythloday's tale: how, he asks near the end, can these Utopians really be motivated without the ownership of property? And if this regime of common endeavour works here, he hints as the book closes as to his scepticism as to whether Europeans could live this way, converting from their opulence and love of pleasure to this superior Platonic and Christian life. This vision remains to More a tantalising



and fascinating one. But to many readers the two islands of Britain and Utopia have too little in common to imagine that the model is meant to be imitated.

*Utopia* of course has several other leading themes which merit mention. Its inhabitants divide their time between fifty-four almost identical towns and cultivation in the countryside. They dress, eat, work, and behave in remarkably similar ways. They combat vice by a regime of near-complete transparency, leaving no space in which crime and vice might flourish. In Utopia, we are told, there are “no wine bars, no pubs, no whorehouses. There are no opportunities for wickedness, no hiding places; there is no scope for conspiring in secret. They are always under the observation of their fellow citizens and have no choice but either to work as hard as the next person, or else engage in respectable pastimes” (More 1999: 108). We cannot travel outside our neighbourhood without passports. We must wear the same plain clothes. We must exchange our houses every ten years. We cannot avoid labour. We all go to bed at the same time (8 p.m.), and never, under penalty of slavery, with someone else’s wife or husband. In More’s time, for much of the population, such restraints would not have seemed overly unreasonable. For modern readers, however, Utopia appears to rely upon relentless transparency, severe regulation, and the curtailment of privacy. In both its external and internal relations, thus, it seems perilously dystopian<sup>2</sup>.

Utopia, then, is not really a fun place. It is a safe place. It offers repose. But the price is restraint. Moreover, Utopia remains an imperial power. When overpopulated it sends out colonies, seizing the uncultivated land of indigenous peoples, and driving out “any who resist them” (More 1999: 103). Well-paid mercenaries keep enemies at bay, the Utopians’ much-vaunted contempt for gold here standing starkly in contrast with the great value their treasure has when expended on slaying their enemies. Utopia’s peace and plenitude now seem to rest upon war, empire and the ruthless suppression of others, or in other words, their dystopia. And there are other limits to their generosity. The Utopians are tolerant in most matters of religion. But they despise those who deny the immortality of the soul because “but for the fear of punishment, they would have nothing but contempt for the laws and customs of society” (More 1999: 147) Intolerance is the price we pay for the purity, homogeneity

<sup>2</sup> These paradoxes are explored in my *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Claeys 2016).

and closeness of the group, as More made all too evident in his (nonetheless consistent) persecution of Protestants in his own day.

Nonetheless perhaps More's text is just an entertaining story. Generations of scholars have reached no fixed opinion as to how seriously More meant us to take these themes. There is much jest and satire mixed up in the text. There is little doubt that More regarded much of Utopian life as ideal, but much more than he thought that most of it was attainable by most of us. Yet More's intentions, and a close contextual reading of *Utopia*, are perhaps secondary to most students today by comparison with the influence of its central ideas.

The most common reading of the text, from Vasco de Quiroga, who adapted Utopia as a blueprint to establish a community near Mexico City in the 1530s<sup>3</sup> to Robert Southey to Karl Kautsky and beyond, has been the realistic one, in which Hythloday serves as prophet of the communist ideal. The reasons for this are not hard to discern. The success of utopia coincided with a decline in the belief that the terrestrial paradise actually lay somewhere in this world. It also overlapped with repeated eruptions of the sentiments, often assuming the form of a hysterical megalomania, which we associate with millenarianism, the prospect of Christ's return, the overthrow of Satan, and the establishment of divine rule.

These have a lengthy pedigree. The millenarian wing of the utopian ideal dated as far back as the twelfth century vision of Joachim of Fiore, who divided history into three stages, those of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and for whom the third, paradisaical period, where there would be no work, wealth or poverty, and no food, each having evolved into a spiritual being. In 1936 Karl Mannheim and in 1947 Norman Cohn were amongst the first to identify the sixteenth-century Anabaptists with the secularisation of millenarian ideas, heralding the great utopian schemes and movements of the twentieth century (Mannheim 1936: 191-192). The seventeenth century echoed constantly with utopian schemes, plans, ideas and sentiments, from Bacon through Winstanley and Harrington to Bellers, Penn and Saint-Pierre. In the 18th century the belief in an original equality was powerfully reinforced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular. Then, in the nineteenth century, faith in a future heaven also began to wane, and with it millenarianism, which had thus necessarily to be secularised. The desire for a much better state for humanity became naturally fixated on

<sup>3</sup> The story is told in Toby Green. *Thomas More's Magician. A Novel Account of Utopia in Mexico* (2004).

the real present and future, on this world. Now, as Henri de Saint-Simon famously proclaimed the Golden Age of mankind lay not “behind us, but before; it lies in the perfection of the social order” (de Saint-Simon 1976: 98).

Utopia thus came to embody the principle of equality, and of the purity of the group defined by its beliefs, which were formerly represented by Christianity. There is a reasonable case here for seeing what Reinhart Koselleck termed the “temporalization of Utopia”, “the metamorphosis of utopia into the philosophy of history”, where the “imagined perfection of the formerly spatial counterworld is temporalized” in the eighteenth century, as a key stage in millenarian secularisation (Koselleck 2002: 85, 88). Yet there remained, and perhaps still remains, much confusion between the millennium and utopia. The leading communist in the French Revolution, Gracchus Babeuf, aimed to abolish “all frontiers, fences, walls, locks on doors, all disputes, trials, all theft, murder, all crime, all Tribunals, prisons, gallows, torture, jealousy, insatiability, pride, deceit, duplicity, finally all vice”—a “classic millennial vision” of boundless felicity, in Richard Landes’ phrase (2011: 290). But utopia was a condition of bounded felicity, of restraint and self-restraint. What the “millennial shock wave” of the French Revolution shared with utopia was a suddenly exploding egalitarianism, described in terms of the mass hysteria of the crowd by Gustave Le Bon, which reverberated through European history for the next two centuries (Landes 2011: 288).

The stages on the road to the present will be familiar to most readers of this journal. In the early modern period the utopian idea, as we might conceive it today, was often still identified with the provision of security and stability through the creation of institutions which once formed became immutable. Satires aside, those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary utopias which reflected More’s aims seriously tended to regulate luxury through sumptuary laws restricting personal consumption and adornment, and by limiting property ownership in land especially (James Burgh’s *Account of the Cessares* from 1764 is a typical example). In Britain in particular, many literary texts reflect the aims of a republican tradition defined in this epoch especially by the works of James Harrington, whose *Oceana* of 1656 offered a loosely-fictionalised constitution enjoining greater social equality and political representation. Utopian republicanism had by 1750 become a distinctive position, going beyond the notion of an agrarian law to community of goods. But in practice authors of fictional utopias toyed with many variants on these themes, including land nationalisation (Thomas Spence). The most transparent and rigidly controlled of these

schemes generally however have little appeal to modern readers, who expect that utopia and liberty are somehow natural partners in the first instance, and disagree that liberty is a just price to pay for equality.

The French Revolution of course represents the first great watershed in the modern development of the utopian idea into this direction. Here a republican constitution accompanied an ideology based upon the “rights of man” which some have assumed possessed a markedly utopian dimension (see Moyn 2010). The shift towards a much more radical ideal of equality which the Jacobin coup of 1792 produced also echoed the central theme we identify with the tradition as such. And beyond this there were new, massive popular festivals, an ethos of increasingly social transparency, and much else that reflected the utopian impulse. But here there loomed, too, the possibility that utopian aims might have dystopian results, with the emergence of Jacobin Terror under Robespierre (1793-1794). But the Revolution in general also indicated that crucial trend towards seeing utopian aims as realisable imminently in a future-to-come, rather than as being the discovered vestiges of a lost golden age or state of nature or a tropical paradise, or a future heaven to be achieved. Utopia now became eudaimonia, the good time which is not yet but upon which we are advancing. The modern concept of progress, an indefinite process of becoming better and more perfect, our own most cherished ideal, though sadly on its deathbed today, had emerged. Now we would remake mankind, not in the image of Original Sin, but in that of millenarian felicity.

The story of utopia’s advancement from this time is a familiar one to most of us, for we are its adherents and beneficiaries to an impressive degree. The main fork in this road came of course with the revolution of 1848 and even more that of 1917, when the communist version of progress came finally to offer itself as the great alternative to the supposed free-market variant offered by liberalism. A general course of increasing perfectibility through opulence, the extension of life, the remaking of the human body and the relief of pain might clearly fly as a utopian programme. But the enhanced Morean variant of this, achieving all this and adding the elimination of crime, for instance, was clearly inherited by Marxism. This became the dominant oppositionist ideology of the twentieth century. Even before the Bolshevik Revolution, however, the immense controversy surrounding Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1887) indicated that other collectivist variants on the management of modern economies could give Marx some competition in the ideological arena.

Marx himself of course denied that his own schemes were in any sense “utopian”, and castigated his socialist predecessors for refusing to harness the proletariat to the revolutionary means required to introduce the new system. But in its expectation of dramatic improvements in human behaviour engineered by a collectivist organisation of property Marx in fact merits the utopian title if anything rather more than those who supposed such achievements might be workable in the small-scale community. And even Marx remained intrigued in his final years by the prospect that modern communism might indeed have antecedents in the Russian *mir* and other forms of primitive communalism.

Nonetheless it was precisely in such communities that the nineteenth century saw utopia unfolding. To spend a day in one, most notably in the Fourierist *phalans-tère*, was, in principle, to encounter a varied routine of multiple forms of work, adjusted to our aptitudes. There would be five or so meals; cultural activities; and a Court of Love assuring us all a minimum of sexual gratification akin to a living wage. Here is no languor, no lethargy, no world-weariness, only *joi de vivre*. The Owenites, the Cabetists, not to say the Shakers, Etzlerites, Harmonists and a hundred strands of religious sectarians, offered many variants on these themes, though Fourier doubtless promised more fun than the rest. All, however, offered security, a *Gemeinschaft* variant on community, or what I call “enhanced sociability”, by contrast to the increasingly alienated, insecure urban society which was rapidly emerging (Claeys 2013). In this vision of the idealised village or small town there is often joy, celebration, creativity, even individuality, not merely security, equality and a sense of greater community. Trust and familiarity are permitted because the scale remains small. Politics remain personal because no coercive state is necessary. William Morris, amongst others, would imagine that even nations could be remade along the lines of such principles.

And yet, with a few notable exceptions (the Amish, the Hutterites, the two million Mennonites), many of these communitarian efforts failed, often very quickly. But the exceptions here also prove that communism does work on a small scale. The lack of bloodshed generally in so-called “utopian” socialism validates such experiments to a considerable degree, while hinting that the application of their principles to a large-scale, highly industrialised, urban context, at a national level, may well prove their undoing. Both Bellamy and Wells nonetheless projected national and world-states, respectively, in which both technological innovation, change and, par-

ticularly in Wells's case, individuation were combined with the earlier goals of utopia. Their visions proved immensely influential in the decades from the 1890s to 1914, when the progress of the civilised world in general came suddenly to a crashing halt. We should remember generally here too, however, that the more equal societies are the more trust can be expanded on a larger scale. Where everyone is aware that most are sufficiently well off not to resort to crime paranoia is minimised and general social relaxation is enhanced.

The twentieth-century engagement with utopia was multi-faceted. On the one hand Bolshevism proved a disastrous model for a more egalitarian variant on modernisation which ultimately swallowed some eighty million lives, most notably in the USSR, China and, proportionately worst of all, Cambodia. Many on the left in particular do not like to confront such facts. But such unwillingness falls little short of intellectual dishonesty: such a confrontation must be an indispensable prerequisite for continuing the study and promotion of utopia. Apologies for Stalinism, the refusal to acknowledge the nature and devastating impact of left "totalitarianism", do nothing to serve utopianism, and indeed undermine it. For this cedes to utopia's critics, most notably from Hayek, Popper and Talmon onwards, much ground which might be contested, but refusing to acknowledge that the pursuit of some utopias has been disastrous, while that of many others has not.

On the other hand the tradition of progress which utopia helped to produce opened up vistas of scientific and technological improvement which assured greater health, longevity and (we suppose) happiness for large numbers of people. As the century closed, however, the spectre of totalitarian dystopia gave way to a far more humbling confrontation with nature itself, as environmental destruction came to pose an even greater threat to humanity's long term prospects than either politics or technology had previously done. Yet the scope for utopian thinking, for imagining long term futures, is consequently more necessary than ever before. Utopia precisely provides the possibility of leaping forwards to envision which futures might be attained and which might be avoided. In perilous times this is a tradition which we need more than ever.

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The twenty-six essays which compose this collection cover a substantial range of both historical and theoretical themes, indicating at the least that the utopian idea

thrives today across a number of disciplines as well as in domains (like computer games) which are themselves of recent origin and which indicate that utopia can also be addressed as an aspect of the internal psychic fantasy world. There is some consideration here of the lengthy and complex historical relationship between utopian ideals and religion. There is some effort to reconsider practical efforts to found actual communities which embody utopian ideals. Several authors revisit the emotional substrata of utopian aspiration rendered accessible through music in particular. Literature is here nonetheless the chief focus, in keeping with the form of Thomas More's original text and that of the tradition which has imitated and satirised it. The themes represented here mirror in literary form the dystopian drift in the external world discussed above. Many of the leading authors of post-totalitarian dystopian fiction are included here, notably (to name but a few) Margaret Atwood, Robert Heinlein, J.G. Ballard, David Foster Wallace and, most recently, Michel Houellebecq. Within these treatments, the possibilities are explored that dystopia may emerge from or assume the form of racist regimes, environmental destruction, corporate dictatorship, or religious fundamentalism, or some combination of these factors. Such potential outcomes of modernity need, the authors of this volume also assure us, to be balanced against the utopian promise which bodily remodelling entertains, and the possibility of longevity which scientific and technical advances encapsulate as the epitome of modern individualist utopianism. From the first essay onwards, we frequently revisit the theme of scientific novelty and improvement as simultaneously both an (e)utopian and a dystopian theme. From this viewpoint the post-totalitarian literary dystopia not only overlaps more closely with real world developments than many of its pre-totalitarian emanations. It also claims a different pedigree, looking, for instance, more to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) for inspiration than to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

These trends also indicate, however, a declining interest in contemporary utopianism as a real-world trend. Scramble though we may to clutch at the straws of contemporary populist radicalism, the general consensus not only after 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet system but equally after the financial crisis of 2008 is that the left has no serious alternative vision of capitalism to offer voters. Images of the ideal model small-scale community, or even of the ideal world-state *à la* Wells, remain now the stuff of utopian museography. As ideals of our future course of action or development they have seemingly little or no relevance. And for all those who herald the hypertransparency of the internet as emboldening a new generation of cyber-

citizens, others lament the vapid populism and undignified anonymous abuse which the same medium promotes. Yet we recall, as more than one author here reminds us, that Thomas More strictly envisioned an entirely confined utopia—"gated", we might say today—cut off from the rest of the world and contingent only upon its own devices, not the accession of humanity to its values. Herein lies the paradoxical relationship between small-scale communitarianism, or even small-nation utopianism, and those movements, most notably Marxism, which have insisted on the inevitability of a shared consensus of values for humanity as a whole. Whether the latter, larger vision remains a viable proposition readers may judge for themselves. Whether, at the other extreme, utopia can now only lie in the hyperinteriority of the psychic world, or in a shared virtual community rooted in similar premises, may yet be another answer to these problems. The essays presented here assist us in probing further to ascertain what value utopia retains for us today.



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*Evantropia and Dysantropia:  
A Possible New Stage in the History of Utopias*

LUCAS MISSERI

## Introduction

The term utopia was coined five centuries ago but to some extent the utopian imagination is something that every civilisation has embraced. A utopia is *grosso modo* a normative image of a society based on particular needs—and the possible solutions to those needs—from the point of view of a collective or individual subject. This subject is limited by his or her time-space coordinates: language, history and culture in general. Utopias usually replace each other and an idealistic dream in period  $T_1$  becomes a nightmare in  $T_2$  because needs and resources change in time and space. Such changes are unavoidable, so utopian subjects become aware of the limitations of static images. Therefore, utopian scholars have marked another meaning for the term which is a broader one (Cioranescu 1972: 21-22). Utopia, in such broader sense, is an approach to social problems based on a method using imagination to provide a model *in actu*—it would be more accurate to say *in fictio*—to convince contemporary fellow countrymen to apply some policies to fulfil their general needs.

Thus, on the one hand, a utopia is a particular image corresponding to a *Zeitgeist* and, on the other hand, it is the method the utopian subject has employed to build that image. This method can be replicated and even aimed at improving or discarding previous utopias. Utopian images often compete with each other, but at the same time they share some traits, allowing us to distinguish epochal trends which

represent the list of needs that particular people consider most urgent and valuable. For this reason, sometimes utopias have competed with religious and mythical images. But the utopian method is a secular one and different utopian trends can be understood as progressive steps in a process of secularisation. Herbert George Wells is considered to be the first one who recognised this feature which still is being looked back over by sociologists, as the utopian method is considered “an active device in reflexive and collective deliberations about possible and desirable futures” (Levitas 2010: 530).

The above clarifications are crucial to this chapter as it will address the question: What is the contemporary utopian trend in liberal Western societies? The answer should fulfil the following requirements: (1) being representative of contemporary utopian subjects; (2) being a normative social image or set of images; and (3) being compatible with the process of secularisation initiated in the sixteenth century with the utopian self-awareness often referred as the utopian genre<sup>1</sup>.

The hypothesis presented and supported in this chapter states that there is a new trend in the history of utopias which I suggest naming evantropia<sup>2</sup>—the name has been developed as a result of the contemporary focus on the scientific goal of the physical improvement of humankind. This neologism has been used for what contemporary transhumanist philosophers have called “human enhancement” (Savulescu, Sandberg & Kahane 2011: 3). The novelty of this trend lies in the fact that the utopian imagination is not necessary focused on a new and better place, time or state of mind, but on a new body. This new and improved body can be organic (clones), cybernetic and organic (cyborgs), or just a consciousness attached to a device—the brain emulation so-called mind “uploading or “downloading” (Sandberg & Bostrom 2008: 7). As it is put forward in the chapter, this new trend can be conceived as a new stage in the process of secularisation initiated with Renaissance eutopias.

<sup>1</sup> For a profound description on the beginnings of utopia as a literary genre see Trousson (1995) and Blaim (2013).

<sup>2</sup> These come from ancient Greek terms: on the one hand, the adverb *eu* which means “well in all senses, justly, fairly; favourable, happily” (Pabón 2000:260), and on the other hand, *anthropos* “man, human being; in plural the men, the humankind” (Pabón 2000:51).

## Utopia as Image and Method

Utopia is a complex concept. Not only has multiple meanings but it is also the subject of different academic disciplines. Broadly defined, utopia refers to a waking dream or, as Lyman Tower Sargent puts it forward defining utopianism, utopias are samples of “social dreaming” (Sargent 1994: 3). Utopian imagination includes both positive (dreams) and negative (nightmares) feelings about the dreamers’ society. As Fernando Aínsa has remarked (1999: 37) it is possible to analyse the concept from a dialectical perspective in which utopias oppose factuality, presenting either good or bad images in opposition. On the other hand—as Cioranescu (1972) and Levitas (2010) have stated—utopias represent a method based on societal models imagined by individual or collective subjects with the goal of criticizing their own societies in order to improve them. That criticism can become a project of social change, usually named “practical utopias” (Servier 1996: 13), or can be just a cathartic expression—so-called “utopias of escape” (Mumford 1922: 15). But a utopia itself needs something to be compared to, an image to overcome with a new improved one. As Aínsa insists, this is because utopias themselves are “counter-images” of our daily world (1999: 37). In Thomas More’s book these two requirements of utopian thought are conveyed in what is now the archetypical feature of the genre: a comparison between the factual society and the utopian society (More 1992: 99)<sup>3</sup>.

Nonetheless, since More coined the word “utopia”, there have been many interpretations of what he meant by that neologism. More wrote his *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo reipublicæ statu deque nova insula Utopia* in the playful spirit of Renaissance humanism, and his intellectual friends contributed to the book with letters, alphabets, poems and other ideas. The word “utopia” was born of collective work, so to speak. Among the names which More considered as possible options for the island were: *Abraxas*—a magical name in the Gnostic tradition (Allen 1967: 161), and *Nusquama*—a Latin equivalent to “nowhere”. However, as Fátima Vieira believes (2010: 4), More chose “utopia” probably because of its productive ambiguity: it can be interpreted both *(o)utopia* “no-place” and *(e)utopia*<sup>4</sup> “a good place”.

<sup>3</sup> In the first part of his book More offers a description of the main problems of the factual society he lived in, e.g. the relationship between the system of enclosures and the increasing poverty in England. In the second part of the book he provided the product of his imagination in a counter-factual society aimed at solving these problems.

<sup>4</sup> These derive from the Greek adverbs *eu* (see footnote 2 in this chapter) and *ou* “no” (Pabón 2000:438) plus a modification of the noun *topos* which means “place, site, position; country, territory, location, district, region” (Pabón 2000: 587).

This ambiguity pervades the whole history of the concept. Utopia can be understood originally as a place that does not exist and as a good place at the same time; in other words, the latter meaning allows to consider it as the fictional idea of a good society. These utopian images are important because they play the role of normative models to judge factual societies and provide blueprints for their replacements, although these models should be flexible and modifiable in order to avoid totalitarianism (Sargent 1994: 24).

In consequence of the ambiguity between a dreamed society and its non-existence, More left a problematic legacy to utopian thought from the very coinage of the term. Are utopias by definition possible or impossible? Here comes the distinction I want to stress: utopias can be considered either as a fictional image of a society or a method of thinking through social challenges. Both ways of considering utopias—as image or as method—share common traits. The most crucial seems to be that an imagined or evaluated aspect is a conception of a good or at least a just society. For this reason utopias are not the same as myths or other fictions such as robinsonades, fantastic or fairy tales. The utopia of More is an image of a better society; it is set in a still unknown continent—the Americas<sup>5</sup>. For some scholars, it is not possible to interpret More as aiming towards future utopian projects because he was considering the utopia in relation to his contemporaneity (Heller 1980: 7). Also, there is an interpretation called “the Roman Catholic interpretation” of Raymond W. Chambers—a scholar and biographer of More. This interpretation explains that the possible objective of More was to use the mirroring feature of his utopian image to show his contemporaries how shameful it could be to find happy austere pagans living in better conditions than Christians (Elliot 1963: 317).

In contrast to many interpretations of the foundational work of More, the word became something else after his death. Firstly, it was considered as denoting a literary genre. So, for some scholars utopias are merely samples of a genre founded by More. They share some plot features such as an island, a traveller-narrator, a long dialogue, a comparison between the island and the city or country of the author. Some scholars also include verisimilitude as a requirement to consider a book as a part of the utopian literary genre (Cioranescu 1972: 30). This is, among many more

<sup>5</sup> In English usually the Americas are considered two different continents: North America and South America. However, I follow the Spanish tradition of considering the Americas as only one continent. But I have written ‘the Americas’ to avoid the misunderstanding between America as the continent and America as the country: the U.S.A.

reasons, why utopian authors accept that we have endless wishes but limited resources (Davis 1985: 46), and forbid themselves to appeal to a *deus ex machina* or fantastic social solutions.

The social counter-image that More depicted in his little book is not perennial, even when some of the social criticisms are still valid. This is because there are some ideas that are hard to be supported nowadays, for instance: the slavery of the prisoners and the practice of marking their ears and forehead, and even some of less shocking suggestions could face strong opposition, such as the case of garment uniformity. In twentieth-century dystopias such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the homogeneity and stability—which are positive values for Thomas More—are described as the opposite ones: disvalues or dangerous values. As a useful convention the followers of the literary approach to utopia distinguish between “eutopia” (the depiction of the good possible society) and “dystopia” (a negative counterpart of utopia). But they still consider both as utopias in general (Trousson 1995; Comparato 2006), since the critical function remains the same, i.e. mirroring the real societies in a critical way.

After that distinction some sociologists and philosophers started to think of the concept not only as the counter-image but also as a way of thinking: the idea of utopian thought. Utopian thought changes its images according to the real needs the utopian thinkers find in their contemporaneity. In answer to my question asked at the beginning of this section—yes, utopian images are possible and in many cases become real communities; however, as soon as one realises that they are utopias, they will stop being ones.

Nevertheless, this is not the end of utopian thought as some might believe (Marcuse 1986: 7). In new social conditions, new needs appear and the imagination starts to work in order to fulfil these needs and criticise the failures of the fulfilled utopia by imagining a new improved one. This is the nature of utopian thought that Ernst Bloch defined as the “not-yet-conscious” (Bloch 1988: 28). As Huxley puts in its epigraph to a *Brave New World*, quoting Nikolai Berdyaev:

Utopias seem to be more realisable than we have believed before. And now we found ourselves in face of a frightful question: How to avoid their definitive realisation? Utopias are realisable. Life goes to utopias. And maybe a new century starts, a century in which intellectuals and the learned class will

dream the means of avoiding utopias and returning to a non-utopian society, less 'perfect' and more free (Huxley 1980: 7)<sup>6</sup>.

In some way a Hungarian philosopher, Ágnes Heller, partly agrees with Berdyaev because she believes some of the eutopiass of the past can become the dystopias of the present (Heller 1980: 204-205). Therefore, to recapitulate there are many ways of considering utopia but two of them are especially fruitful: as a counter-image of reality and as a method of social criticism. The first one is based on a synchronic perspective because it stands against other representations of the social good in its contemporaneity. The second one is based on a diachronic perspective because it extends the criticism to the past and to the future. Tom Moylan called this self-critical feature of utopian thought "critical utopianism" (Moylan 2000). The clearest example of diachronic awareness is provided by H. G. Wells in *Modern Utopia*, in the first pages of which he claims the need for modern kinetic utopias against the traditional static ones (Wells 2000: 33). Even Wells went further when he argued that utopianism should be the very tool of sociology (Kumar 1990: 197).

In the twentieth century—and thanks to the critical influence of Wells but overall because of the World Wars—utopian imagination exaggerated its pessimistic side. Dystopias proliferated, warning us how badly humans were doing and which social institutions needed to be changed. Utopian thought was linked to Marxism and criticised as a heresy (Molnar 1970: 7) and a mean to tyranny and violence (Popper 1967: 429). Nonetheless, the criticism was misguided insofar as critics commonly mistook utopian image for utopian method (Levitas 2010: 530). Utopian images expire with the progress of time, but the utopian method remains a useful tool to criticise our societies. Criticism needs a normative ideal dimension to compare the actual needs and errors with our possible solutions and actions. The danger does not lie in creating utopias, but in ceasing to create them.

<sup>6</sup> "Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus réalisables qu'on le croyait autrefois. Et nous trouvons actuellement devant une question bien autrement angoissante: Comment éviter leur réalisation définitive...? Les utopies sont réalisables. La vie marche vers les utopies. Et peut-être un siècle nouveau commence-t-il, un siècle où les intellectuels et la classe cultivée rêveront aux moyens d'éviter les utopies et de retourner à une société non utopique, moins «parfaite» et plus libre".



## Diachronic Classification of Trends in Utopianism

From the diachronic perspective of utopian thought it is possible to classify the development of utopias in a few stages. It is preferable to use the idea of development rather than progress because of two characteristics. Firstly, the different stages often overlap with one another. The predominance of one over the other is changing, but the less predominant does not necessarily disappear. Secondly, the new stage is not exactly better in an absolute sense but it only better embodies the contemporary needs of the society. In this way, the different stages can be seen as the development of one idea—that of an ideal social model to criticise factual societies—through the different needs of every particular age and place.

As it was mentioned above, utopian thought is adapted to particular human needs and it discards and criticises previous unfitted utopian images at the same time. Again, this does not mean the previous images disappear; instead, they become unpopular and are considered to be regressive or conservative. Even More's utopia may be interpreted as a conservative counter-image because of his defence of a medieval way of life matched with the Hellenistic philosophy of living naturally and austere. These ideas, in the context of the birth of capitalism and modern science, can be—and were—considered to be regressive.

It is also important to specify that there is no general agreement among utopian scholars about the stages of utopian thought. Most of the time they assume two general conventions: the periodical and the foundational. The periodical convention repeats the classification of time in terms of historical ages: ancient utopias, medieval utopias, Renaissance utopias, modern utopias, and contemporary utopias (Trousseau 1995; Comparato 2006). This approach does not focus on the difference in the conceptual framework of the various utopias. It is probably the easiest classification, but the least accurate at the same. The other approach is based on a typology of utopias and it is linked to the utopian founding fathers: Plato, More, Mercier, Wells, etc. Plato is considered to be the founder of the idea of a perfect republic, but not yet a utopian author in the literary sense of the term. The literary genre appeared in the Renaissance together with More, who used fiction in a didactic way to express some ideas which were similar to Plato's, whom he quoted a few times and considered an inspiration. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, the author of *L'An 2440: un rêve tel qu'il ne fut* (1771), is agreed to be the founder of the first uchronia, i. e. the switching from a good-place-

but-not-this-one (or *u-topia*) to a good-time-but-not-this-one (or *u-chronia*)<sup>7</sup>. Wells named himself the founder of the modern utopia, considering all the previous utopian images both classical and static ones, because his idea was the first kinetic utopia and it allows change.

The aforementioned classifications are one of the most popular. It is true that there is some similitude among different utopias during the same historical age, however, the periodical classification neglects much of the complex nuances of utopian production. The same happens with the foundational approach, since it is Western-biased and person-focused. Considering utopia as a rational method of social criticism, we should expect it to be present in every culture since humans started to think rationally. Even Frank E. Manuel and his wife—the great believers in the Western-centrality of the utopian thought—have provided an interesting classification which contributes to a more sophisticated enumeration of utopian stages.

Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel (1997: 4) have mentioned three main categories, which here I call “utopian trends” to keep in mind that new images do not necessarily cancel previous images but become dominant in some period. They classify these trends into the categories of early eutopias, modern uchronias and contemporary eupsychias. These can be summarised as follows. Eutopia is the trend in utopian thought deeply focused on finding—or building—a better place to establish a good society. This tends to be linked to morality, architecture and urbanism. Uchronia has a utopian drive centred on future and better times as well as the idea of linear progress in the current society. This trend tends to be linked with technique and technology. Finally, eupsychia is the one in which the utopian spirit has arrived to a more fragmented and individualistic point of view and the society is considered as a collection of individuals searching for their own inner and outer peace. This kind of utopia aims to be not only rational but also reasonable. It tries to accept social mobility, tolerance of differences and axiological pluralism; in other words, the kinetic ideal is pursued but not reached by Wells in his *Modern Utopia*.

The question is: are eupsychias still the dominant trend in utopian thought nowadays? The answer supported here is negative. While there are still samples of eupsychias around us, they are not the normative ideal of the good society anymore. A new

<sup>7</sup> Uchronia is the variation of the noun utopia by replacing *topos* by *chronos*, which means “time”, “determined epoch, period” (Pabón 200:647).

one has risen, continuing a process of secularisation started during the Renaissance. The trend of eutopias can be considered the secularisation of the idea of paradise (Servier 1996: 139; Aínsa 1990: 114); the same happens to with uchronias and the idea of providence (Molnar 1970: 13, 27-28), and eupsychias and the soul (Manuel 1965: 295). But this age is secularising the body, in Judeo-Christian terms the “divine creation”. Human creatures are claiming the right to re-create themselves and to reform the crooked timber of human nature. Although there are still some eutopian examples of hope for a fresh start on Mars or the Moon (not necessarily in new times or calm minds but in enhanced or artificial bodies), the contemporary predominance of the utopian images of immortality and other forms of human enhancements are focused not in new places. The contemporary utopian stage of secularisation is mainly that of the re-creation of the human by the human itself.

STAGE	EUTOPIAS	EUCHRONIAS	EUPSYCHIAS	EVANTROPIAS
IDEALISATION	Land	Time	Mind	Body
SECULARISATION	Paradise	Providence	Soul	Creation
EXAMPLE	T. More	L. S. Mercier	W. Hudson	N. Bostrom
AGE	Renaissance	Modern Age	20 <sup>th</sup> century	21 <sup>st</sup> century

Table 1. Diachronic transformation of utopian goals

## Evantropias and Contemporary Utopian Imagination

The name “evantropia” is taken from the works of two Cuban physicians from the early twentieth century: Eusebio Hernández and Domingo Ramos. They employed the word “evantropia” to refer to the ideas shared in three Panamerican conferences on health policies—Havana 1927, Buenos Aires 1934, and Bogotá 1938 (Medina Domènech 2004: 295-296). For Hernández and Ramos evantropia is an ideal of human health development including two linked branches: eugenics and “homiculture”. The first refers to human selection, through hygienic and health policies that aim to preserve the “best genes” in different human groups. This discipline is associated with some of the most horrible landmarks in human history—racism, genocides, etc. The second one, called by the authors “homiculture”, focuses on the development of *Homo sapiens* and it is inspired by the concept of “puericulture” as developed by the French obstetrician Adolphe Pinard (Hernández 2009: 1-5).

The use of the concept of evantropia in this chapter refers to contemporary ideas of human enhancement, not only in traditional ways as education or cooperative work but also in new ways including, for example, genetic manipulation and digital prosthetics. This kind of approach has led us to dispute the very conception of our own species, raising questions such as: “Is it possible to modify our own essence?”; “Is there a human essence at all?”; or “Is it mandatory to preserve any of our biological traits?”. In some hyperbolic sense evantropia is the contemporary desire to go beyond our physical limitations by pursuing the dream of self-creating the “good humankind” or “the human beings who are doing well in all senses”—reflecting the origin of the term, from the Greek *eu-anthropos*. This dream wants to avoid—but can also become—a nightmare: dysantropia or human extinction.

Over the last twenty years, after almost half a century of anti-utopian literature linking utopia to Marxism and the Soviet Union, the utopian imagination reappeared with renovated images. As I mentioned before, the utopian method was applied to new needs and discoveries. Two of the most remarkable forms of contemporary utopias are deeply linked: the digital utopia and the transhumanist utopia. The first arose with the revolution of information and communications technologies, especially the Internet and the process of digitization of data and even social interactions—e.g. social networks, home-banking, etc. The second utopia is more radical because its rhetoric appealed to a long-lasting wish of humanity: immortality, or in a more humble approach, the increase of longevity to its maximum. Whereas the defenders of the digital utopia appeal to the future with direct democracy and a learned and intelligent population, the self-defined transhumanists appeal to longer and better lives. Sometime the two are combined in the idea of digital consciousness attached to a non-biological body.

The revolution of the new technologies has forced us to rethink our idea of what it is to be a human. The body is seen sometimes as a starting point and sometimes as an obstacle. While reading John Perry Barlow’s *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* written in 1996, one may find in his preaching of the future “civilization of mind” the denial of the limitations of bodies, when in cyberspace the individuals recover their full freedom (Barlow 2001: 30). Some digital activists, so-called cypherpunks, have echoed this kind of rhetoric. For example, Julian Assange, defending the freedom of the Internet, calls on us to protect “our platonic realm”—our minds—with the rules of nature, and our bodies with the laws of man (Assange et al. 2012:42), i.e. mathematical and legal codes.

Even though both contemporary images are linked, I want to focus on the most radical one: the transhumanist, because the digital utopia can be considered a kind of dualistic approach, an unnecessary duplication of the “realms” of human activity. In contrast, the transhumanist utopia supposes a deflation of the concept of human nature by putting trust in the capacity of self-transformation of our bodies and skills. In an open letter which has been rewritten many times, a Swedish philosopher, Nick Bostrom, depicts how the transhumanist utopia could look like:

What is Suffering in Utopia? Suffering is the salt trace left on the cheeks of those who were around before.

What is Tragedy in Utopia? There is tragedy in Snowman’s melting. Mass murders are not required.

What is Imperfection in Utopia? Imperfection is the measure of our respect for things as they are and for their history.

What is Body in Utopia? Body is a pair of legs, a pair of arms, a trunk and a head, all made of flesh. Or not, as the case may be.

What is Society in Utopia? Society is a never-finished tapestry, its weavers equal to its threads—the parts and patterns an inexhaustible bourne of beauty.

What is Death in Utopia? Death is the darkness that ultimately surrounds all life.

What is Guilt in Utopia? Guilt is our knowledge that we could have created Utopia sooner (Bostrom 2010: 7-8).

This letter can be also included in euechronian trend because it is allegedly written from the future; however, this is not the most prominent feature of it. Bostrom imagines a “post-human” being with a life expectancy of half a millennium, a non-organic body and superintelligence beyond our current geniuses and best computers. It is possible to interpret the whole letter as a hyperbole to stress Bostrom’s point, but in *Superintelligence* he warns us that this could also “veer toward dystopia” (Bostrom 2014: 210)—which I suggest to call “dysantropia”. In simpler words, our own technology, aimed at enhancing human beings and freeing ourselves from organic-cognitive limitations, could be not only used to feed the gap of political unfairness (Fukuyama 2004: 42-43) but could also risk our own survival as a species.

The problem of the risk of creating our own extinction was discussed by a German philosopher, Hans Jonas, who made an interesting distinction between the ancient ethics and future-oriented ethics. In *The Imperative of Responsibility* he claims that our contemporary ethical needs require the second kind of ethics, because our actions have larger and riskier consequences than ever before (Jonas 1995: 32). Even

now we need to behave in a way that can guarantee the genuine human life of future generations. Jonas' answer was pessimistic and in some way conservative. He considers that we need to protect our human nature. That implies for him two things: our image-making capacity and our bodily limitations. While the first aspect is deeply linked to utopia, he took care to clarify that utopias are a dangerous form of future-oriented ethics. They are dangerous because they are too optimistic regarding technological capacities and risk future generations in the quest to go beyond the limits of our own generation.

Even when both Bostrom's and Jonas' approaches share the similarity of being future-oriented ethical claims, they differ on their stand on utopian thought. Once again, as Berdyaev stated in the above-mentioned *Brave New World's* epigraph (Huxley 1980: 7), if the danger with utopias is that they are possible, the answer of Jonas is to replace utopian motivation for survival motivation—through his heuristics of fear and the imperative of responsibility. Jonas recognised the value of utopia as human motivation (1995: 17), however, he was not able to trace the distinction between particular—and limited—utopias and the ever self-updating utopian thought. In contrast, Bostrom recognised the dangers of some particular utopias and the possibilities of utopian thought by using it as a method to share his view on the future of humankind. That is why instead of denying the value of utopias he tries to offer particular eutopian scenarios to be judged (Bostrom 2010: 1-10) and particular dystopian ones to be avoided (Bostrom 2014: 209-210).

In this context the contemporary stage of utopian thought is revisiting the religious notions of creation and destruction, genesis and apocalypse through evantropian and dysantropian fictions. Contemporary utopias deal with the question of whether it is possible to create new human beings that will overcome all the challenges they are to be left with, i.e. global warming, economic inequality, political unfairness, artificial diseases, overpopulation, exploitation of non-renewable resources? Or will the very medicine—the anthropogenic changes we are trying to perform on ourselves—lead us to extinction? These questions are addressed not only by transhumanist philosophers as Bostrom or Savulescu but also by fiction writers in new subgenres in which evantropic and dysantropic images are displayed. The example of

these questions can be found in different pieces of literature as the clones of *La possibilité d'une île* (Houellebecq 2005) and hopes put in cryonics<sup>8</sup> in *Zero K* (DeLillo 2016). But also in films and TV series similar examples appear more often, such as in the film—and later also the TV series—*Limitless* (Burger 2011), in which the enhancement is only cognitive. The protagonist reaches a state of superintelligence via “nootropics”, drugs stimulating brain activity. Some pharmaceutical companies increased their sales of nootropics after this film came out. Something that was considered a dream or a fantasy at first, then starts to be marketed—whether it is feasible or not—and gradually transforms our social life and hopes.

## Conclusion

To sum up, I repeat the question stated at the beginning of this chapter: what are the characteristics of the contemporary utopian image? Foremost, it is necessary to admit that utopian images are trends and even after being discarded or satirised some of the previous images still remain. Once I have made this clarification, the answer is that the current trend in utopian thought is what has been defined here as evantropic. These new utopian discourses fulfil the three conditions established in the introduction. Firstly, they are representative of contemporary needs such as the pursuit of longer life expectancy and the prevention of illnesses and the physiological traits of agedness. Secondly, they provide a normative social image because what is pursued is aimed at becoming widespread among all members of contemporary—at least Western and liberal—societies. Thirdly, the anthropogenic transformation of the human body can be considered a new step in the utopian process of the secularisation of the religious idea of the creation of human beings.

Evantropias are particular to our times because they question entirely our view of the world and of what we can do in it. The distinctive aspect of evantropias is that they go beyond the synergy of social cooperation and the use of scientific techniques in mere prosthesis and they are grounded on the anthropogenic transformation of the humankind, i.e. the hubris of the transformation of the human species by the human beings. In these scenarios technologies replace and/or become part of the

<sup>8</sup> On the relationship between evantropia and cryonics, it is interesting to note that Max More—the founder of the Extropy Institute and one of the leading figures of the transhumanist movement—is now President and CEO of Alcor, a company dedicated to life extension via cryonics.

evantropic body. The ultimate goal in evantropias is immortality followed by eternal youth and the maximum use of our capacities. The societies as have appeared in evantropic discourses and fictions are communities of superhumans.

These radical discourses echo ideas such as the singularity or transhumanism and in any case fulfil the requirement of secularizing some religious ideas. In the particular case of this current stage in utopian thought, the divine creation becomes human creation. Evantropic images offer scenarios in which humans decide for themselves their own evolution, their own bodies, and their own capacities boosted by technologies and supermaterials.

As any other utopian dream, evantropias have their nightmarish counterpart: dysantropias. This is the idea of a worse society than the factual one in which the evantropic ideas end up undermining the life and societies they are intended to improve. Common dysantropic scenarios are human possible futures in which the outcome of the anthropogenic modification is negative and irreversible at the same time; another one presents the increase in the division between different people—new interspecific divisions between superhumans and regular humans—and finally the extinction of the species by the above-mentioned hubris.

The challenge we face is to guide debates in utopian thought towards creating scenarios that help to face these problems emerging from the application of new technologies to our daily lives, and to do so in a way that preserves diversity and equality. Some possible basic requirements could be to maintain respect for the otherness, ensure that transformations are reversible, and to ensure collective participation in enhancement policies.



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## II

# *The Facets of “Universal Religion”: Religion in Nineteenth-Century French Utopian Thought*

TOMASZ SZYMAŃSKI

### Introduction

When talking about universal religion as an element of utopian thought, and more precisely of nineteenth-century French utopian thought, one should begin with questioning the relationship between religion and utopia. The polysemy of the concept of utopia means that this relationship cannot be unequivocally described. For Raymond Trousson, a Belgian historian, utopia, as opposed to the myth of the Golden Age, is an attempt to achieve heavenly happiness (Trousson 2001) and can take the form of either literary invention or a political programme which aim to change the world. This would invert the Augustinian image of the City of God; although the latter expresses the quest for peace and justice on earth, the Father of the Church ultimately locates the Christian homeland in Heaven. From this point of view, earthly life and its perfection have to be associated with the Earthly City. U-topia (a non-place, a place that may not be found in this world) differs from the spiritual Kingdom “out of this world” in that it is a fruit of human imagination and endeavour rather than of grace or of God’s interference or act of creation (Servier 1991)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Jean Servier points, nevertheless, to the religious and in particular Judeo-Christian source of utopian imagination: Celestial City, God’s Kingdom, the messianic age and the Thousand-year Kingdom, invoked by millenarism, will prefigure subsequent utopias and inspire later utopian social movements.

Having said that, religion has always been present in various utopias, both literary and political, beginning with the earliest ones; this is a paradox observed by Trousson. As examples, one can quote the Myth of Er in Plato's work, the supra-religious worship of Mithras in More's *Utopia*, Solomon's House and the presence of Christianity in Bacon's *New Atlantis*, or the divine Metaphysician and the trinity of Power, Wisdom and Love in Campanella's *City of the Sun*. Despite the presence of religion in various utopias, one can notice a tendency to limit its significance to endow it with a purely symbolic function and to replace the redemptory with the philosophical dimension. In utopias religion's prerogatives are taken over by science and man's political initiative. Religious redemption is substituted by the quest for a society founded upon just laws, well-organised work and education, communal property and tolerance. Whereas during the Renaissance it is hard to imagine a non-religious utopia (clergymen are usually authors of utopias), during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries religion is increasingly frequently criticised, which steers utopia towards rationality and materialism (e.g. in Cyrano de Bergerac's writings) or atheism (as in Fontenelle's work). Modern utopias are, however, dominated by the presence of natural religion, which is opposed to the abuses and absurd character of founded religions.

This process leads to the revelation of the very essence of utopian thinking, of its desire to displace religion, to bring the New Jerusalem to Earth and to turn transcendence into immanence. This is because utopia is a religion reduced to the human level—the religion of man: "Let's assume that utopia is essentially the religion of man [*Entendons que l'utopie est par essence religion de l'homme*]" (Trousson 2001: 23). This becomes apparent in the nineteenth century after the delegitimisation of religion during the Enlightenment. Although at the end of the eighteenth century some (Dupuis, Volney) would like to see society become secular, while for many, religion retains its importance. And this does not only mean the perpetuation of religious traditions and institutions that indeed continue to attract the faithful. It also means the preservation of religion in the sphere of imagination or, to put it differently, the engagement of religious language and symbolism to express truths and create structures that oppose traditionally understood religiosity. This is exemplified by the movement known as utopian or romantic socialism (Alexandrian 1979, Evans 1948), positivism and lay humanitarianism, where we observe the rise of the idea of the synthesis of religion and politics, revived by the Revolution (Chabert 2004). In this chapter I shall concentrate on a selection of its representatives, paying particular attention to the way religion,

as invoked by their works, takes on the form of a universal religion, and to the way philosophical tenets and principles of social organisation are transposed into the domain of the sacred. In order to achieve this I shall examine a number of projects for temples found in the work of nineteenth-century utopian thinkers.

## Saint-Simon's New Christianity and Saint-Simonianism

It is as early as 1803 that in *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève à ses contemporains* [*Letters from an Inhabitant of Geneva to His Contemporaries*] Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, who will play a major role in the development of social utopian thinking, calls for a founding of a scientific council presided over by Newton<sup>2</sup> and intended to replace the clergy, just as science is to supersede theology and the law of gravity is to supersede God (Bénichou 1977). According to Saint-Simon, traditional Christianity has lost its currency and now the time for New Christianity has come, to which he will devote his 1825 treatise where a traditionalist polemicizes with a moderniser. According to the latter, Christianity is to become the only and universal religion, yet, contrary to what has been said for centuries, it is to render people happy already here on Earth (Saint-Simon 1825). New Christianity abolishes the traditional separation between secular and religious authority, fulfilling the Chosen People's expectation of the Messianic Age, during which all humanity will have one religion and constitute one great community. Saint-Simon's doctrine is based upon the principle underlying all morality, which is fraternal love, while its goal is "the speediest improvement of the physical and moral condition of the poorest [*l'amélioration la plus rapide possible de l'existence morale et physique de la classe la plus pauvre*]" (Saint-Simon 1825: 21). Theology, which diverted attention from this goal towards sterile speculations concerning eternal life, must be abandoned altogether. Scientists, artists, and industrialists ought to join efforts in order to level out social inequalities and to replace hereditary aristocracy with the aristocracy of talent and merit. Christianity was indeed intent on achieving this goal until the fifteenth century and the pontificate of Leo X, when it became

<sup>2</sup> During the initial stage of his career Saint-Simon plans for a temple and a mausoleum dedicated to Newton to be built next to every centre where a council will preside, supervised by the head scientific council. The mausoleum, where internal worship takes place, leads to an underground part of the temple. External worship pays tribute to all the men who made important contribution to the development of arts and sciences. The church is to be surrounded by laboratories, workshops and a college. Later Newton will criticise the technical and limited character of sciences, wishing to subject society to a dogmatic, theory-based and apriorical education.

a worldly organization. What was needed to reverse this trend was the Reformation, yet Luther's reforms turned out to be only partially successful. In order to reform Christianity in a systematic and thorough manner and to restore the evangelical spirit of fraternal love, one would need to implement Saint-Simon's ideas. In society's spiritual domain the scientists, writers, and artists (they will provide inspiration and projects) are those who will be in charge, while in the secular sphere the industrialists and manufacturers (they will organise the economic life so that it may serve general interest) are those who will have the authority (Bénichou 1977).

Saint-Simon, who dies the very year his major work is published, has many disciples and followers. The latter develop their master's ideas into a cohesive religious doctrine that is characteristic of the "organic" age and puts an end to doubts, moral relativity, and false freedom of the "critical" age associated with the Enlightenment. After the founder's death, Saint-Amand Bazard and Barthélémy Prosper Enfantin, assisted by other key figures gathered forming the college such as Olinde Rodrigues, become the leaders of Saint-Simonianism (Charléty 1965, Picon 2002). As a religious and dogmatic movement, Saint-Simonianism, which has its headquarters (after Bazard's schism) in Ménilmontant (at the time still situated outside Paris), has a short history, beginning in 1829 and ending in 1832 (Bénichou 1977). One of the most interesting ideas, born in Enfantin's community, is the plan to entirely rebuild Paris, presented by Charles Duveyrier in *La Ville nouvelle ou le Paris des Saint-simoniens* [*The New City, the Paris of the Saint-Simonians*] (Duveyrier 1832). According to this scheme, the city was to take on the shape of a man, while the temple located in its heart was to take on the shape of a woman and, more precisely, be a figuration of Messiah's Mother<sup>3</sup>. Her enormous body was to be surrounded all the way up to the waist with spiral galleries screened with stain glass windows, which would resemble a long robe. Her train was to be crowned with a huge amphitheatre where one could relax under shady orange trees. The woman's right hand points towards the domes of industrial buildings and rests on a globe housing the sacred space of the theatre. In her left hand the King's Mother would hold a silver, openwork-design sceptre topped with a great bright lamp of a lighthouse. In a text by Saint-Simon's another follower, Michel Chevalier, we find considerations regarding the use of metals, sewers (figured as an

<sup>3</sup> Saint-Simon's followers were originally seeking a Messiah in Saint-Simon himself, and then in Enfantin, who through marriage was to join the divine Mother (sought in both the West and the East). Her image is closely related to the emancipation of women, postulated by Saint-Simonianism (Bowman 1987).



enormous organ), and electromagnetic force in the construction of the temple, which would result in a huge multimedia show combining visual arts with music<sup>4</sup>, creating an impression of a frenetic communion of all time and space, an immense “glorification of God, of his Messiah and of Humanity” (Bénichou 1977: 304). This vision demonstrates the breach between Saint-Simon’s followers and the sober doctrine of the movement’s founder. The flamboyant religiousness with pantheistic overtones that benefits from the achievement of art and industry, and where the difference between God and nature vanishes, and the Incarnation extends to the entire humanity (or even to the universe), according to the Saint-Simonist ideas of “rehabilitation of matter” and “rehabilitation of corporeality” (Bowman 1987: 172-173), displaces Saint-Simon’s natural religion that boiled down to morality and the implementation of its guiding principle.

## Auguste Comte’s Positive Religion

Amongst Saint-Simon’s collaborators and disciples who turn away from their master’s teachings or reinterpret them by creating their own doctrines one may also find the founder of positivism, Auguste Comte. His religious thinking will reach its apotheosis in *Catéchisme positiviste, ou Sommaire Exposition de la religion universelle* [*The Catechism of Positive Religion, or Summary Exposition of Universal Religion*], published in 1852, that is five years before Comte’s death. In the cherished formula—“Love as principle, order as basis, progress as end [*L’Amour pour principe, et l’Ordre pour base; le Progrès pour but*” (Comte 1852: 55)—Comte opposes both the destructive forces of anarchy and the reactionary forces of traditionalism. Order is impossible to attain without religion, just as progress is impossible without real knowledge: “There exists only one religion, which is both universal and definitive, and towards which all partial and provisional syntheses strive to the extent allowed by historical circumstances”<sup>5</sup> (Comte 1852: 41). For Comte religion is foremostly a drive towards unity. Although universal religion has no supernatural quality, it possesses its worship, its doctrine and its way of life, which correspond to feeling, intellect, and action. The position

<sup>4</sup> In the work of Saint-Simon’s followers there is the recurrent motif of total dramatic art (anticipating Wagner’s oeuvre), the synthesis of all arts and of the legacy of the past and bright future.

<sup>5</sup> “Il n’existe, au fond, qu’une seule religion, à la fois universelle et définitive, vers laquelle tendirent de plus en plus les synthèses partielles et provisoires, autant que le comportaient les situations correspondantes”.

feeling occupies in this triad is telling, as only feeling can forestall the decline of culture experienced by the West since the Enlightenment: "Women's revolution must now complete the proletarian revolution, just as the latter consolidated the bourgeois revolution, which had resulted from the philosophical revolution"<sup>6</sup> (Comte 1852: 28). This explains the dialogue in Comte's oeuvre between a woman and a Priest of Humanity, two figures inspired by Clotilde de Vaux and Comte himself<sup>7</sup>. Comte's positivist religion is the religion of Humanity (Chabert 2004, Grange 1996, Domaradzki 2005). The latter occupies the place of the Supreme Being, whose arbitrary will become replaced by a struggle against all kinds of fatalism.

Comte left behind a detailed plan for the Church of Humanity<sup>8</sup>, transmitted to posterity by his collaborator, Georges Audiffrent (1885). Located in a wooded area and neighbouring a great cemetery, the Church has the shape of the letter "T" and faces the world metropolis that Paris was to be for a long time to come<sup>9</sup>. It represents the spatial figuration of the positivist philosophy of history and the positivist calendar, showing the evolution of humanity. The nave is flanked on both sides by fourteen chapels<sup>10</sup>. Thirteen of these are dedicated to the thirteen calendar months (each lasting twenty-eight days) and one to saintly women who are to be remembered every four years. The chapels are dedicated to great men, including scholars, philosophers, political and religious leaders who made a significant contribution to the progress of humanity. These are Moses, Homer, Aristotle, Archimedes, Julius Cesar, Saint Paul, Charlemagne, Dante, Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Descartes, Frederic II, and Bichat. The saintly women are represented by Heloise. At the rear of the Church there is an altar featuring the statue of the Supreme Being—Humanity—figured as Virgin holding an infant<sup>11</sup>. Steps leading to the altar symbolizes seven disciplines

<sup>6</sup> "La révolution féminine doit maintenant compléter la révolution prolétaire, comme celle-ci consolida la révolution bourgeoise, émanée d'abord de la révolution philosophique".

<sup>7</sup> Comte met Clotilde in 1844 and fell in love with her. She died shortly afterwards in 1846. Comte emphatically declared that without Clotilde his conception of universal religion, based on "sound philosophy" and inspired by Aristotle and Saint Paul, would not have come to being.

<sup>8</sup> The church would be built in Rio de Janeiro by Brazilian members of the Positivist Church. It was on their initiative that in 1902 the Chapel of Humanity, a miniature copy of the temple, would be built in Paris, in the building where Clotilde de Vaux lived.

<sup>9</sup> Comte was planning for its future relocation to Istanbul, formerly Constantinople.

<sup>10</sup> The temple does not significantly differ from a traditional church, with its nave, aisles, and apse. In any case, positivist masses were to be said in Roman-Catholic churches until society was ready to accept the new worship.

<sup>11</sup> Here we can observe a reference to the Catholic tradition and Marian devotions. Comte is thought to have been particularly inspired by Raphael's Madonna, yet it is more likely that the feminine model for the beloved Humanity was Clotilde de Vaux.

(Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Sociology, Morality) and thirteen categories corresponding to the calendar months which are divided into “primary relationships” (Humanity, Marriage, Fatherhood, Filiation, Brotherhood, Service), transitory stages (Fetishism, Polytheism and Monotheism), and social functions or classes (Priests, Women, Patricians and Proletariat). In front of the altar there is an elliptical space featuring Saint Paul who incarnates religion and is surrounded by other leaders of Humanity. The positivist worship, on the one hand, adulates the goddess Humanity and, on the other hand, pays tribute to the dead, commemorating those most distinguished amongst them. It has a subjective character, which means that positivist “saints” live on only in the memory of the living. Likewise, according to the “subjective method”, although real and incarnated by Humanity, the Supreme Being cannot be conceived of as the transcendental Absolute and only as a relative and purely human imagining.

### Pierre Leroux’s Cult of Humanity and Victor Hugo’s *Temple*

Humanity also constitutes the main object of interest of Saint-Simon’s another dissident follower and representative of lay humanitarianism, Pierre Leroux. His key work, *De l’humanité* [*Of Humanity*] appeared in 1840. Leroux’s conception of humanity varies, however, from Comte’s. In his view, it is in humanity that all past religions, old traditions, modern philosophy, and the spirit of Christianity and of the Enlightenment find their summation (Leroux rejects the distinction between organic and critical ages). Whereas for Comte the time of revelation ended irrevocably when humanity entered first the metaphysical and then the positive stage of its evolution<sup>12</sup>, Leroux believes in eternal and continuing revelation. Humanity is divine in its nature and if Leroux negates Jesus’s divinity, it is only because of its monopolising, preclusive character. It is for the same reason that he rejects the immortality of the individual soul, accepting however its eternal presence in Humanity. This is because the soul constitutes the expression of spiritual individualism, yet Leroux seeks the third way that would help to avoid the extreme of absolute individualism and absolute

<sup>12</sup> This problem is complex since the positive phase contains the theological phase (including fetishism and polytheism) which enables the positivist religion to gain a fully human character that excludes neither emotions nor imagination.

socialism<sup>13</sup>. He wishes to reconcile the principles of freedom, equality, and brotherhood: "In future society every man will be a pope and emperor to himself [*Dans la société de l'avenir, chaque homme sera à la fois son pape et son empereur*]" (Leroux 1846: 98-99), states Leroux in his book *De la religion nationale, ou du culte* [*Of Religion, or of Cult*]. Humanity needs religion and society a national religion. Leroux finds the latter in the work of Spinoza, who succeeded where Rousseau had failed, namely in marrying the idea of public worship with freedom of conscience. This is where lies the basic utopian outline of Leroux's thinking: he seems to be seeking to achieve the impossible that is to reconcile social responsibility with individual liberty. Although in his work we could not find plans for temples similar to the afore-described ones<sup>14</sup>, we can guess that for Leroux, who in 1848 was initiated into regular freemasonry, the temple figured by the Lodge symbolically corresponds to the Church of Humanity, elevated through the self-improvement of all people of good will who thus follow the example of the builders of Solomon's temple.

During the Second Empire Leroux finds himself in exile as a political opponent. It is on the Anglo-Norman island of Jersey that, impoverished, he met Victor Hugo, another political refugee who was then already enjoying certain notoriety. At the time Hugo becomes a prophet of the so called religion of the *tables tournantes*, inspired by the practice of summoning the spirits with the aid of a tapping table; together with his close friends and relatives he will summon over one hundred and ten spirits. The worship of the Tables (Boivin 2009), foretold by Jesus Christ himself (amongst exiles are, for example, Mahomet, Shakespeare, Dante, Napoleon or Luther), is a religion of universal love and forgiveness, which will replace Christianity, just as Christianity had replaced Druidry. According to this doctrine, everything in the world possesses an immortal soul that purifies itself during the cycle of subsequent incarnations until it reaches its spiritual goal<sup>15</sup>. Simultaneously, however, drawing on the tradition of the Enlightenment, this doctrine exposes to stringent criticism religious customs and institutions, dogmatic fanaticism, and the abuses committed by the clergy.

<sup>13</sup> Leroux creates the neologism "socialism", which, signifying the contradiction of freedom, carries for him a negative connotation. The same applies to the term "individualism", which is the opposition of "socialism" (Viard 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Leroux in his book *Du christianisme* [*About Christianity*] formulates the idea of a Pantheon inspired by a general doctrine, in which every cult of the past will find his place (Leroux 1848).

<sup>15</sup> As we know, Leroux could not agree on this point with Hugo for in his view all humanity shares one eternal life. In Leroux's mind Hugo was a spiritual liberal postulating soteriological individualism.

Hugo's views are succinctly captured by the title of his collection of poems, *Religions et religion* [*Religions and Religion*], published in 1880, which is late in his life. The true and only essence of religion is the following: it refers to what is unknown and infinite. Although all religious systems that undervalue this will necessarily be sooner or later abandoned, they fulfil their role at the time. It is in this context that the poem *Le Temple* [*The Temple*]<sup>16</sup>, published in the second series of *La Légende des siècles* [*The Legend of the Ages*] (1877), ought to be read (Hugo 1950: 554-557). The poet calls for a construction of a mysterious, utopian temple built on top of a hill, outside all space and time, where humanity will worship the Unknown; the impenetrable Being will be screened by a curtain inside a gloomy crypt situated under a vault and illuminated by an eternal light. The worship will be accompanied by an elevated ambience and sacred fear, as well as by a belief in goodness emanating from the statue. Everyone will sense the presence of the Deity, but no one will be able to grasp its mystery. And all this will be taking place at a time when there will be no other temple on earth as all of them would have been swept off its surface by the progress of wisdom and time.

## Conclusion

The poem is worth invoking because of, firstly, its utopian resonance and, secondly, its motif of the temple which has been the guiding idea of this chapter. Returning to the relationship between religion and utopia we can propose three different versions of it. Firstly, religion can be one of the elements of a utopian vision. The religion in question is here a natural one and expresses society's religious tolerance. This element must be present because of the cultural context in which a text describing utopia is created, although semantically, it may seem secondary or even marginal. This can be exemplified by literary utopias, such as those imagined by More, Bacon, or Mercier. Secondly, religion can be the basis or the medium of a utopian conception of society. This is the case of Saint-Simon's and his followers' New Christianity,

<sup>16</sup> The poem is dated 1874. It consists of 132 verses and is divided into parts of unequal length, written in alexandrines. Together with *La Fin de Satan* [*The End of Satan*] and *Dieu* [*God*], *La Légende des siècles*, which contains the poem *Le Temple*, constitutes a great Hugolian epic, taking up three main issues faced by man: the meaning of the history of humanity, the origin of evil, and the absolute that is God. As Hugo himself states in the preface to *La Légende des siècles*, these are the three facets of the same problem which is Being: Humanity, Evil and Eternity (what is subject to progress, what is relative and what is infinite).

Comte's positivist religion, or Leroux's cult of Humanity: here religion provides language and imagery, helping to articulate the key ideas of utopia. It is a universal religion summarising the whole legacy and all the aspirations of humanity.

Finally, there can be a purely religious utopia where utopian criteria (the representation of an ideal opposed to reality, the quest for a complete transformation of the latter, existence beyond time and space) are applied only to the religious sphere. This type of religious utopia is exemplified by Hugo's poetic vision. Generic and chronological differences aside, the latter belongs to the tradition created by *De Pace fidei* by Nicolas of Cusa, Bodin's *Colloquium heptaplomeres*, Toland's *Pantheisticon*, or Voltaire's *Sermon des Cinquante* [*Sermon of the Fifty*]. The worship described by these works not only surpasses traditional worships (this is what happens in various conceptions of universal religion) but also reassesses the very concept of religion. In modern times religion begins to signify a form of worship attached to a given doctrine. Whereas in the work of utopian socialists, positivists, or humanitarians (although the latter are mostly sceptical about dogmas of any kind), doctrine takes on a social character and the object of worship (its various forms) becomes Humanity, in Hugo's work it practically disappears and the object of worship becomes highly mysterious. In *Le Temple* humanity becomes initiated, reaching the end of its apothatic path, as does the lyrical subject of Hugo's poem *Dieu* (Hugo 1950). Nevertheless, the utopia and the uchronia of the Temple reveal a Being who, unnameable, cannot be even called God.

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### III

## *Twenty-first Century Critical Dystopias*

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### Introduction

The twenty-first century, like the twentieth, has seen a flourishing of dystopian novels in which human actions and institutions have created powerful and destructive societies that control and manipulate human beings<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps even more than the twentieth century, the twenty-first has seen an outburst of post-apocalyptic narratives that tell the story of what human life on earth is like after cataclysmic events that wipe out many people and institutions. Focusing on two recent twenty-first century dystopias in which apocalyptic events occur, i.e. Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, I wish to explore their relations to earlier twentieth century dystopias that project a totalitarian state, such as Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*<sup>3</sup>.

Bacigalupi's and Atwood's works, like the twentieth century dystopias, describe dystopian societies that have come about due to currently-existing tendencies and practices. They present their dystopias in order to educate us as readers about these

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Megan Gallagher, recently Visiting Assistant Professor at Whitman College and currently the Carol G. Lederer Postdoctoral Fellow in Gender Studies at Brown University's Pembroke Center for a careful and insightful reading of the text that improved both the substantive content and the style.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* can be included with this group, but including it in the text would pose confusion anytime "Atwood's views" were mentioned. In the text I mean to refer to the *MaddAddam* trilogy when I use Atwood's name.

ominous trends and to warn us, so that we can act to try to prevent, mitigate, or reverse the dystopian tendencies. But Bacigalupi and Atwood also end their recent dystopias with overt utopian hopes and aspirations for the human beings who remain alive after the apocalyptic events and for their readers, who can speculate further about the possible post-apocalyptic good society and can also try to imagine how to act in the present to counter the growth of dystopian society.

## Utopian/Dystopian Writings and the Twenty-first Century Dystopias

Ever since More's *Utopia*, which began the history of utopias and dystopias, good societies—"eutopias"—have frequently been characterized as an imagined or "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 1994: 9). More's *De optimo reipublicæ* proposes alternative imagined good societies; it also criticizes More's contemporary England and Europe. More separates the explicit critique in Book One—where he presents an England rent by poverty, unemployment, inequality, and unnecessary suffering—and the description of Utopia in Book Two, where new, different, non-conventional thoughts, actions, and institutions occur.

More's *Utopia* creates "cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 1979: 136-37) and presents defamiliarization, especially for those who like Peter Giles cannot think that any society could be better than the one in which he currently lives (More 2010: 56). To be distinguished from More the author, More the character holds aristocratic values that appear unchanged from the beginning to the end of the dialogue of *Utopia*. An attentive reader, however, cannot help but see *Utopia*'s critiques and proposals as challenges to complacency about and acceptance of the contemporary *status quo*; utopias "help to change the way we think [emphasis—P.S.]" (Levitas and Sargisson 2003: 17).

More begins the five-century utopian struggle against mental closure, against those who are unable to think beyond the conventional acceptance of the present as the only, best, natural, or inevitable society. When the character More simply repeats clichéd arguments against private property after Hythloday's description of Utopia in 1516, or when almost five centuries later Margaret Thatcher (1980) insists that "there is no alternative", then it becomes clear that "the Utopian idea [...] keeps alive

the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is" (Jameson 1972: 111).

Dystopias are presentations of imagined societies that—as a noted definition reads—"the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 1994: 9) and that grew out of trends and possibilities in the present. Despite dystopias' connections to current trends, they also create cognitive dissonance and present otherness, by isolating and intensifying trends, focussing them, and showing their future implications. For instance, in an age that celebrated rationalism, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) showed how too exclusive an emphasis on rationality can make rational beings unfeeling, discriminatory, and inhuman; in an age that celebrated material progress and mechanical innovation, E. M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) showed the destructive dystopia that can result from an over-reliance on machinery.

In many twentieth century dystopias, the critique—the equivalent of More's Book One—colonizes almost the full text: the dystopian society is described and criticized at length. The dangerous trends of the present can lead, these dystopian authors see, to a powerful authoritarian state, with a strong centralized government that diligently controls political and social life through state power and modern technology. The state manages information and thought and so controls personal memory and collective history. The state shapes individuals' material and psychological needs and their interpersonal relations by creating, facilitating, or prohibiting specific activities—so it can regulate emotions and sex, frustration and fulfilment, fear and love. The dystopias seek to warn readers about how totalising and oppressive the dystopian society could be, and to encourage readers to judge the disturbing tendencies of culture and government that can lead to dystopia, and act to prevent them before it is too late. Although these dystopian texts do make suggestions about what a good society might look like (the equivalent of More's Book II), these suggestions are frequently brief or indirect, potentially useful for the reader, but of no help to the protagonists.

Many students of dystopia see a change in dystopias in the second half of the twentieth century (and into the twenty-first), from the totalistic, despairing dystopias like Orwell's to what they label "dystopian optimism" (Miller 1998: 358), "critical dystopias" (Moylan 2000: 195), and "open" or "open-ended dystopias" (Baccolini 2000: 16). Like earlier dystopias, critical dystopias are "motivated out of a utopian pessimism so that they force us to confront the dystopian elements"; but critical dystopias

then “work through” those dystopian elements so that we can “begin again” (Miller 1998: 337). The earlier dystopias “invariably end with the victory of the totalitarian state over the individual” (Baccolini 2000: 39), use that victory as a warning, and hold to the hope that readers will act together to forestall dystopia; in a critical dystopia some characters can seek to live through dystopia and create a better life in the aftermath. So Moylan (2000) emphasizes that critical dystopias gain their significance and power from a utopian horizon, utopian space, or “utopian anticipations” presented or implied in the text or dawning just beyond the text, where “contestation and opposition” (Baccolini 2000: 18) develop or continue.

In critical dystopias power still exists, but it has shifted from the authoritarian state to the “more pervasive [and less visible] tyranny of the corporation” (Moylan 2003: 135) that reaches into culture and bodies: “everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited, and commodified” (Moylan 2003: 135-136). Along with corporate capitalist power coursing through all of social life in these new dystopias are highly developed technologies, especially biotechnologies, environmental degradation, and a state that is non-existent, weak, or controlled by corporate power. The contemporary capitalist pursuit of profits and power to the exclusion of other values means that individuals’ lives are marked by chance, randomness, and discontinuities—by “a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself” (Jameson 1988: 351)—and that the overall workings of society and power are difficult to comprehend synoptically for the characters<sup>4</sup>. The plurality of powers and institutions means that totalisation is marked by excesses, gaps, and conflicts.

These pluralities and excesses can be seen as manifestations of neoliberalism, which conditions the worlds imagined by Atwood and Bacigalupi. David Harvey helps begin the definition of neoliberalism by focussing on political economy:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free market, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2005: 2).

<sup>4</sup> In *We*, efficiency as the rationality provides order and predictability to life; in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, O’Brien can describe to Winston how the system works.

Harvey's characterization fits corporate capitalism. Neoliberalism includes corporate capitalism, but "is much more than economic policy and an accompanying free market ideology" (Brown 2016: 5). It entails "what Foucault called the ascendancy of a form of normative reason that extends market metrics and practices to every dimension of human life" (Brown 2016: 5); it governs the sayable, the intelligible, the visible, and the criteria of truth within these domains (Brown 2003). "To govern in this sense is to structure the field of action of others" and how they construct the relevant meanings (Foucault 1982: 790). So, the means and the goal of neoliberalism is "how the overall exercise of political power [and of other social relations] can be modelled on the principles of a market economy" (Foucault 2008: 131), which includes the use of "economic analysis to decipher non-market relations", i.e., "the application of an economic grid to fields defined in opposition to economics" (Foucault 2008: 239-243).

Therefore, what can become private property is expanded to include organisations such as schools, prisons, mercenaries (like Blackwater), and police, as well as intellectual property. Because capital is identified with individual speech (they are both resources for the individual to use), unlimited amounts of money can be spent in the attempt to buy or influence elections. Wage labour becomes defined as human capital, where each of us becomes an "enterprise unit" concerned with our genetics and "educational investment" so that when we deploy our social capital, like an entrepreneur, we can earn the highest return. In that process, we become investors who choose, not labourers who work and produce—in a modern economic science that has become the "science of substitutable choices" (Foucault 2008: 219-229). For neoliberalism, the "citizen is calculating rather than rule-abiding, a Benthamite rather than a Hobbesian" (Brown 2003: par. 16); individual freedom rests in the making of economic decisions, not the exercise of political rights and participation; and personal morality values self-interest, self-promotion, efficiency, and entrepreneurial success, not the common good or the moral law.

Market language, practices, and rationality—like the enterprise form, social capital, and the economy of relations—are extended into non-market spheres of life, like the family, child-raising, and education, where schools are evaluated and rated on, among other criteria, how happy their students (as consumers) are and how much income their graduates make (Foucault 2008: 229, 243-244). The rule of law, protecting individual rights, is replaced by the quest for social order and pacification. The state itself and its laws are to be subject to market criteria of efficiency, cost-benefit

analysis, and consumer satisfaction, and can be judged or tested in those economic terms, so that there is “a permanent economic tribunal confronting government” (Foucault 2008: 247).

In Atwood’s trilogy, the tribunal has judged the government an inadequate failure, and so various corporate capitalist entities shape the society according to their needs and economy. Policing, for instance, has been privatised into the hands of CorpSeCorps. In Bacigalupi’s dystopian future, the Thai government still exists and is potent (unlike in many other countries), but two factions are in conflict, Environment favouring the (non-neoliberal) government regulation of trade, public health, and environmental matters, and the Department of Trade favouring a neoliberal abdication of those social justice concerns in favour of open markets dominated by foreign corporate capitalists. The book can be read as the attempt by foreign corporate capitalists, in alliance with Trade, to impose a neoliberal regime on Thailand.

Bacigalupi gives the reader a vivid “mental image” (More 2010: 56<sup>5</sup>) of Bangkok, with its political conflict between the Ministries of Trade and of Environment, existing in a city on the edge of breakdown: the threat of rising sea levels, the quest for energy, the leftover buildings from the previous economic expansion, its slums and areas for foreigners, and the predatory global calorie companies competing with each other and trying to break into the closed Thai market. The conversations among the foreigners allow the reader to understand some important aspects of the workings of global capitalism: a neoliberal world where corporate capitalism is trying to expand into every possible niche of society, with the aid of government if it can, and manipulating government if it must. The reader also receives a quick history that gets to the novel’s present: the fossil fuel global expansion crashed, and only now is a new food-based expansion occurring. But some important matters are not accounted for. What does the global system look like and how does it function to produce and reproduce itself? The reader may be given enough information to infer an answer, but much is not described; the reader never learns what unspeakable tragedy befell Finland—because no character tells the reader of those dire events (Bacigalupi 2009: 151).

Similar to Bacigalupi, Atwood also presents information primarily from the perspectives of the characters. Life in the corporate compounds is filtered through the

<sup>5</sup> The English text’s “conception” translates More’s Latin *imago*, which is better rendered as “image” or “mental image”.

responses of Crake and Jimmy to the events and culture within the compounds (Atwood 2003); life outside, in the pleeblands, by the members of “God’s Gardeners” (Atwood 2010). So, Atwood’s trilogy contains little or nothing about government, beyond the privatised policing and administration of justice of CorpSeCorps, which, as her characters suggest, is corrupt and self-serving, uninterested in the poor or in justice, happy to help a corporation employee who has strayed commit “suicide” (Atwood 2003: 211-212). HelthWyzer and the other large corporations with their compounds are described in some dimensions but not others; the reader learns a lot about the corporate culture and its effects, but little directly about corporate structure or governance. Moreover, the reader can glean enough to see that Atwood, like Bacigalupi, portrays a world dominated by corporate capitalism unchecked by government, undertaking whatever projects it wishes, using science to drive profits, and all of that in competition with other corporations (Atwood 2003: 303).

The reader could, like Professor Pieixoto at the end of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, complain about what Bacigalupi and Atwood leave out, and wish for a few pages of computer print-out from the printer of a powerful member of each dystopian society (Atwood 1987: 393). But I think that Bacigalupi and Atwood are trying to make a number of points about contemporary dystopian societies (and how they differ from the nightmares by Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell). For Bacigalupi and Atwood knowledge is perspectival and carries the biases of the observer; and so most of what we as readers know is only what the characters let us know. Many of the characters are trying to figure out the bigger picture, which itself is frequently uncertain or in flux, or at least how they may fit into certain pieces of the puzzle; but no character is able to discern and present the full picture, nor to act with any but a partial and flawed understanding<sup>6</sup>.

That perspectival and partial knowledge reflects the condition of the societies Bacigalupi and Atwood depict. Power flows throughout the societies, and any concentration of power is always in competition or in tension with other concentrations, so that the corporate balance of power may be shifting and the means of control may change. For instance, among the biotech pharmaceutical companies there are ongoing battles for profits, power, control of spaces, and control of bodies; in Thailand

<sup>6</sup> A dystopia of totalizing government, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* nonetheless is told by Offred, and so is perspectival and partial.

the Environment opposes Trade and the struggles for control between the two of them are unceasing. In those struggles, crises and upheavals will occur, but when and how are both uncertain, and whether the neoliberal actors will come out victorious (and what victory means) is also uncertain. As Hock Seng reflects, “nothing is certain, nothing is secure”; “we are like little monkeys, trying to understand a huge jungle” (Bacigalupi 2009: 67, 312). Snowman, reflecting, says that “The world is now one vast uncontrolled experiment—the way it always was, Crake would have said” (Atwood 2003: 228).

In the struggles among calorie companies and as they attempt to aid Trade to dominate Environment, the reader does see that corporate capitalism attempts not only to grow in wealth and power through their relentless pursuit of profit and power but also to grow in power through crises or shocks. Thus the calorie companies assist Trade in fomenting a civil war in Bangkok against Environment, what Naomi Klein (2007) has called “disaster capitalism”. Inevitably, then, the changes that dystopias undergo are unpredictable and uncontrollable, because capitalism operates by disasters, in which actors may be seeking their own gain but are doing so in circumstances that they can neither comprehend nor control.

Whereas Zamyatin’s, Huxley’s and Orwell’s dystopias focus on governmental control, the neoliberal dystopias present the power of government as either highly contested—Environment’s power in Bangkok—or effectively non-existent, with disciplinary power hived off to CorpSeCorps. For them, it is not so much political power that readers need to fear as it is the power of contemporary large corporations engaged in genetic modification and in the marketing of genetically modified products—agribusiness in *The Windup Girl* and pharmaceuticals in Atwood’s vision. In these two twenty-first century dystopias, government is not the problem. Rather, the problem is corporate power establishing neoliberal rationality, which contests and frequently defeats governmental regulation, takes policing onto itself, and allows no limits to the “market”. Agribusiness wishes to impose its idea of “free trade” onto Thailand (Bacigalupi 2009: 148); big Pharma uses patients as experimental subjects for drug tests (Atwood 2010: 25-26); and in both dystopias plagues and disease are introduced by competing large corporations (Bacigalupi 2009: 150; Atwood 2003: 210-213). In other words, agribusiness determines that exchange is the normative relation among Thais; big Pharma regards human beings as a bundle of cells like any other animal; and plagues and disease increase fear, introduce a new “normal”, and heighten dependence on the corporations.



For Bacigalupi and Atwood, then, we—the twenty-first century individuals—live in a world that can be comprehended only partially; we act with only limited knowledge; and power courses through the society, not from the single point of an all-powerful government, but from the plural sources of corporations bent on genetic modification, on creating locales for profit-seeking beyond the bounds of any traditional marketplace, and on using power in any manner to maintain or augment their position. It is not only that corporations are knowledgeable and powerful but also they use their knowledge and power throughout the society in ways that assure drastically limited knowledge and power for the members of that society.

## Utopian Possibilities

Both Bacigalupi and Atwood propose utopian possibilities: societies or forms of human interaction that develop after the collapse and flooding of Bangkok and after the catastrophic plague. Both authors envision that the transformed world is post-capitalist, despite the “capitalist realism” that sees no alternatives to capitalism (Fisher 2009), even though “someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (Jameson 2003), and regardless of Le Guin’s having watched us:

[...] blighting our world irrevocably, irremediably, and mindlessly—ignoring every warning and neglecting every benevolent alternative in the pursuit of “growth” and immediate profit. It is quite hard to live in the United States in 2001 and feel any long term hopefulness about [...] technologies that could and should be useful and productive—fuel sources, agriculture, genetic engineering, even medicine (Le Guin 2001).

Contemporary capitalism with its powerful corporations and pervasive neoliberal rationality is too destructive of the environment, relations among human beings (and between human beings and other beings), and individual growth and development; as the dystopias show, capitalism cannot be included in the utopian possibilities<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that many twentieth century totalitarian dystopias consider nature as oppositional or as a solace to the dystopia, whereas in the twenty-first century, the anthropocene era, nature is no longer separable from human beings (Bacigalupi 2009: 243-249). Conversely, both Bacigalupi and Atwood see religion as oppositional: Jaidee and Kanya (and the monks) seem profoundly affected by their Buddhist beliefs (Bacigalupi 2009: 214, 348-351), and *The Year of the Flood* is basically about the theology and practices of “God’s Gardeners”, an environmental, pacifist, generally egalitarian and open religious sect whose members are the only known human survivors of Crake’s cataclysm other than Jimmy/Snowman and two Painballers. These religions are in part a response to neoliberalism’s exclusion of the spiritual and emphasis on instrumental rationality. Kanya can successfully negotiate the crisis in Bangkok because she does not think only instrumentally, but asks about the meaning of life—whereas Anderson and his allies think instrumentally (how are we going to gain power) as they watch hundreds die in the civil war. God’s Gardeners similarly doubt the values of the

Beyond seeing the need for a post-capitalist society, Bacigalupi's utopian possibilities are fewer and less well-developed than Atwood's. In part, of course, only in Thailand has the rule of agribusiness been thwarted, and then only by the flooding of the city; so, corporate capitalism still dominates worldwide, and Bangkok is but a flooded remnant of itself. Nonetheless, Bacigalupi suggests utopian anticipations, small scale flashes of what might occur more extensively<sup>8</sup>.

One involves time, memory, and collective history. One climax of the novel occurs when, after Trade's victory in the civil war, Kanya murders the AgriGen emissaries who come to seize the precious Thai seedbank, their spoils from the war; she then distributes the seeds to the monks charged with protecting them, who take the seeds to new hiding places (Bacigalupi 2009: 348-353). Kanya is a complex character. Originally a spy for Trade within Environment out of bitterness because her childhood home and village were burned by Environment to head off a plague, over time she develops loyalty to Jaidee, her boss at Environment who is brutally murdered, and to Environment's goals of environmental stability and social justice. Her own memory is invigorated when, as Head of Environment, she has to order a village burned after a young girl from the village reports possible viruses there. Thus, she participates in the collective memory of Thailand. She is Buddhist. Her Buddhism lets her recognise flux, change, and chance—and so opens her to radical change (like murdering AgriGen's representatives). Her Buddhism also makes her sceptical of science: she admires Gibbons's generipper skills, but when he offers to help her and "be [her] god" she replies, "I'm Buddhist" (Bacigalupi 2009: 243). She also feels a deep connection to Thailand, its independence from the integrated, globalized world of agribusiness, and its own traditions<sup>9</sup>. For Kanya, with those connections, "the culture of memory [emphasis—P.S.] allows for the formation of a collective resistance" (Baccolini 2003: 127).

Compound, and in asking about the value of life they for instance avoid eating meat or entering the commodity economy—and thus reject the BlyssPlus pill.

<sup>8</sup> One dystopian alternative to agribusiness that Bacigalupi implies is that the decay of one form of corporate capitalism may simply serve as the beginning for another form. Current agribusiness dystopia is in fact a dystopian sequel to a previous worldwide neoliberal corporate dystopia, a world dominated by oil or energy companies, which expanded—"the first expansion", it is called—throughout the world, imposing their vision throughout the world. But with the exhaustion of oil that dystopia evaporated in a great contraction and the rising sea levels of a carbon-heated world flooded coastal cities everywhere. Oil energy, having been depleted, however, large American corporates started to deal in caloric energy. Bacigalupi (2009: 28, 150) does not describe in detail the first expansion and its contraction; but the dominance of calorie companies means that one serious problem of contemporary neoliberal corporate capitalism is that it can replicate itself: if oil is depleted, move to calories.

<sup>9</sup> At one point she thinks: "We are alive. We are alive when whole kingdoms and countries are gone. When Malaya is a morass of killing. When Kowloon is underwater. When China is split and the Vietnamese are broken and Burma is

In her violent saving of the seedbank Kanya also engages in an act of generosity: she allows Hock Seng, who is acting as a translator, to escape the carnage. His Malaysian Chinese background and green card would normally make him the first person targeted in any violence in Bangkok, but here they allow Kanya to see that he is not of the AgriGen delegation, and she lets him go. That generosity feeds on itself: Hock Seng, who until the attack had always been concerned with his interest and advancement first and foremost, risks his escape by helping to rescue Mai (Bacigalupi 2009: 354).

Bacigalupi also presents a caring community of Emiko (the windup), Gibbons, and Kip (Gibbons's lady-boy companion). Quite sick as the floodwaters engulf Bangkok, Gibbons keeps Kip so that Kip does not have to work the streets; and the two of them invite Emiko onto their small patio. Emiko has frequently despaired about her condition: "I am a windup. Nothing will change. We will always be despised" (Bacigalupi 2009: 222). And indeed throughout most of the novel Emiko is despised, denigrated as a prostitute, and unable to be in public without giving away her status as a windup because of her halting movements (she revolts against being a mistreated sex-worker when the corrupt Lord Protector and his cronies come to gang-rape her; she kills them all, setting into motion the immediate events leading to the civil war). But she finds in Gibbons not the arrogant competitive taunting generipper who confronted Kanya (Bacigalupi 2009: 243-248) but a generous companion who offers community and connectedness and who is willing to use his skills to help her. Emiko's dejection about her condition especially derives from her inability to reproduce and the stutter-steps that expose her status. But Gibbons knows the strengths of the windups: especially in a world of plagues, "you do not fear cibiscosis or blister rust" and "you don't catch diseases like mine", he says to her. He also can improve her gait and allow her to reproduce (by reworking her genetic material, not by using old-fashioned eggs and sperm); "nothing about you is inevitable" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 358) and Gibbons promises that she can reproduce: "Oh yes. I can do that for you [...]. I can do that for you, and much, much more" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 359).

nothing but starvation. The Empire of America is no more. The Union of the Europeans is splintered and factionalized. And yet we endure, even expand. The Kingdom survives. Thank the Buddha that he extends a compassionate hand and that our Queen has enough merit to attract these terrifying farang tools without which we would be completely defenceless" (Bacigalupi 2009: 214).

Gibbons's words end the novel, but they also suggest how open-ended, ambiguous, or uncertain are utopian anticipations in critical dystopias, or at least in Bacigalupi's critical dystopia. Because other generippers can probably do as Gibbons can with windups, then "someday, perhaps, all people will be New People [i.e. windups—P.S.] and you will look back on us as we now look back at the poor Neanderthals" (Bacigalupi 2009: 358); Gibbons, playing God with Emiko as he tried to do with Kanya, would usher in a post-natural, post-human world<sup>10</sup>. That vision, however, seems to contrast with Kanya's final acts of memory and generosity, acts done from human memory by human agency; what specifically the utopian anticipations will mean and they might interact are, ultimately, left open.

Bacigalupi's characters suggest other utopian possibilities. Gibbons keeps in mind that human issues are not like "the decay of uranium or the velocity of a clipper ship. [They are—P.S.] not predictable" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 249) and throughout the novel the unpredictable occurs, not only in physics and mathematics but in the purposes and instrumental reason of the actors (Anderson, AgriGen's chief agent, sought to win the Lord Protector to the calorie companies' side by promising him something he had never had, sex with a windup. Unintended and unpredicted consequences ensued). So the instrumental reason and calculation by economic rationality promises more than it can deliver, and needs to be replaced by a reasoning more open to contingency and chance.

In Bangkok, individuals' roles, status, and class are defined and determinative in most instances: for instance, Emiko is labelled unnatural, a windup, alien to human beings, owned by a man who keeps her in sexual servitude. But she breaks down the natural/artificial or human/unnatural binary: despite being bred to obedience, she finds a human-like agency when she kills her rapists and transgresses her limitations. The predetermined social role into which she is placed proves transient and the binary that marks her "inevitably" as less than human can be overcome. The segmentation and divisions that marked Bangkok are not inevitable but changeable.

<sup>10</sup> For Gibbons it would not be "post-natural" in any significant sense because he sees that human beings naturally manipulate and transform nature: as he says to Kanya, "The ecosystem unraveled when man first went a-seafaring. When we first lit fires on the broad savannas of Africa. We have only accelerated the phenomenon. The food web you talk about is nostalgia, nothing more. Nature... We are nature. Our every tinkering is nature, our every biological striving. We are what we are, and the world is ours. We are its gods. Your only difficulty is in your unwillingness to unleash your potential fully upon it. [...]. If you would just let me, I could be your god and shape you to the Eden that beckons u" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 243).

Atwood's utopian anticipations, like Bacigalupi's, include time, memory, and collective history, generosity, caring communities, alternative rationalities, and the breaking of binaries. By the end of the trilogy, the surviving human beings have survived in large measure because of their active memories of their collective history. What brought God's Gardeners together was, originally, a revulsion against life in the Compounds and the pursuit of biogenetic knowledge with experimentation on human beings; many of God's Gardeners first worked with Crake. In reaction to Crake and the pursuit of human power over (or human transforming of) nature, they established a relatively long-lived and relatively successful religious community, many of whose values become valuable after the "Waterless Flood", the destruction of human beings by Crake's BlyssPlus pill. Partly, the group learned how to work in concert, protecting friends and working against enemies (such as the Painballers) when necessary. They became vegetarians to lessen their ecological footprint, and—despite backsliding on occasion—were able to reassert their vegetarianism when they needed to work together with the Pigoons (genetically engineered pigs with human brain tissue). Their extensive time together, in co-operation and in disagreements, gave them collective memories and a collective history that allowed them to confront the post-apocalyptic crises as a unified, thoughtful, and co-operative community. Much of that collective history involved the generosity and caring communities of the Gardeners. They are selves who see themselves in relation to other individuals, and care for the others frequently without regard for their own well-being and without the expectation that they will obtain some kind of individual benefit or reward. Thus, they have an alternate rationality to the market or individualistic rationality.

They break down important binaries and prepare for an uncertain future of hope and possibility when they undertake to kill the dangerous remaining two Painballers and when they engage in educating the Crakers, who are a genetically engineered species whom Crake created without the "destructive features" of human beings like hierarchy, property, jealousy, racism, and religion (Atwood, 2003: 305). They also have certain characteristics to make life easier and environmentally sound: their skin automatically contains sun-screen and insect repellent, they eat only vegetation, and they recycle their own excrement.

Atwood's black humour and irony make it difficult to recapitulate briefly the serious episodes that end the book. First, to kill the Painballers an alliance is formed among the remaining human beings, the Pigoons and the Crakers (who are kind, gentle, and pacifist, but who can communicate or translate between humans and

Pigoons); in the campaign, the Painballers are captured because of the strategy and quick actions of the Pigoons, the weapons of the human beings, and the cross-species communication and translation by a Craker. In the campaign the human beings are not the lead species but they follow the commands of the Pigoons and listen to the Craker. Human agency and human action are effective only when undertaken in co-operation with (non-human) others. After the battle, the human beings, the Crakers, and the Pigoons work out terms for living together in peace and aiding each other—the Crakers make the human women pregnant to continue (changed) humanity<sup>11</sup>, the human beings and Pigoons protect the Crakers, human beings promise to eat no bacon, and Toby teaches the young Craker named Blackbeard to write (Atwood 2013: 339-375). When four “green-eyed Craker hybrid children are born to the human women”, this is the “future of the human race” (Atwood 2013: 380). The binary of human/nature and the hierarchy of human beings over nature are broken, and in the newness of the birth each hybrid child “is a thing of hope” (Atwood, 2013: 390).

The second “episode” at the end of the book is the education of the young Craker, Blackbeard, the battle translator, who seeks and gains a cultural education far beyond what Crake would have wished: “Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war” (Atwood 2003: 361). But his Crakers have potentials beyond what he imagined, “their brains are more malleable than Crake intended” (Atwood 2013: 273). Blackbeard, fascinated with human storytelling and writing, learns how to write. When Toby (the chief human storyteller) in her sorrow cannot write or tell of the final battle, Blackbeard steps in and based on first-hand accounts writes the history of the event, for the Crakers as well as for others. At this point, “the Crakers become potentially autonomous individuals in the sense that they are responsible for their own history” (Marques 2015: 144).

<sup>11</sup> Having sex is more complex than it might seem. At the beginning of *MaddAddam*, some Craker men take two human women, Ren and Amanda, into the bushes and have sex with them by force without the women’s consent—from the human perspective, rape—because they were “blue”, i.e., in their fertile period, when Craker men were genetically programmed to court and impregnate females—from the Craker perspective, natural sex (Atwood 2003: 165; Atwood 2013: 12-13). Later in the book some human women voluntarily go to the Craker men (Atwood 2013: 273-74); and finally, after the post-battle agreements, Toby insists, and Blackbeard and the Crakers accept, that the Crakers “must be respectful, and always ask first, to see if a woman is really blue or is just smelling blue, when there is a question about blue things”, i.e., about sexual intercourse (Atwood 2013: 386).

Toby taught Blackbeard not only to write but also to keep writing alive, crafting pens and ink, insisting that the historical stories of the Crakers (and their creator Crake and first teacher Oryx), the relevant stories of the human beings the Crakers know, and some other stories (Atwood 2013: 385) be copied and preserved, and that each new book have blank pages on which future beings will write and “will teach these things to the younger ones” (Atwood 2013: 387). Storytelling, history, and the continuation of both hold a promise of learning, community, and communication among the Crakers and the hybrids.

## Conclusion

Atwood’s and Bacigalupi’s utopian aspirations hold hope not only for a post-catastrophe world of plagues and floods. The contemporary reader can also see them as model or metaphor for critique and action for our present. Combining traits of Crakers and Pigoons, working together with time and memory and against segmentation and separation, contemporary human beings can work to develop those principles and practices needed to live non-destructively and harmoniously in the present. For the sake of contemporary human beings, the utopian aspirations of the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Windup Girl* need to be instantiated in today’s human (and more-than-human) community.

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## IV

### *Deconstructing Utopia*

KRZYSZTOF M. MAJ

In the topic of the sign, Utopia is the gap, the fault, the void that passes between the signifier and the signified and subverts every sign.

Jean Baudrillard, *Utopia Deferred*

#### The King and the Cut

Why did King Utopus cut his domain off the mainland?

The answer to that question has to be twofold, resembling in a way a bipartite composition of the founding work for all narrative utopias to come, i.e. Thomas More's *De optimo reipublicæ*. Utopia, on the one hand, could have been essentially different from *topia*, *topos*, *topoi* as a substantiation of the metaphysical reign over signs or, on the other hand, as an emanation of the holistic, totalitarian need to build a brave new world in place of perfecting the former one. However, at the same time, one must recognize utopia not only as a discourse or a particular representation of a travel narrative but also as a vivacious, vibrant, and real world enslaved by a transformative idea. The last claim seems to correspond with the fallogocentric interpretation of the origins of Utopian island, offered by Luis Marin in *Utopics. Spatial Play*:

The island of Utopia, womblike matrix and mother, originates in a violent gesture aimed at the earth itself; its birth is work of no less violence. The narrative produces a new tension or ambivalence as a result. On the one hand is offered to us the image of a welcoming enclosed space, tranquilly situated

about a center that is to be both vacuum and fullness. On the other hand we see war and violent aggression opening up space. It detaches and separates. Utopus is the male, the father; Utopia is the lunar island, enclosed and warm, the mother (Marin 1984: 108).

The centre (*umbilico terræ*) and its oversea peripheries, the island and the continent, the founding Father of Utopia and the mother island, the enclosure and the openness—all these binary oppositions are only but a consequence of the utopian rhetoric developed by Thomas More, whose “truly golden little book” is, as Artur Blaim points out in *Gazing in Useless Wonder*, full of juxtapositions like all versus nothing, any versus no-one, everywhere/anywhere versus nowhere, ever versus never, equality versus inequality, true versus false, wisdom versus folly, order versus disorder, community versus privacy—and so on (Blaim 2013: 30). Luis Marin’s interpretation goes further in terms of critical analysis, merging utopian and gender studies to show how the difference between utopia, understood as a discourse and, conversely, as a world, may be translated into cultural roles of a mother and a father. *Logós spermáthikos*, an idea inseminated in Mother Earth, is here an act of symbolical rape, subduing the world to his master’s voice just like in Luce Irigaray’s vision of the womb to where “there is no going back. Except in the father’s name” (Irigaray 1985: 353)<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, as Marin sets it forth, the reader of *De optimo reipublicæ* is a “witness to both a rape and a birth: rape of the earth, which has been opened up by the hero and his army, birth by cutting the umbilical cord” (Marin 1984: 108). This idea was followed up by Angelika Bunner in her well-known reading of utopian origin as a birth by “cutting off the umbilical cord that had joined it [utopia—K.M.M.] to the mainland” (Bammer 2004: 13). Finally, as Darby Lewes recalls in the article *Nudes From Nowhere: Pornography, Empire, and Utopia*, this idea has been widely adopted to political discourse (not necessarily related to utopianism), ever since Niccollo Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*:

Machiavelli frequently refers to his country as the “fatherland” when he is speaking of the land in terms of a proud and great nation. But when he speaks of a weak, passive, vulnerable state, the fatherland suddenly undergoes a rapid sex-change operation; the pronouns are suddenly switched and Italy becomes the feminized motherland. At several points in his discourse, Machiavelli characterizes Italy as

<sup>1</sup> There has been an ongoing tradition in utopian studies to interpret Utopia as a womb. This interpretative standpoint was probably the best reflected in 1992 edition of *Utopia*, which is annotated by Robert M. Adams’ note on “a resemblance to a womb” bore by the island of Utopia (Lewes 1993: 72).

an exposed, susceptible “she”: weak, vulnerable, meek, and submissive [...]. The imagery is chillingly explicit: the land is susceptible to rape (Lewes 1993: 70).

This symbolical cut that occurred when King Utopus decided to sever his domain off the continent, thereby enjoying a splendid isolation, is symbolical only thanks to the utopian discourse that have legitimised it as such—because it was truly both political and corporeal. Thus, it could be another argument in favour of the continuous effort to defend utopia from anti-utopian equations like “utopia equals totalitarianism equals communism equals Marxism equals socialism”, or “communism equals totalitarianism equals fascism” (Levitas 2013: 7) and move it from, using Ruth Levitas’ terms, the utopia of terror to utopia of grace.

A feminist critique of the very foundations of both the discourse and the island of utopia helps to realize that utopia is predominantly the narrative of the origin story of the idea, the man, and the world alike. More, after all, wrote about the best state of commonwealth and the island of utopia, never suggesting any innate connection in between. The cut did occur on every possible level and introduced a great deal of disturbance in the utopian rhetoric. Hence, a utopian narrative should never be read simple-mindedly as an idealistic tale of the perfect city steeped in an abundance of happiness. This story has always been two-sided which was reflected in the very introductory words of *De optimo reipublicæ*, composing the opening *Hexastichon Anemoli Poetae Laureati* that so famously introduced a pun “utopia/eutopia”:

“No place [Utopia]” was once my name, I lay so far;  
But now with Plato’s state I can compare,  
Perhaps outdo her (for what he only drew  
In empty words I have made live anew  
In men and wealth, as well as splendid laws);  
“The Good Place [Eutopia]” they should call me, with good cause (More 1995: 19).

It seems unlikely, that Thomas More would have decided to focalize his narrative on the Utopia itself and let her speak before any man—from the legendary King Utopus up to a character-narrator, Raphael Hytlodæus—and considered this only as a rhetorical figure. Utopia knows herself that she can be called Eutopia only when certain conditions are met, and only when she becomes worthy of that name in “the speculum of other”—so in the eyes of those who do not believe in the “eutopianhood” as an inborn title inherited in a paternalistic, feudal lineage as well. This interpretation aligns with etymological roots of utopia which does not only transgress the word-building rules in Greek grammar but also projects on itself a female gender

identity—even in its earliest embodiment as *Nusquama Nostra* in More's correspondence with Erasmus Roterodamus. (E)utopia is a woman: it deconstructs the discourse of ideality from within the Platonic metaphysics of presence, thereby "mak[ing] anew" what have been "drawn in empty words" hereinbefore.

## The Fatherhood of Utopian Logos

"Let us cut the King off here", says Jacques Derrida in the essay *Father of Logos* right after recalling a famous passage 274c-e from Plato's *Faidros*, to freeze the scene and examine a seemingly two-face nature of *pharmakon*—a kingly gift of the writing. The father, the King, the writing, the logos, and the world—these are key metaphors for this very essay and utopian discourse alike. A peculiar fondness for nonsensical paradoxes, word-plays, and puns, widely discussed in reference to More's persiflage in *De optimo reipublicæ* (Romm 1991; Nelson 2001; Blaim 2013), reveals its inescapable logocentric parentage and brings up the question of the origin of creation and the Father of Logos:

Not that logos is the father, either. But the origin of logos is its father. One could say anachronously that the "speaking subject" is the father of his speech. And one would quickly realize that this is no metaphor, at least not in the sense of any common, conventional effect of rhetoric. Logos is a son, then, a son that would be destroyed in his very presence without the present attendance of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him and answers for him. Without his father, he would be nothing but, in fact, writing. At least that is what is said by the one who says: it is the father's thesis. The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father (Derrida 1981: 77).

This parental, father-and-son relationship between the logos and its source, origin, and subject draws a perfect analogy to the subtle though discursively legitimizing relation between utopia and its founding father, the one who severs the island from the continent, who speaks for his citizens, and who answers for them. A phrase "founding father" has domesticated in American political discourse as a proper name for those who have laid foundations for the United States of America; however, quite similarly, it may describe the very act of placing a cornerstone of utopia. Without the persistent, continuous attendance (or, as one could say, surveillance) of the father, utopia is not utopia at all, but a mere imaginary place located "*in illo loco*, »ex-isting« out there apart from the world and cohabiting the vast and largely unknowable cosmological space of the extra-ordinary" (Hutchinson 1987: 176). Utopian domain of

the father of logos who “is always suspicious and watchful toward writing” may be, therefore, associated with Foucault’s model of panopticon, wherein the watchman can see everything but cannot be seen by anyone. This “powerful and virtual omnipresent gaze”, as Luis Marin calls it (1993: 402), or “all-pervading gaze”, as Hanan Yoran prefers (2005: 24), resonates in another passage from *Father of Logos*, where Derrida recalls the famous Plato’s metaphor of the cave and sun from the *Republic* (VII, 515c ff.) and associates it with the simultaneously pervading and evading face of the Father of Logos:

Now, about this father, this capital, this good, this origin of value and of appearing beings, it is not possible to speak simply or directly. First of all because it is no more possible to look them in the face than to stare at the sun [emphasis—K.M.M.] (Derrida 1981: 82).

Correspondingly, in *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes Jeremy Bentham’s vision of panoptic prison, which by reversing principles of dungeon (to enclose, to hide, to deprive of light) “arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately” as “full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected” (Foucault 1995: 200). “Visibility is a trap”, concludes Foucault, and delivers, thereby, a perfect commentary on the nature of Derridian father who remains a “hidden illuminating, blinding source of logos”. A sun that punishes with blindness. In Tommaso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*—which remains an obvious reference when it comes to exemplifying the similarities between the sun, the father, and utopia—the supreme ruler of the City (“he is head over all, in temporal and spiritual matters”, (Campanella: 2006: 9) is addressed to only as the Metaphysicus or HOH, safely concealed under the solar symbol ☉. Even though HOH is nameless as any entity hiding beneath a cognomen, a trigram (which conceals must not be named, as it has been in case of Judeo-Christian tetragrammaton יהוה, YHWH) or a symbol, he reserves to himself the ultimate right of giving names—and thus, the control over the logosphere of Civitas Solis. Good people of *The City of the Sun* sincerely believe that “that sun is the father, and the earth the mother”—and this principle, although obviously inspired by a great many factual mythologies, translates the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié* into a dichotomic parentage of father and mother. Clearly, this striking resemblance reveals a common philosophical grounding for the metaphysics of presence and logocentric utopia, bridged by the idea that paradigmatic, oppressive discourse le-

gitimizes any number of symbolical cuts, not only the cut between the island of Utopia and the continent of *empeiria* but also all the other cuts that lead to the further divisions, separations, and segregations, so useful when it comes to governing the society by the rule *divide et impera*.

To fully realize the relevance of logocentric fatherhood in utopia, one must bring forward a political and economic face of the nameless father who gives (away) the names. Jacques Derrida says, mainly, that *logos* is indebted to the father who etymologically conveys the meaning of the chief, the capital, and the good(s)—all crucial to understanding the way the father can become the founding father himself. The Father of *Logos* understood as the good, *agathon*, rules in all early modern utopias—or at least that is usually assumed. A suspicious assessment of the perfection of utopian “inner world of *idolum*” (Mumford 1928: 13) has marked its presence already in the ending parts of More’s *De optimo reipublicæ*, wherein a heterodiegetic narrator confronts character-narrator’s (i.e. Hythloday’s) account of his journey to the island of Utopia with words:

When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that not a few of the laws and customs he had described as existing among Utopians were really absurd. These included their methods of waging war, their religious practices, as well as other customs of theirs; but my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy. This one thing alone utterly subverts all the nobility, magnificence, splendour and majesty which (in the popular view) are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth [...]. Meantime, while I can hardly agree with everything he said [...], yet I freely confess that in the Utopian commonwealth there are very many features that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see (More 2003: 106-107).

This short passage is indeed, perfect, but for deconstruction. On the one hand, it challenges the paradigmatic statement of utopia being *eutopia* in the all-pervading eyes of Hythloday, the traveller, and clearly confronts the narrative created by Utopian father of *logos*, the founder of utopia, King Utopus. On the other hand, while doing so, it uses the very same paradigmatic subject, seizing the opportunity of dropping the last words in the whole book and introducing a narrative perspective external (heterodiegetic) to the inner world of Utopia—and, thereby constructing a binary opposition of the internal and the external, easily translatable to the postcolonial juxtaposition of the centre and peripheries. Utopia is peripheral in the vision of Hythloday’s interlocutor because even though *De optimo reipublicæ* is written in the form of a dialogue, it clearly exposes the danger of subjecting the dialogue, i.e. the conversation of two *logoi* (διά-λογος), with a concealed paradigmatic monologue—of



one voice and one logos (μονο-λογος)<sup>2</sup>. And this very threat or a general problem of utopia, which is always to come, may be regarded as a key argument in favour of defining eutopia and dystopia not as, respectively, visions of happy and blessed or unhappy and unblessed commonwealth, but as two interpretations of the very same discourse tragically trapped in the logocentric discourse of the father of logos, a demigod wielding the power of inscription.

## Father of Logos and Lord of Logos

A polyphonic discourse shaping the narrative space of More's *De optimo reipublicæ* along with a two-faced nature of the father of logos and an ambivalence of *pharmakon* seems to correspond well with a non-dichotomic approach to eutopias and dystopias. The difference between these two could be, mainly, assessed from the narrative perspective, disregarding the auctorial intention some researchers would like to appeal to and contributing to a more world-conscious analysis of utopian narratives. Thus u-topias, no-places, would become e-utopias ("positively valorised no-places") or dys-topias ("negatively valorised no-places") depending on a given interpretation that would revolve around the world-building and world-controlling discourse of the Father or the Lord of Logos, respectively. Both presence and relevance of the latter symbolic figures are unquestionable in the history of eutopian and dystopian narratives across media—fathers, brothers, kings, priests, presidents, architects, judges, and other white men all represent the same "supermale authority of the patriarchal state" (Ferns 1989: 374).

(E)U-/DYSTOPIAN NARRATIVE	FATHERHOOD/LORDSHIP OF LOGOS
Thomas More, <i>De optimo reipublicæ</i>	King Utopus
Tommaso Campanella, <i>Civitas solis</i>	HOH
Francis Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i>	The Fathers of Salomon's House
Yevgeny Zamyatin, <i>We</i>	The Benefactor
George Orwell, <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>	Big Brother

<sup>2</sup> This idea was greatly inspired by Bernhard Waldenfels' phenomenological analysis of xenological differences between the monologue of one logos and the dialogue of two logoi (Waldenfels 2002: 92).

Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>	Mustafa Mond
Alan Moore, David Lloyd, <i>V for Vendetta</i>	Chancellor Sutler
<i>Matrix</i> , dir. Lana & Lilly Wachowski	The Architect
<i>Equilibrium</i> , dir. K. Wimmer	The Father
<i>Deus Ex: Human Revolution</i> , prod. Square Enix	The Illuminati
Margaret Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	God the Father
Lois Lowry, <i>The Giver</i>	The Elders
Philip Pullman, <i>His Dark Materials</i>	The Authority
Marcin Przybyłek, <i>Gamedecverse</i>	Emperor / ImBu
Suzanne Collins, <i>Hunger Games</i>	President Snow
<i>Bioshock: Infinite</i> , prod. Irrational Games	Father Comstock
<i>Fallout 3</i> , prod. Bethesda Softworks	President Eden
<i>Star Wars: The Clone Wars</i> , dir. Dave Filoni	The Father (of the Force)
<i>Black Mirror: Fifteen Million Merits</i> , dir. Euros Lun	Judges Hope, Chairty and Wraith
<i>Revolution</i> , prod. NBC	President of the Monroe Republic
<i>Dominion</i> , prod. SyFy	Vegas Lord of the City
<i>The 100</i> , prod. The CW	President Dante
<i>Helix</i> , prod. SyFy	Brother Michael
<i>Ergo Proxy</i> , dir. Shūkō Murase	Lord Regent/Proxy One

Table 2. Utopian and dystopian narratives juxtaposed with the logocentric instances

As clearly shown in the table above, a recurrence and reappearance of father figures has become a hallmark of, particularly, dystopian narratives, ranging from anti-logocentric or anti-metaphysical identities like Mustafa Mond, God the Father, or The Architect up to straightforwardly ironical President Eden, The Benefactor, or The Authority. The ruling figure in utopia undoubtedly has two faces: one of the loving, though patronising Father, and the other one which represents the imposing and sinister Lord. Any effort of juxtaposing the two of them would, however, result

in establishing yet another binary opposition—which seems futile, as it would deprive the utopian narratives of their ironical ambivalence that they have born since the very inception of the genre. If one decides to interpret Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas solis* as twisted, totalitarian theocracy with the literal embodiment of the metaphysics of presence atop the feudal hierarchy—it should not be opposed, as any vote in favour of paradigmatic treatment of this storyworld as eutopian would prove the contrary even more. Therefore, the Lord and the Father of Logos are not *different*, but they are products of Derridian *differance*—as they remain indistinguishable when only heard of, but never met, spoken to, or confronted with the power of the scripture, always open for subversive interpretations.

As a result, the Father/Lord of Logos must be constantly “suspicious and watchful towards writing”. He incinerates books and libraries (Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*) or works of art (Wimmer's *Equilibrium*), twists the meaning of words (Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) and replaces them with meaningless digits (Zamyatin's *We*). A famous confession from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “We're destroying words—scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone”, clarifies the intention of this “cutting to the bone”, being yet just another cut in dystopian logosphere that leads to a deprivation of context and ennoblement of speech over the scripture. The *pharmakon* of the Lord of Logos is a poisonous gift, inasmuch as any other overdosed or misprescribed medication—or maybe, as one could say, it does not bring any solace to its users as it is prescribed by the giver instead of being inscribed by receivers, according to their will, needs, and expectations. As Derrida phrases:

[this—K.M.M.] medicine, this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent (Derrida 1981: 70).

Such is also the nature of dystopian opiates of the masses, introduced to the logosphere to simulate an otherwise inaccessible state of openness and keep people subjected to the Father of Logos as not only the source and origin of *logoi* but also the philtre or charm of either beneficent, or maleficent effect Derrida elaborates about. Soma in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Can-D in Philip K. Dick's *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, mascóns from Stanisław Lem's *The Futurological Congress*, anti-stirrings pills in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, morphling in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, Prozum in Kurt Wimmer's *Equilibrium*, The Bliss from James Dashner's

*Maze Runner*, Aqua-Cola in George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road*, or fruits of the New Babylon in Brandon Sanderson's *Firefight*—they all in fact filter the reality concealing everything unfitted to a master plan of the Lord of Logos.

The Father/Lord of Logos, though omnipresent, remains disembodied. He reveals himself through the media (*V for Vendetta*), haunting his subjects from behind the curtain. He is the h(a)unter who resides in the centre of the panopticon, surrounded by screens which allow him to communicate with his subjects and commute around his domain without being directly involved in its affairs. He is at the same time the and at the very centre of logosphere, where “the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible” and “the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden” (Derrida 2002: 352). The charm he casts over his subjects exposes, therefore, an added value in a form of telepresence in a spectral medium, a “teletechnological *différance*”, as Derrida calls the phenomenon in *The Specters of Marx*. As he clarifies this notion in the passage introducing the famous concept of hauntology:

this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes [emphasis—K.M.M.]. It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death. It requires, then, what we call, to save time and space rather than just to make up a word, hauntology. We will take this category to be irreducible, and first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology (Derrida 2006: 63).

Dystopian Father of Logos is tele-present in that very way, in a visible spectrum of mass-media, reaching with his voice—that may not be scripted—ears and minds of all his subjects. “Attention Dunwall Citizens”, announces the Propaganda Officer in the gameworld of *Dishonored* many a time, transmitting the voice of Lord Regent via the network of loudspeakers, thus keeping the world narrated and explained. Throughout the gameplay the player seizes to be amazed by this recurring, repetitive voice and adapts to it, learns to treat it as an irreplaceable part of the environment—a similar phenomenon occurs in any other dystopian society treated with omnipresent telescreens, as Orwell calls them. In Kurt Wimmer's *Equilibrium* giant telescreens broadcast the word of The Father, head of the Tetragrammaton (יהוה, YHWH)—and continue to do so even after his death, in a time out of joint, allowed to interfere from the otherworld with the world of the living. The only cure, the *pharmakon*, which once has been taken from the people of Libria, is art—and a famous scene showing a Tetragrammaton agent (played by Sean Bean) shot in the head with a bullet that

had pierced through the volume of William Butler Yeates's poetry—presents a powerful metaphor of how the logos may be subjected to the will of the spectral, h(a)unting Father/Lord.

Finally, the Father/Lord of Logos may not exist without his counterpart, let it be an enemy of the state, a rebel residing in the outlands, or, as in the feminist critique of utopia, a motherland subdued to the patriarchal white male supremacy. It is no coincidence that revolutionary movements, as well as their instigators and leaders, come in all dystopian narratives from without the borders of dystopia: from the peripheries, i.e. a space surrounding the logocentric *topos*. This surrounding heterotopian space may be, contrary to the (phal)logocentric no-place of (e)u-/dystopia, associated with *Χώρα* (gr. *khōra*)—understood by both Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva as a moving, transformative force (Kristeva 1984: 25) that escapes centralised metaphysical structuration. In Derrida's own words, *khōra* is “a secret without secret [that—K.M.M.] remains forever impenetrable on the subject of it/her” (Derrida 1995: 94). Thus, *khōra* denotes “the place of absolute exteriority” (Derrida 1998: 19) which does not allow “to be dominated by any theological, ontological or anthropological instance” (Derrida 1998: 20). This seems to fit well not only most of dystopian narratives (which usually bifurcate into two plotlines, one set within the borders of dystopia and another one—beyond) but also, as Alec Charles reminds, a feminist reinterpretation of *khōra* as *écriture féminine* (Charles 2012: 497), which turns out to be yet another scripture the Father/Lord of Logos may be suspicious and watchful about. If one takes also into account that *khōra* may indicate “the call for a thinking of the event to come, of the democracy to come” (Derrida 2005: XV), its *par excellence* deconstructive and subversive potential may be clearly seen in strong female heroines leading revolutionary movements in so many recent young adult dystopias, like in the case of Katniss Everdeen in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* or Beatrice Prior in Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, to name just a few. However, as Chris Ferns has observed, also male protagonists of classical dystopian narratives usually feel insecure about their masculinity, not to mention that they are usually assisted by a woman able to see through the veil of lies woven by the Father/Lord of Logos. Anti-patriarchal and subversive discourse is, then, the most important aspect of dystopian narrative that do not only project an unhappy world triggering a warning for the current civilisation (as, one could say, any more ambitious science fiction novel) but also—if not even predominantly—teaches a critical approach to any authoritarian instance threatening the society with, at first, totalising, but then totalitarian lordship.

## Closing remarks

So why did King Utopus cut off his domain from the mainland? Was it truly necessary to introduce a hiatus between the new and the old, the ideal and the real, the fantastic and the mundane? Maybe it is the nature of the Father/Lord of Logos to impose a binary opposition in order to legitimize his power/knowledge and leave aside continental jurisdiction or ethics. Maybe he wants to become the source of logos, to conceal himself as the very origin of utopian discourse, and to spread a poisonous *pharmakon* to befuddle his subjects. After all, who can counter the metaphysical indicative sentence “War is Peace” from within the world subjected to the originary falsehood?

The answer to these questions lies probably in a non-transitive “middle voice” of *différance* and the subversive power of *khōra*, which altogether help to find utopian impulse even in the darkest of dystopian storyworlds. Utopia is a mother, a *khōra*, who, as Luce Irigaray phrases it, by “giving life to one who has the right to power, [...] wins the right to be perfectly happy” (Irigaray 1985: 107). She may be found in a dystopia, on heterotopian outlands of the city where fatherless scripture can rebel against the almighty Father/Lord of Logos<sup>3</sup>. Utopia that speaks for herself, in the fatherless voice and scripture, does not need any patronising instance to guide those who want to believe in her.

The Father/Lord of Logos, despite all his willingness, cannot be the one giving birth to an idea. He can only put it, literally, in motion, be *deus absconditus*, a master of puppets pulling the strings from behind the curtain—but hardly ever he can be the executor himself. Therefore, he *needs* someone to join his mockery of a dialogue and let him witness the word of the Father which is uttered usually during a solemn, almost ritual confrontation that occurs in the end of the most of dystopian narratives between the Lord of Logos and the rebellious figure, whom one could call a Scriptor, to honour the relevance of secret diaries or notebooks that have helped unravel the founding lie of dystopian logosphere<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> A recent example—the sisterhood at the place of the former oasis on a desert in Frank Miller’s *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

<sup>4</sup> It was one of the points of Andrzej Drózdź’s acclaimed book *Od Liber Mundi do hipertekstu: książka w świecie utopii* [*From Liber Mundi to Hypertext: The Book in the World of Utopias*] wherein he analyzed how the book understood as an idea or a metaphor (and, therefore, as a holy or hermetic Scripture as well), has penetrated utopian discourse and literature alike throughout the centuries.

This typology of (e)utopias and dystopias understood as such, depending on the extent of metaphysical presence of the Father/Lord of Logos, however, it is no typology at all, as it deconstructs itself by shifting paradigms and allowing no preconceived genre patterns to influence one's interpretation—allows to abandon a recurring debate on the formal differences between various genological reiterations of utopia<sup>5</sup>. The anti-logocentric approach would favour more world-centred approach to utopia which would be viewed as neither a fictional account of the travel to a better or worse no-place nor a particular political or sociological discourse pivoted around the transformative potential of utopian ideas—but a living world, just like the world one knows on beforehand from her experience and tends to call it paradigmatically the “real” one. Finally, a critical capacity of deconstruction would utterly match anti-utopian discourse occurring in so many dystopias—but it will not produce simultaneously any more genres or subgenres that distract the interpreter from what is the most relevant in utopian and dystopian studies: which is, as simple as its etymology suggest, the common-wealth.

<sup>5</sup> The same that Lyman Tower Sargent so assiduously wanted to end, but after all proposed even more severe genological classification (Sargent 1967, 1975, 1994).

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## *Micro-dystopias as Socio-political Constructs in Post-apocalyptic Narratives*

KSENIA OLKUSZ

### The End is a Beginning: the Apocalypse as a Restart

Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic<sup>1</sup> literature is often debated in terms of the end, emphasising catastrophic aspects of these narratives as well as indicating the demographic reduction (and thus defeat) of the human race. Some scholar, including James Berger and Anette M. Magid, underscore paradoxically union nature of the narratives dealing with the twilight of the anthropocene. Namely, Berger states that:

the end is never the end. The apocalypse texts announces and describes the end of the world but then the text does not end nor does the world represented in the text, and neither does the world itself... Something remains after the end [emphasis—K.O.] (Berger 1999: 5-6).

The aesthetic and fictional conditioning of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature is explored also by Barbara Gurr, as she explicates the cause, for which works devoted to this subject can be perceived in a special manner. The scholar observes that:

<sup>1</sup> Due to historical and literary reasons, considering its peculiar nature and determinants, as well as political, economic, social or philosophic aspects, it is worth acknowledging that: "Science fiction and popular culture scholars generally agree that the increasing emergence and popularity of post-apocalyptic narratives in popular culture can be traced to the end of World War II and specifically to the dropping of the hydrogen bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States. The world after 1945 was not only a changed landscape physically, politically, and economically, it was also a changed world symbolically" (Gurr 2015: 4).

[...] after the apocalypse—after the eradication of all we know—we who survive will have to build something new out of the ashes. The emerging world may be desperate and dirty; it may be hard and hungry; it may be something completely unexpected (Gurr 2015: 4).

And since the annihilation of the civilization is never total, then:

The end of the world rarely is the end, at least in popular culture. Instead, it's the beginning of a New World, a World that is Devoid of strong central government and traditional social institutions, and is populated with tougher than nails survivors (Yuen 2012: XIII).

A similar context can be noticed in case of arising narratives which refer directly to the disintegration of power structures, destabilization within the military, police, and other structures related to regulation and enforcement of laws, resulting in a crash within social hierarchies, leading to the disengagement of the existing systems and the emergence of new power structures, most often implemented in the micro-scale.

These constructs, bringing together a small community and possessing an efficiently functioning power apparatus are very often portrayed in dystopian<sup>2</sup> terms, realizing the pessimistic tendencies surfacing in post-apocalyptic narratives. Puzzling predilection of the authors towards the multiplication of the theme of a hegemon tantalising the survivors with an illusion of welfare is, according to some scholars, a consequence of a particular worldview. As Emma Vossen states, after Fredric Jameson, a dystopian tendency is associated with the inability to envision the future with a collective nature<sup>3</sup>. Constance Penley controverts this conceptualization as imagination of the future is unattainable and dystopia is merely an illustration of the inability to achieve a collective agreement which would guarantee maintaining order or a positive shift within determined rules of the existence. As underscored by Vossen, „Both theorists illustrate that dystopia represents our desire for global change, even if we would not want to live in the apocalyptic worlds of our dystopian fiction” (Vossen 2014: 89). The scholar believes, however, that the modern society is

<sup>2</sup> In my work, I refer to the interpretation of dystopia put forward in *Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited* by Lyman Tower Sargent: „Dystopia or negative Utopia—a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (Sargent 1994: 9).

<sup>3</sup> “The idea of apocalyptic dread can be traced throughout the lineage of science fiction and horror in both film and graphic fiction: both art forms attempt to confront our ambiguous future. Fredric Jameson’s esteemed observation that science fiction is oftentimes dystopian because it embodies our inability to imagine a collective future, has since been taken up by Constance Penley who instead insists that we can imagine a future, and dystopia instead illustrates that we “cannot conceive the kind of collective political strategies necessary to change or ensure that future” (Vossen 2014: 89).

no longer plagued by the fear of the apocalypse, as this fear has evolved into a full of affirmation anticipation of the end. Vossen defines this state as the “apocalyptic anticipation” and clarifies that the perception of the reasons for the end of the world began to transcend the determinants arising from political tensions and a pursuit of a military dominance, turning into visions of the total annihilation. The narratives of dystopian inclination are largely consistent with such predilection as constructs which—according to Vossen—are target points of the end of the world, constituting not so much an illustration of the anxiety concerning the way in which the twilight of the anthropocene will occur, but a fantasy about a variant of the predicted, and, to some extent, accepted apocalypse which is to serve as a disentanglement (or escape) from disagreeable economic and social restraints, as well as from less and less promising global future (Vossen 2014:90).

## Defining Micro-dystopias

Making an attempt to de-globalise the reality, the authors of post-apocalyptic narratives refer to experiences connected with the formation of small groups of survivors, the role of a leader, and the citizen management structure. Since these formations often play a significant role in the plot, they should be clarified and placed in a theoretical context of associations with the dystopian aesthetic. These communities can thus be called micro-dystopias and defined as small places separated from the surrounding post-apocalyptic world, in which power is held by a hegemon tantalising the citizens with an illusion of welfare. In reality, however, rules of existence are subordinated to discretionary choices of the tyrant, citizens are under rigorous supervision, and any forms of opposition are not only disapproved of but also ruthlessly suppressed. The asylum, which is supposed to be a harbour from danger, becomes the very danger itself. The terror does not exclusively come from the outside of the alleged asylum, it is present within its territory, transforming it into a trap. The double reversal of the order of reality’s existence is all the more severe, since it concerns the supposedly adapted space. It is the place, to which the characters traumatized by the apocalyptic events find their way, people searching for a substitute for “normal life” or simply an escape from the nightmare.

It is worth noting that in many narratives presentations of rules of creating new power constructs are remarkably comparable and display certain regularities. In accordance with these regularities, survivors in need of a guarantee of safety begin to

turn towards a strong individual or a group including such a person, as they recognise him or her as a natural leader. This way the chain of relationships which shapes those within a group is being created. The structure of a given micro-community depends on the personality and emotional aspirations of the leader. An individual prone to authoritarian governance, potentially remaining on the margin or performing insignificant functions within the community, disturbed or frustrated with his or her own personal or occupational circumstances, is depicted by the authors as an individual gradually intoxicating himself or herself with acquired power and increasingly willing to show and exact it. Pathology of behaviours connected with the question of controlling a group is the basis for the formation of micro-dystopias in the works pivoted around the description of the apocalypse.

Lords of Logos—as Krzysztof M. Maj refers to dystopian tyrants<sup>4</sup>—are portrayed in micro-dystopias as individuals holding absolute dictatorship and possessing tools (the power of persuasion and carefully selected “staff”) for exacting obedience to the authority. In post-apocalyptic worlds, this type of enforcement depends on the degree of domestication in the space controlled by the hegemon, the development of techniques for maintaining the *status quo*, assembling and equipping the forces keeping order.

In works where the action takes place soon after a cataclysm, micro-dystopias are formed and developed according to the most basic rules, i.e. around a particular kind of a personality. It is a strong, determined, charismatic person able to convincingly acquire allies and striving to organise the occupied area as well as to discipline the survivors. The examples of microsystems displaying dystopian inclinations clearly show that the rules of constructing social constructions manifesting in the fictional reality are akin to authentic mechanisms of establishing the totalitarian power in the most basic dimension. The authors are clearly inspired by the elementary determinants of the relations existing within groups, merely amplifying certain authentic mechanisms, so as to make them more attractive to recipients. These are psychological mechanisms concerning the so-called blind obedience to authority, based

<sup>4</sup> Maj defines this figure in the following way: „The father of logos unveils in dystopias one of his most ominous face: a concealed face of the ruler who uses the power of discourse to falsify the true worldview. A perverse nature of dystopia is particularly apparent [...] when the lord of logos realizes that the rule over language is a key to the victory over freedom. Therefore, from the inclusive perspective of dystopia, where one’s-own logos cannot be differed from other logos due to the deprivation of correspondence of the truth and its entanglement in a loop of inner coherency, only one way may lead to freedom—whereas any other to damnation (Maj 2014a: 167).

on three aspects, which can determine the consolidation of a similar power construct. Pointing to certain regularities in the formation of this type of dysfunctional relationship, psychologists often stressed that, in order to create a similar relationship, it is crucial to have an authority that inspires confidence and offers clearly defined rules, specifying the process of gaining control by distributing specific roles in the community. This way an individual may transform from a person reacting independently to the one acting in accordance with a function assigned by the dominator. Once known social standards are disrupted by a cataclysm determining the end of the world and the new ones take their place. These new standards are crucial to survival in the post-apocalyptic reality and they constitute the determinant in the models of initial dictatorial behaviours<sup>5</sup>.

In micro-dystopias, where the rules imposing an absolute obedience have been well-established for a long time (sometimes even for years), impulsive, unplanned actions usually do not occur but rather developed and tested methods of punishing defiant individuals, or those breaking the rules of coexistence are implemented. It relates to a characteristic ritualization being an integral part of obedience towards the one wielding power. In the structures which foundations are the reflections of the original primitivism those would most frequently be spectacular and often bloody rituals, which aim at warning against the legitimacy of resistance against the autocratic power. This tendency derives from a classic motif in dystopian narratives, often enough introducing safety valves of the sociostasis, as Stanisław Lem called them (Lem 1996). In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* these were the famous *Two Minutes Hate*, in Huxley's *Brave New World* orgy-porgy, in Stanisław Lem's *Observation on the Spot* "rage-inhibitors", in Susanne Collins's *Hunger Games* the eponymous hunger games, in the post-apocalyptic TV series *The 100* (The CW 2014-, an adaptation of the first book of the trilogy of the same title written by Kass Morgan) bloody tribal contests. As pointed out by already quoted Maj, all these rituals "became safety valves of the internal integrity of the logosphere, channelling the rebellious and threatening the general order activities in the isolated, secure environment" (Maj 2014b: 52).

<sup>5</sup> When joining a community created by survivors and governed by a dictator, the same mechanisms are at work. The mechanisms determining human behaviours in situations of exploring a new group of people. As Philip G. Zimbardo, Robert Lee Johnson and Vivian McCann write: "When a person joins a new group, such as a work group or a group of friends, there is always an adjustment period during which the individual tries to discover how best to fit in. Adjustment to a group typically involves discovering its social norms. Individuals experience this adjustment in two ways: by first noticing the uniformities and regularities in certain behaviours, and then by observing the negative consequences when someone violates a social norm" (Zimbardo, Johnson, McCann 2009: 482).

By contrast, in communities possessing predilections for shaping sophisticated systems of power, the punishment mechanisms are more discreet—as illustrated by the example of the Mount Weather bunker in *The 100* mentioned before or the Arc from the same production, as well as the City of Vega from the *Dominion* TV series (Syfy 2014-2015). Both methods of enforcing the established laws allow wielding power in a closed biotope, where the balance must remain unaltered, as any kind of unrest among the numerically limited community may launch a revolt resulting in a breakdown of the existing order. Citizens confined to a limited area must be kept in a mental stasis by any means necessary precisely not to destroy the illusory order maintained within their habitat.

### Illusory Micro-asylums

Thus every micro-dystopia constitutes an illusion of life in freedom as this limitation is not only connected with depriving an individual of the right of self-determination—if a community is led by a tyrant—but also with a special confinement. The area available to residents is usually separated from external threats (e.g. zombies, aliens, people infected with a virus or other survivors organised in extortion groups) with some form of a wall. As a consequence, the area becomes at the same time a sanctuary and a trap impossible to escape from. The illusoriness of order in this case is realised in a systematic demonstration of external threats which are subsequently contrasted with a beneficial cohabitation of the leaders and their subordinates in the isolated area (bunkers, forts, bastions, fortified cities, stronghold ships, etc.). Enforcing the supremacy of a community and the loss of individuality in order to create a state of collectively, inhibited identity becomes the dictator's goal, which may take a variety of forms in different interpretations. It may range from a giver of life (Immortan Joe in *Mad Max: Fury Road*), through a politician (Lord of the City and the senator subordinate to him in the *Dominion* series), an allegedly benevolent keeper (the President from Mount Weather in *The 100*), a leader of a sect (micro-dystopias in the *Z Nation* series [The Asylum, SyFy 2014-], *The Last Ship* [TNT 2014-; based on a novel by William Brinkley of the same title), to a ruthless tyrant (the Governor from the universe of *The Walking Dead*). Each of them assumes a specific social role adapted to the emotional expectations of the citizens and to the conditions of the ecosystem, which surrounds the micro-dystopia at the same time.



Typical dystopias often require an artificial isolation from the natural environment, while in case of micro-dystopias, this isolation is determined by the conditions independent of the tyrant, most often related to certain deformations of the existing biotope. Therefore, the alienation of the dystopian area is not another illusion but a fact, which keeps the residents confined to the uncomfortable habitat. Isolation is *conditio sine qua non* for survival; therefore, it is neither an illusory guarantee of separation nor does it determine its volitional dictatorship of the hegemon, but it outreaches arbitrary decisions. Such confinement is a form of impossibility for a community to survive in different territorial systems and, at the same time, a condition for recognition for a collective community. The knowledge of the way in which the outside world functions does not inspire questions concerning the cause and nature of the isolation—as it is obvious from the dawn of its time. A micro-dystopia indeed separates its residents from external threats, which are real ones, while in case of classic dystopias, an external threat may be an imaginary construct created by the lords of logos in order to legitimise their oppressive governance. In a micro-dystopia threat is indisputable, although it constitutes a similar basis for stressing the role of a community in opposition to an external threat.

A micro-dystopian tyrant, as opposed to the dystopian Lord of Logos, despite the self-oriented principles of ruling a micro-country, does not maintain, or succumb to the illusion of the idea of building an asylum—he or she simply creates it. However, the point is that having isolated the subjects from external threats, the tyrant transforms the domicile into an environment determined by his own aberrations or obsessions (much like in a sect). Micro-dystopian biotopes generally are not even a poor substitute for an artificial paradise, as from within them it is impossible to achieve the same level of perfection and welfare in order for the captive citizens to remain firm in the belief that they live in a place resembling the Garden of Eden. The structure of micro-dystopias presented in many post-apocalyptic narratives is almost immediately revealed by both the newcomers and the residents to be a dysfunctional territory (pathological), where even appearances of welfare cannot conceal the actual decomposition within the community. A somewhat more reliable illusion of perfection is generated by leaders of micro-dystopias functioning for centuries, where the primal gesture of salvation from the consequences of a disaster anointed the leader and his successors (as in the case of the president of Mount Weather in *The 100*).

In the dystopian formations shaped during the apocalyptic period, tyrants do not need to create any illusions of perfection, because the possibilities this asylum offers are enough for the survivors. A vision of being left alone in the throes of a disaster is so traumatizing that many leaders do not even have to create any illusion of welfare, as the awareness of living in a safe place, surrounded by a social formation, is well enough for the citizens. This passiveness towards the lord of logos is amplified further by experiences related to surviving the apocalypse—the loss of loved ones, violence, the disintegration of the state structures, or the loss of the social status in such situations. Survivors, trying to redefine their existence, accept conditions proposed by the ruler of the micro-dystopia and agree to surrender to the rules characteristic of this construct. “The founding lie [*klamstwo założycielskie*]” indicated by Paweł Źwikła (2006: 131) admittedly still is a form of a secret kept from the citizens but, due to the particular nature of a micro-dystopia’s existence, its disclosure is not entirely a form of a collective mystification.

### Micro-dystopias: What Tyrants Want and Why It Is so Easy for Them to Claim It

The motivation for the ones in charge of micro-dystopias is not always making people happy *hic et nunc* but first of all the imperative of wielding power impossible to obtain in the world before the disaster. In order to maintain the *status quo*, the tyrant usually resorts to solutions which entail using physical force but rarely the psychological one.

The lack of rebellions characteristic of many micro-dystopias is tightly connected with the citizen deindividualization phenomenon. The more anonymous micro-community members are, the less likely they are to have reservations about committing ethically reprehensible acts. Social roles are distributed according to an established hierarchy. They become a recognised tool of control and, at the same time, a point of reference in case of any deviations from standards. Individuals or groups ruling over a community are entitled to the law of the strongest. In these circumstances maintaining law and order seems to be crucial for the preservation of

the established *status quo* by the rulers, involving the creation of a reality correlating with the despot's concept<sup>6</sup>.

In a classic dystopia deindividualization of an individual proceeds as planned in the form of commitment to slaying a creative individual in the process of unification. However, in micro-dystopias, the obliteration of identity takes place in entirely different circumstances, most often during the apocalypse, when the disastrous *danse macabre* tears people out of their current position in the social hierarchy. It deprives them of the meaning of their work, their profession, it neutralizes achievements by transforming them into an insignificant past, it undermines plans and ambitions, extracts them from their places of living, breaks familial and friendly relationships—only to make the newly shaped survivor face loss, only to abstract him or her from known values. The world after the apocalypse is full of lost people deprived of the defining past. In such circumstances, no tragedy or personal drama is unique as they are a part of a horrific collection of constant loss, never ending mourning, and a process of reinventing themselves. Micro-dystopias are collectives of such survivors and their new identity is usually related to finding a place in an asylum, a sense of belonging with the society, which caters to the herd instinct and calms the survival one as well. Survivors are separating themselves from others and, most often, their passive attitude towards the autocrat constitutes a result of experienced trauma and the desire of redefining themselves in the community and giving their existence a meaning and a purpose once more.

The relationship of the post-apocalypse with the apocalypse is expressed in this very “post”, post-modernist relationship between the actual world and the one-that-is-no-more, one which spectre looms over the sprouting new life. The paradox of this relationship is based precisely on the fact, that regardless of whether the circumstances of the disaster will be used to build a brave new world, or its dystopian *al rovescio*—a spectre of the past will continue to haunt them, provoking questions

<sup>6</sup> In many narratives authors or screenwriters are clearly inspired by real phenomena. The amplification of the negative factors makes the plot more dramatic. However, it is important to note that those speculations or visions only function in close liaison with authentic problems faced by various communities, as written by Todd S. Platts, who states that: “cultural productions reveal something about the societies that created them, and patterns emerging from the content of cultural productions partly unsheathe underlying structural patterns of those societies” (Platts 2013: 551). This means that various motifs present in post-apocalyptic narratives derive from the criticism of the real phenomena.

about the past and its relationship to the present. The “post-” character of this relationship, as recalled by Anna Burzyńska, is not only a cause and effect sequence but also develops a certain critical distance (characteristic of dystopias):

“Post-” means also, in other words, a thematisation or objectification (Heideggerian *Verwindung*) of certain formations, paradigms, or traditions in order to conduct their critical re-vision and, therefore, to rework them. However, it is a simultaneous parasitic “utilization” of those formations etc. (most often by radicalisation some of the assumptions) in accordance with a well-known (also “postic” in nature) belief about a lack of something completely new. Any “post-” is then a phenomenon internally complex, even paradoxical—as it combines simultaneously relationships and a severance, impeachment and assimilation, engrafting and radicalisation. At the same time, every “post-” is a time of purification, revaluation, or reworking—thus it is simply the time of Lent<sup>7</sup>, which comes in order to provide conditions for something new to come. However, the consequences of this whole process are not immediately visible but always from a further perspective (Burzyńska 2007: 337).

In *Spectres of Marx* Jacques Derrida associates a similar “post-” relationship with a metaphor of spectrality—known also by the name of hauntology—and, in accordance with the latter, he formulates categories of haunting the contemporary discourse with spectres of the past. Moreover, he writes: “Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (Derrida 1994: 48). The spectrality of an association of the post-apocalyptic with the apocalypse or any other kind of terrible events from the past (an epidemic, genocide, world war, alien invasion) is connected with hegemony and a discourse of power in a sense that those spectres of the past may be used by dystopian tyrants for legitimising their own rule over survivors. This allows to avoid superficial references to post-apocalyptic narratives as narratives dealing with dark, bad worlds in favour of examining micro-dystopias as emanations of critical discourse. After all, as Jacques Derrida points out:

At bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back; in the future, said the powers of old Europe in the last century, it must not incarnate itself, either publicly or in secret. In the future, we hear everywhere today, it must not re-incarnate itself; it must not be allowed to come back since it is past. What exactly is the difference from one century to the next? Is it the difference between a past world-for which the specter represented a coming threat-and a present world, today, where the specter would represent a threat that some would like to believe is past and whose return it would be necessary again, once again in the future, to conjure away? (Derrida 1994: 48).

<sup>7</sup> Untranslatable pun of Polish word for Lent (“Post”) and a prefix “post-”.

## Narrative Role and Allocation of Micro-dystopias

While traditional dystopias constitute the world-building axis, micro-dystopias are non-dominating constructs, merely parts of the storyline, a type of a transitive territory akin to heterotopia, which are encountered by wandering characters or faced during the struggle for supremacy over a given survivor colony. The aspect of domination and aggression is also a recurring motif in the network of relationships between the protagonists and micro-dystopian rulers. However, a thread of the destruction of dystopian order is not a meaningful element of the storyline—thus it may or may not emerge. A disaster is not always the event leading to the creation of a dystopia in the traditional sense, since a dystopia can emerge in the process of evolution, as in the case of the story of coming to totalitarian, panoptical power in the TV series *Person of Interest* (CBS 2011-2016)<sup>8</sup>. Conversely, the emergence of micro-dystopias is usually connected with an apocalypse ending the world we know—although there are some examples of deviation from this rule, as in the case of the second season of the *Helix* (season 2, SyFy 2015) series and the presented promiscuous cult of immortality on the St. Germaine Island (Brother Michael's sect).

As the presented material illustrates, micro-dystopias only partly fit into or correlate with the determinants of a classic dystopia. A similar positioning results first of all from the fact, that these are not pivotal constructs, and their meaning to the storyline can be—although not always is—relevant, as long as they constitute a mere transition point in the journey or adventures of the protagonists, and not a core, meticulously described element of the storyworld.

<sup>8</sup> In the description of the series available on the arstechnica.com website is written: „brooding over all the action—whether it was organized crime, secret government assassinations, subversive Anonymous-like political groups, or out-of-control surveillance tech—was the Machine, slowly gathering sentience over the seasons. Finally, it figured out a way to steal its own servers from the government, stashing its distributed brain in hidden underground facilities and, eventually, in a massive, redundant network that stretched across the whole country. Meanwhile a corporation called Decima got its hands on a second AI called Samaritan with powers equal to the Machine. But unlike Finch's emo creation, Samaritan is unhindered by ethics and unmoored from a social group of do-gooders. Decima sells Samaritan's services to the government and promptly begins dividing US residents into desirables and undesirables. All subversive elements are ferreted out and removed. Aided by Decima's cackling CEO, Samaritan even throws local elections and begins to build up an elite army to do its bidding. [...] In season 5 [...] the Machine has been severely disabled by Samaritan. [...] And Decima has taken over the US using Samaritan's powers of surveillance and social media propaganda" (Newitz 2016: par. 3).

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## VI

# *Boredom and Melancholy in Utopias and Dystopias*

MARIUSZ FINKIELSZTEIN

## Introduction

In many ways, utopia was the humanists' replacement for Paradise—Christian utopia of eternal life (Manuel, Manuel 1979). Arthur Schopenhauer was among the first in a long line of Western thinkers to suggest the powerful agency of the experience or the state of boredom in jeopardising the sustainability of utopian states of being: “after man had transferred all pain and torments to hell, there then remained nothing over for heaven but ennui” (Schopenhauer 2011: 401).

Schopenhauer's statement could be interpreted as rhetorical or humorous. However, its central thesis that an “ideal” world might eventuate in an unbearably stressful state of boredom has been corroborated by many other writers and observers of human condition. In the twenty-first century a body of research findings and conceptualizations of boredom suggest that Schopenhauer's “hell” might be conceived as stressfully “boring” as well.

Casual observation of twentieth-century events has provided convincing support for the idea that even in the worst and most horrifying situations the experience/state of boredom wields enormous power over human life—myriad diaries and testimonials have noted excruciating boredom in wartime trenches, in Jewish ghettos, and in war-torn occupied countries. Alberto Moravia (2010) posited that boredom compromised the efforts of people who were fighting for utopias, thus actually creating dystopias. Many writers suggest that capitalism, which according to some

thinkers had its origins in attempts to mitigate boredom (make trade more “interesting”), over time resulted in a sufficient level of individual and societal boredom that led to the Russian Revolution. Boredom experience which was engendered by the Great Depression led to totalitarianisms and their pervasive visions of an ideal social order. Boredom together with melancholy have accompanied the emergence of utopias and dystopias in most of the late expressions of human history.

This chapter aims to explore the following issues: (1) why utopias and dystopias almost invariably come to be experienced as boring or unsatisfying for their inhabitants; (2) why admitting the experience of boredom and melancholy is proscribed in utopias and dystopias; (3) the array of methods employed by the utopian and dystopian authors to prevent admission of the experience of boredom and melancholy among their adherents.

The absence of a currently singularly-accepted definition of “boredom” is problematic for the proposed exposition. However, a relatively high level of agreement exists for a received phenomenology of boredom. Boredom is generally associated with physical and/or mental idleness and with situations in which individuals have nothing to do in particular or have no interest in doing what they should do at a given moment. Boredom defined as a state of disconnection/indifference associated with a sense of meaninglessness is also an antithesis for engagement (Toohey 2012). On the other hand, melancholy, which is generally considered to be closely phenomenologically associated with boredom (especially with boredom’s existential variant), is a reflexive experiential and behavioural state related to the experience of pessimism, sadness, sense of futility, lack of agency, and a generalized “inhibition of action” (Lepenies 1992).

Both boredom and melancholy have much in common: their variants manifest similar expressions (a glazed look, apathy, lack of action) and effects (a sense of meaninglessness, pessimism). However, empirical work *vis-à-vis* intraindividual correlations of scores on validated boredom proneness and depression scales (Farmer, Sundberg 1986; Vodanovich 2003) points out that the two terms cannot validly be employed interchangeably. Melancholy entails a larger component of sadness, sense of futility, inhibition of action, and indifference, while boredom, especially its situational and less severe variant, entails a larger component of action, behavioural arousal, and need for change (Mann, Robinson 2009; Russell 1932). Melancholy more often leads to behavioural resignation, whereas mild, transient boredom is often noted

to be associated with high degrees of behavioural activation, restlessness, and physiological arousal often accompanied by the experience of frustration and/or anxiety.

In the following chapter I define utopia and dystopia mainly as a literary genre which aims to present life of ideal or apparently ideal society along with a description of its social settings (Kamińska 2012). The selection of utopias and dystopias analysed in the chapter embraces the following Western literary works: Thomas More's *De optimo reipublicæ*, Thomasso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Plato's *State*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, and Charles Fourier's idea of Phalanstery. The dystopias are represented by Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. The main criterion employed in my exposition was whether the terms boredom or melancholy were mentioned in a particular work by name or subjectively suggested "between the lines". While a small number of literary works featuring boredom or melancholy as a central theme comprise my datum, this limited selection of literary works is sufficient to proffer and explore a number of tentative questions and theses on the role of boredom and melancholy in modulating the emergence of utopias and dystopias, their subsequent evolution, and their eventual unsustainability.

### Why Do Utopias/dystopias Frequently Come to Be Experienced as "Boring" or "Unsatisfying" for their Inhabitants?

Returning to Schopenhauer's perspective of Paradise as being an inevitably "boring place," a fundamental question is why life in a paradisiacal society might be experienced as "boring". First of all, "the ideal" is "boring" by its very definition, as it is inherently predictable and unchanging. Knowing that the ideal has no capability to provide additional surprise/interest through further development, the "ideal" is complete in and of itself. Since a utopian social system is perfect in every way, "any change must be for the worse, must be a return to pre-utopian chaos" (Szacki 2000: 178). Thus, it is not surprising that utopian republics were meant to be unchangeable—namely, Plato's *State*, More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, or Bacon's *New Atlantis*.

The aforementioned works are only descriptions of "mental experiments" (Jerzy Szacki's terminology), but all of them envisage an invariant state of separation—both geographical (islands, high mountains) and social (the politics of isolationism). Admittedly, Bacon's *New Atlantis* sends scientific, spying missions to other countries but

nowhere does it mention of any influence of the missions on everyday social praxis. Other social systems have little or no influence on utopian social settings along any dimensions. As articulated by one of Huxley's characters: "We have our stability to think of. We don't want to change. Every change is a menace to stability" (Huxley 2007: 198)—and stability means boredom. Thus, each utopian and dystopian social system is an adequate place for boredom to escalate, as predictability, sameness, routine, and repetitiveness are its primary attributes.

Utopia is a paradise primarily in regard to material needs. A utopia does not lack for materialistic entities and it does not require supplementation of any biological necessities (food, water, oxygen, shelter, etc.) In a utopia, all regulations and social institutions aim to establish and implement a socioeconomic system that provides their adherents with all the materials essential for the experience of "basic" happiness (in Abraham Maslow's sense of the term). Boredom might even be construed as normative in developed Western countries in which large numbers of denizens live lives that are close in character to materialistic utopias/quasi-utopias. However, utopias and contemporary materialistically affluent societies create a situation in which "the guarantee that we shall not die of starvation entails the risk of dying of boredom" (Vaneigem 2001: 18).

Many utopian authors have assumed that if food, health care, peace, and rules that secured its continuance were guaranteed, their adherents would be eternally happy. The second fallacious supposition of the authors is that such happiness is inexhaustible (Walsh 1962): people cannot be bored or depressed in materialistic utopias. Utopian authors have proposed various recipes to achieve an affluent utopian society, e.g., the abolishment of private property (More, Bellamy), development of science (Bacon), and mechanization of routine boring tasks (Bellamy). However, the world of mechanization, automation, and standardization virtually guarantees psychologically debilitating sameness—"boredom"—under the guise of diversity. This variety of "affluent boredom" is salient in Bellamy's *Looking Backwards*, a literary work in which a reader dreads thinking about what the characters in the novel would do if they were not required to describe their social and economic system to a time traveller, Julian West.

A perceived lack of action on the part of adherents is a major posited cause of normative boredom experience and/or associated behaviours afflicting utopias and dystopias. In *Notes From the Underground*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky has his main character opine:

Of course there is no guaranteeing [...] that it will not be, for instance, frightfully dull then (for what will one have to do when everything will be calculated and tabulated), but on the other hand everything will be extraordinarily rational" (Dostoyevsky 2005: 29).

Rational, or one may say "ideal" order in utopias, implies overregulation of social life. Boredom would be normative for adherents because there would be nothing left to do that depends on the adherent's idiosyncratic "freedom to choose". This situation is exemplified in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, where dystopian adherents must deal with a highly mechanised world in which individuals are supplementary to machines and mechanisation being the central characteristic of their daily lives. For instance, computers measure an individual's intelligence and decide whether the individual can partake in a university education or not, what a great significance, because without a university education the individual becomes a slave-worker instead of an engineer operating the machines. People no longer have a sense of agency and usefulness. However, because it is a dystopia—at the end it turns out, like in Huxley's *Brave New World*, that the majority do not want to decide on their own account and choose not to decide for themselves. Dostoyevsky strongly disagrees with this concept, claiming that everything that individuals do is to be independent, to "want independently" in spite of the consequences of such behaviour. According to Dostoyevsky, humans may even prefer suffering, chaos, and self-destruction—just to show their agency.

It is said that boredom and melancholy are defined as anomie at the individual level. Anomie is a sociological concept developed by Emile Durkheim. It is etymologically derived from the Greek word *nomos* (law, order) where the prefix *a-* denotes "without" or "absence of". Thus, anomie is a state of lawlessness and insufficiency of law and order. Societies that provide too little control often evoke a correlative sense of insecurity and anxiety. Anomie can also result in melancholy, a tendency to interpersonal isolation and solitude as well as to the state of boredom characterized by withdrawal of engagement in one's social system. Therefore, the great exemplars of it are "romantic boredom", the melancholy of artists, aristocrats and bourgeoisie in nineteenth century Germany, aptly described by Wolf Lepienies (1992). A lack of political power and agency, coupled with an excess of social and political control, are frequently prodromal of melancholy and boredom. The same situation and outcome obtain for utopian adherents.

The aforementioned argument states that freedom and control are central issues in most people's lives. Boredom is commonly linked to a paucity of control, an

excess of freedom (anomie, leisure time), or to an excess of control/lack of freedom—which one can observe in utopias and dystopias as well in the form of over-regulated societies.

### Why Do Utopias/Dystopias Proscribe Experiences and/or Displays of Behaviour that Suggest the Existence of Boredom and/or Melancholy States among their Inhabitants?

Explicit expression of boredom or melancholy on the part of utopian adherents have the potential of being perceived as denoting ingratitude by founders or proponents of a given utopian society. Such admission of boredom or melancholy might be construed by proponents of the utopian society as a public accusation of a particular order, as a symptom of strong dissatisfaction, and thereby instantiating that “the ideal” is not in fact “perfect”. “The ideal” implies that everyone would invariably perceive it as such, lest the conclusion arise of the conceptual bankruptcy of “the ideal” or that the notion itself is highly relative.

In the Christian Heaven, melancholy or boredom are seen by believers as impossibilities owing to the assumed nature of Heaven itself. For Christians, Heaven is a gift while boredom and sadness are construed as visible signs of ingratitude on the part of Christians for Heaven’s existence. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the issue of *acedia* (spiritual boredom) which expressed by medieval monks strongly contradicted the Christian view of creation, in the Christian context—in which *acedia* entailed a lack of joy with God’s order/creation and as a result was perceived as a cardinal sin. The sin of passive undermining the concept of the ideal Christian utopia.

Each utopia is a projection of some ideal (or apparently ideal) order (see Mumford 1922; Manuel, Manuel 1979). The experience or display of melancholy or boredom ruins this order. For Wolf Lepenies, utopias “ban the melancholy” (1992: 25). The members of utopian communities are no longer in a position to allow themselves to be sad—to openly display their emotions which could suggest or reveal the failure of the utopian endeavour. Ultimately, a utopia is a conceptualization of how to guarantee the experience of happiness among its members. Any actions that potentially signify melancholic mood (for example, the poetry in Plato’s *The Republic*)

or a display of behaviour which would suggest that one is not satisfied with her life are prohibited.

For inhabitants of utopian ideals, expression of boredom or melancholy is not merely a symptom of the invalidity of “ideal” ideologies. Expression of such emotions calls into question the stability of the utopian social system. Sadness, implied by melancholy, “allows us to slow down so that we can reflect on disappointment or failure. It lets us know that there is a problem or trouble” (Macklem 2015: 7). The awareness of inconsistency in utopia’s order is the first step to enable challenges of the conceptual or organizational system and through this awareness the utopian system’s stability which is a *sine qua non* for its sustainability. The expression of melancholy or boredom can lead to the experience of alienation, thus starting to undermine the community and threaten the official conceptualization of the ideal/utopian system. This phenomenon can clearly be seen in twentieth century totalitarianisms, for instance, Communism. Citizens of communist states were not allowed to be sad, to be bored by their social reality, and were expected to experience and manifest gratitude to the party leadership for construction and implementation of the best possible social system. The experience or expression of melancholy (or its medicalised version, depression; Földényi 2011) or boredom had the potential to be interpreted by party proponents as a form of “soft resistance” to party ideology.

Boredom and melancholy also had a potential to foster advanced reflection, criticism, or even subversive thoughts. This point is developed by Mostafa Mond, one of the World Controllers in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, who claims that the society of Alphas would slit leadership’s throat: they would revolt owing to being forced/expected to endure unfulfilling and mediocre occupations far beneath their skills and aspirations (in *Brave New World*, the fate of the lower social castes). Severe frustration and boredom could lead to violence and slaughter of the subjugators.

Subversive, revolutionary thoughts in bored, dissatisfied individuals in fact pose serious threats to any social order: real, utopian, or dystopian. A common assumption is that boredom is associated with social deviation. One has too much time, nothing to do, and becomes “bored” with it—the state of boredom often fosters “threatening” or “anti-systemic” ideas, and worse, drives the sufferer to implement these ideas almost immediately. A “boredom-as-a-problem-literature” exists (Calhoun 2011: 269), especially in pedagogy. A major pedagogical issue is “adolescent boredom”, in the main propelled by a revolt against adult social rules. In this manner, boredom can be not only an individual disposition but also a serious threat to a

macro-social system. Being accompanied by feelings of constraint or being cogs in a huge uncaring social machine without a correlative construction of a sense of meaning are just the case of utopias and dystopias.

The revolutionary potential of boredom is, therefore, not surprisingly often proscribed in utopias and dystopias. For Guy Debord, however, “boredom is always counter-revolutionary”. Debord’s apparently contradictory view of boredom’s role in revolutionary activity and thought stems from defining boredom as a synonym to apathy or total lack of engagement. Many scholars emphasize that boredom and apathy do not refer to the same phenomenology and set of behaviours (Svendsen 2005; Mann, Robinson 2009). In contrast to apathy, boredom can be its own cure and a strong motivator to act and change one’s situation. Boredom is a state of dissatisfaction or even frustration that leads to actions that are meant to alleviate that feeling in a positive (creativity; Mann, Cadman 2014) or negative (deviation, revolt; Russell 1932) way. Apathy is a lack of any emotion, a state of total indifference and experiential anaesthesia: as a state of apathy is counter-revolutionary in that the word denotes the inhibition/absence of any emotional response to one’s environment/existential situation.

### What Methods Do the Utopian/Dystopian Authors Employ to Prevent the Emergence of Boredom and/or Melancholy among Utopias/Dystopian Inhabitants?

Work is the most often prescribed remedy for boredom or melancholy by almost all utopian and dystopian authors. Human beings should be occupied with work and other productive activities all the time. In More’s *Utopia*, there were even special officials, Syphogrants, whose main duty was to see “that no one sits around in idleness” (More 2003: 49). In *Utopia* and in Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*, idleness or laziness is strictly prohibited. More’s “laziness” includes every kind of non-productive or non-useful activity like playing dice, drinking alcohol, or being involved in sexual activity. Campanella, echoing More, considers idleness and sloth as harmful for health, describing the consequences of idleness among women of the upper classes who due to idleness:

[...] lose their colour and have pale complexions, and become feeble and small. For this reason they are without proper complexions, use high sandals, and become beautiful not from strength, but from



slothful tenderness. And thus they ruin their own tempers and natures, and consequently those of their offspring (Campanella 2009: 32-33).

Both visions, More's and Campanella's, entails short working hours, i.e. four or six hours per day, respectively. The rest of the time, nevertheless, must be fully occupied. A similar prescription can be noticed in Charles Fourier's day schedule for people within the Phalanstery structure, i.e. a well-organized time from 3 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (Fourier 1971: 276-77). Unremitting activity is treated as an unquestioning prescription for the sustainability of their utopian communities. In the same time, utopian authors proffer optimistic views of human nature. They assume that people can be easily persuaded to obey "good" and "proper" rules. The inhabitants of More's and Campanella's utopias spend their free time only on estimable occupations like self-education, discussion, reading, and writing. Moreover, they do all these praiseworthy tasks willingly out of a "natural" disposition. Utopian adherents are unable to be idle, and even if they are rewarded with dispensation of work (for example, being prize for the best warrior in *The City of the Sun*) they cannot bear idleness and willingly return to their work.

Behind the optimistic assumption that all societal problems are caused by "bad" rules (not by human nature) and that people can easily be persuaded to follow "good" rules stands another unquestioned assumption. Namely if individuals are momentarily left alone/idle, they start to think and experience boredom or display its associated dysfunctional behaviour. Therefore, social systems should be established to fill up every minute of the day with some useful activity. This fact may draw us to the conclusion that utopias and dystopias can be perceived as totalitarianisms of time: they enforce spending all available time on things that are controllable, by political or physical/military power, or, more subtly, by social control. Both forms of control can be seen in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. After many hours of work the main character Winston is obliged to attend Community Centre, where "his soul writhed with boredom" (Orwell 1961: 74) owing to the experience of emptiness, futility, and meaninglessness engendered by all of the Centre activities.

Human beings obviously "naturally" require some occupation, challenge, and aim. However, in many cases, "activity/busyness" appears to be only an escape from boredom or melancholy, from being exposed to one's own thoughts, from reflection concerning human existence and the meaning of life. The creators of utopias appear to fear "empty" time, frightened by their view that in the absence of distracting activity, boredom or melancholy trumps the experience of interest and happiness.

Scholars refer to this variant of boredom as busy boredom, employing the term in the context of the continuously distracting entertainment culture (Winter 2002). The phenomenon of busy boredom is central in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where in order to avoid sense of futile, time is tightly organized by the production and experience of "entertainment" which after "busyness/unremitting activity" is the next important treatment of boredom and melancholy. All members of Huxley's society are conditioned to like sports and other leisure activities, for example, photograph films (special kinds of movies in Huxley's world). If "entertainment treatments" do not sufficiently mitigate boredom and melancholy, the drug named Soma, which has the effect of being "happy" and precluding the "aberrational" states of boredom and melancholy, is distributed to all after their work. Happiness is the new god; but sadness, melancholy, and boredom are treated as dangerous criminal misdemeanours.

In Plato's *The Republic*, everyone works in a position according to individual disposition and talents. In Campanella's *The City of the Sun* officials are chosen by abilities and assigned their social status in childhood. The dystopian authors were not so optimistic. They hold to the assumption that in order to make people do boring, unchallenging, and sometimes even stultifying jobs, people have to be properly conditioned. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, manipulation of embryonic incubation and conditioning individuals to like what they will have to do for their whole lives is the basic method of achieving sustainability of social system. Boredom and melancholy is nipped in the bud as "all conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny" (Huxley 2007: 12).

Community participation is another prescribed method of alleviating boredom and melancholy. In almost every utopia (and in some dystopias as well), participation in "community" is an essential imperative. No one should be alone, no one should be outside society, no one should be alienated and disconnected from the assigned community. In fact, many authors ascribe a sense of belongingness as essential for avoiding boredom or unhappiness (e.g. Toohey 2012; Spacks 1995). However, involvement and belongingness in community must be voluntary and desired, which constitutes a serious problem for utopias and dystopias wherein social engagement is obligatory and enforced.

Several prominent boredom theorists (Spacks 1995; Goodstein 2005; Svendsen 2005) construe boredom to be intimately tied to modernity and correlative changes in socio-cultural mores embracing individualism over collectivism as well as secu-

larisation over religiosity. A closer analysis of these phenomena suggests epistemological interdependence (“both/and”) rather than polarization (“either/or”) of the respective changes in social mores in modernity. While there is no doubt that religious practice strengthened community, and community empowered religion, the individualism of capitalism and its associated weakening of community strengthened the need for community and associated transpersonal “spiritual” experience and worship of gods other than money.

Apparently steadily increasing rates and testimonials of boredom and melancholy in the developed West are ascribed to be exacerbated by the decline of community and religion in modernity. It is not surprising that utopian and dystopian authors emphasized attention to boredom and melancholy in their prescriptions for sustained viability. In More’s and Campanella’s utopias, one’s localised “community” is to be established and maintained by the cooperative/helping attitude fostered by religious beliefs. In Bacon’s utopia, the state religion is science, and a scientists its priests. In dystopias we can see some influential surrogates of religion, for example, a charismatic effective leader, a ruling party (in Orwell’s work), or science in its dehumanized form (Huxley’s work).

## Existential Boredom and Melancholy as Human Attributes

This chapter has provided an overview of interrelations between boredom/melancholy and the development of utopias/dystopias; explained why utopias and dystopias are such a favourable environment for the experience of boredom and melancholy; why the two states are so vigorously combated; and what remedies for boredom and melancholy originators of utopias and dystopias prescribe. Here, the last important issue to the current reflection. A curious aspect of utopias is that their members appear to be content but not ecstatic: they often present a visage of being happy, albeit in a fettered, controlled, and emotionless manner. Negative emotions and states, including melancholy and boredom, are assumed to be excisable. Apart from a passive contentment (apparently real in utopias and a facade in dystopias), all others emotions are neglected or openly prohibited and a general quasi-inhibition of emotions is the normative acceptable attitude. Some authors have ascribed the presence and expression of emotions as a *sine qua non* attribute of being human (Macklem 2015)—a perspective seemingly corroborated by descriptions of many utopias

and some dystopias describing adherents as relatively unfeeling, minimally expressive living entities who are more like unfeeling robots than sentient human beings.

A Polish philosopher, Leszek Kołakowski, opined that “boredom is an indispensable part of our society, or: the fact that we are capable of feeling boredom makes us humans” (2008: 99). The status of melancholy is assumed to be similar as human beings are self-conscious and generally painfully and fearfully aware of their own finitude. The human capacity for boredom and melancholy (as well as man’s correlative capacity for language-abetted abstract rational thought) is considered to be an important correlate of being human or even human right. When Huxley’s *Savage* insists on having the right to be unhappy, and within it, to experience boredom and melancholy, in fact he is insisting on having the right to be human. Utopian social systems that pretend to guarantee happiness and to eliminate all negative effects are dehumanizing. Such social systems enhance their adherent’s sense of incompleteness, alienation, and lack of agency by overregulation exacerbate boredom and melancholy. Utopias also prohibit some means of alleviating these states. For example, according to Denis Diderot, to overcome boredom and melancholy<sup>1</sup> we need “neither solitude, nor community, but this, what stitches them: desire. Or at least friendship” (Diderot 1984: 116). The world of utopias and dystopias is bereft of these human qualities, which upon emergence threaten the “idealized” worldviews of their utopian or dystopian originators—as did the love between Winston and Julia in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or the friendship of Bernard Marks, Helmholtz Watson and the Savage in Huxley’s *Brave New World*. The experience and overt expression of emotions (including boredom and melancholy or sadness), most central aspect of humanity, is prohibited. Thus, in utopias and dystopias the object of prohibition is the humanity itself.

<sup>1</sup> Diderot speaks about French term *ennui*, which was actually the mixture of boredom and melancholy.

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## VII

### *Creating Utopian or Dystopian Worlds in Digital Games*

MIŁOSZ MARKOCKI

#### Introduction

For centuries people have been fascinated with the idea of an ideal society. Many thinkers and philosophers have been coming up with new ideas either to improve their societies or to propose visions of what in their opinion would be an ideal community. The creation of visions of ideal societies required a counterbalance image of a society to better highlight what makes a society or a country good or bad. Depictions of an ideal social structure—“a better place, or time, a portrait of a happy society” (Claeys 2010: 15)—are usually referred to as utopias whereas the opposite—“a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand” (Claeys 2010: 107)—are dystopias; however, both have inspired great number of works of fiction in different mediums. In the spirit of Nick Montfort’s work *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction*, in this chapter digital games will be treated similarly to literature—books, films and digital games are all considered as works of fiction (Montfort 2005: 1-35). Representations of utopian and dystopian societies can be found in a variety of literary works, film and digital games. Every medium operates in a unique manner, resulting in different relations between a piece of work and a consumer in the case of each medium. Digital games, in particular, enable players to experience the idea of both utopian and dystopian societies in various ways. Therefore, this chapter focuses on two digital ga-

mes—*Civilization: Call to Power* (Activision 1999), and *Black & White* (Lionhead Studios 2001)—that enable the players to create their own utopias and dystopias within the gameworld.

## Utopia and Dystopia

One of the first proposals of the ideal society recorded in writing is Plato's *Republic*<sup>1</sup>, in which he divided citizens of the imaginary country into four classes “golden”, “silver”, “bronze”, and “iron”. Each class had specific duties and privileges and all of the citizens' work was set to benefit the society as a whole. The country in the *Republic* is not an ideal place; it is not separated from other countries and societies and therefore it can wage wars. Moreover, Plato includes instructions on how depicted society should wage wars. The solution is to hire mercenaries from country's more aggressive neighbours, in order to make warlike people of surrounding republics kill each other so only peaceful are left (Plato: 2014). Plato's vision of the country is not ideal but evidently it is a proposal of a better, more peaceful, and just society, with potential to make the world a better place.

The proposition of an ideal society, which later has become the term that is associated with this idea, was presented by Sir Thomas More in 1516 in his book *De optimo reipublicæ*, where More describes a fictional society inhabiting an island in the Atlantic Ocean that was supposed to be an ideal society, at least ideal in the context of 16th century Europe (More: 2015). Nowadays understanding of a utopia is heavily influenced by More's work—it is considered as an imagined community or country characterised by highly desirable qualities which allows to form a perfect society (Sargent 1994). Principles that are common for most works describing utopian societies are economic equality, justice and the government that is supposed to take care of its citizens (Sargent 2010: 44). Methods of the government and the structure of the society are based on ideology and intentions of the utopia's creator. Lyman Tower Sargent in the book *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* specifies a substantial number of possible utopias in fiction, including: “socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-

<sup>1</sup> Although it is important to mention that even if Plato's work tends to be regarded as the first example of the vision of ideal or better society, many scholars argue that the first work depicting an utopian society is More's *De optimo reipublicæ* (Claeys 2010: 3-5).



wing, right-wing, reformist, free love, nuclear family, extended family, gay, lesbian, and many more” (Sargent 2010: 21). A good example of a utopian society which should deserve close attention as inspired by a specific ideology is the ecological utopia (or so-called ecotopia), in which the society strives to relate better to nature. This utopia focuses on rejecting the modern Western way of life, and its machines and technology that wreak havoc on nature, in order to return to simpler and more nature-friendly way of life (Kirk 2007: 86). A very important consequence of introducing utopia to cultural discourse is that it not only describes real or imagined communities and their attempts to create ideal societies in real-life or in fiction but it also results in creating many different utopia-related concepts which express decidedly ominous or tragic visions.

Interestingly enough, there are many different terms used by scholars to describe a “bad” society. One of them is “cacotopia”—the term proposed by Jeremy Bentham in his work *Plan of Parliamentary Reform, in the Form of a Catechism, with Reasons for Each Article* in 1818, where he defines utopia as the best form of government and cacotopia as the opposite (Bentham 2003). Even though the term “dystopia” became more popular and it is currently more widely used, the term “cacotopia” is also in use by scholars who argue that it is not an exact synonym for dystopia, as it is the case with the term “anti-utopia”. For example, Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent argues that there is a distinction between various terms that are considered as synonyms of dystopia. That is why Claeys and Sargent propose to define a dystopia as a society that is much worse than the contemporary society, whereas an anti-utopia would be a direct criticism of utopia and the values it represents (Claeys and Sargent 1999). As a result, “dystopia” terms a society in which a government often uses force and fear to maintain order and keep citizens in their place. Many works of fiction, especially the ones that are set in the future, depict futuristic societies as dystopian ones—with the well-known, notable examples of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Many narratives depict dystopias as countries or nations run by totalitarian governments which dehumanize its citizens; often the world is in a difficult situation as a result of some kind of an environmental disaster or a destructive war that brought about a significant decline in society (Moylan 2000: xi-xv). In many genres and subgenres of fiction authors use various representations of dystopian worlds or societies in order to emphasise a complexity of issues related to society, religion, or politics, as well as broader problems such as ethics, science, or environment—to name only a few—in the contemporary, real-life

world. Quite often those stories are considered as warnings against being reluctant to address mentioned issues—since idleness or refusal to change might lead to turning the real world into a dystopia-like reality.

There is an uncanny relation between utopias and dystopias in works of fiction. Very often both utopias and dystopias are based on similar, or even the same, ideals and the main difference lies in political and social execution of these. In utopias the way in which ideas are implemented is beneficial and positive for citizens of a given society, but in their dystopian counterpart the way to the “perfect” state is very often brutal, unpleasant, and quite negative for the citizens. Furthermore, in representations of dystopias in fiction the ruling class or the government are described as brutal, unjust, and indifferent to the problems of the common citizens. Because of that, very often many depicted dystopian societies and worlds in works of fiction (especially in digital games) are characterised by protagonists who act against the government or take part in some kind of resistance movement that tries to change the society and overthrow the “evil” government (Donawerth 2003: 29-46).

## Utopias and Dystopias Across Media

The main goal of this section is not to characterise in detail the wide variety of utopias and dystopias in literature, cinema, and digital games, but to present a few examples to highlight the main differences in the way the audiences of these mediums can interact with various visions of utopias and dystopias. In the case of books three examples were already mentioned (*The Republic*, *De optimo reipublicæ*, and *Brave New World*); however, there is one novel which deserves particular attention, as the reader is provided there not with one vision of ideal society, but with two possible scenarios. *Woman on the Edge of Time*, written by Marge Piercy in 1976, offers visions of alternative futures: one utopian, wherein many political, environmental, social and racial problems have been solved, and one dystopian, wherein a wealthy elite lives on space platforms and rule over the rest of the population with the use of drugs and surgical operations that let them control the minds of others. This novel is a very interesting example of a u-/dystopian text—as far as the literary medium is considered—mainly because it is uncommon to include two opposing depictions of future society.

Another interesting trend in regard to fictional representations of utopias and dystopias can be observed in film production. Popular or mainstream films largely tend to depict dystopian societies—even when at first certain communities or nations

seem to be utopian, in the end this impression turns out to be only a facade and in reality they are dystopian visions of society. What is more, utopias achieved by future societies are limited to certain aspects, or not accessible to everyone. *Gattaca* from 1997 directed by Andrew Niccol can serve as an exemplification of such vision of a society in the “near future”. The genetic technology in the film is much more advanced and allows people to design their children down to very specific detail—creating, from the genetic point of view, ideal humans. Genetically engineered people are considered “better” and discrimination of genetically non-modified people is widely accepted. However, it is not clearly stated whether *Gattaca* depicts a dystopian or utopian society and the film does not present any decisive answer; instead, it provides many arguments for and against such society allowing its viewers to draw their own conclusion. Although the most common depiction of future societies in cinema is unambiguously dystopian, filmmakers often use a popular formula for the presentation of a futuristic society that on the surface looks like a utopian one, but the outsider or even someone from this society is able to discover the “dark secret” of the system which leads to a change of the perception of this society from utopian to dystopian. Such change of perspective on a seemingly utopian society can be observed in 1976 film *Logan’s Run*, directed by Michael Anderson. The society in the film is settled in an advanced city that is run and controlled by computers, allowing people to live untroubled lives in a hedonistic way. Their only responsibility is to submit themselves to a ritual of renewal at the age of thirty (twenty-one in the book that the film was inspired by), in which their bodies are transferred into energy so they can be born again. In the chain of events Logan 5, the main hero, discovers that the ritual of renewal is a lie and it is just a tool used to maintain a stable population of the city. Computers calculated the maximum population of the city that can be maintained and they decided that all people must be killed at the age of thirty to make room for newly born citizens. Logan 5, so as the protagonists of the majority of dystopian narratives, ultimately rebels against the system and changes the society (Anderson 1976).

Digital games, on the other hand, have at their disposal distinctly different tools to depict and create visions of utopias and dystopias. Many game developers choose the same path as film directors—creating digital dystopian or utopian worlds in the middle of which players start their game (e.g. the *Fallout* series or *Dishonored*). The most distinctive feature of digital games is that they offer possibility to not only observe created worlds, but also interact with it and in some cases change it to some

degree, while in the case of other mediums—books and films—their readers and viewers can only observe visions of utopian or dystopian societies. In most games where players enter a pre-existing world they have zero influence on how the game-world became a dystopian world—an example of this is *Dishonored* (Arkane Studios 2012). In this game players start off in an already established world, with cities, government, social rules and technology. Players also do not create their own character but control a man called Corvo, whose life, worldview and morality were formed by and are a part of the gameworld. Often players cannot even change the gameworld in any significant way; however, there are games in which players begin in a dystopian world where they are the driving force that brings order and stabilization to the world, at least in some extent, like in the *Fallout* series (Interplay Entertainment, Black Isle Studios, Micro Forté, Bethesda Game Studios, Obsidian Entertainment 1997-2015). This type of games just throws their players into a dystopian world and the players' objective is mainly to survive or fight for a "better" tomorrow, fulfilling the characteristic theme for dystopian works of fiction—a hero fights system or government, or in some cases the gameworld itself, to bring change and lessen the suffering of its people, like in the game *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (Bethesda 2014).

Yet, there are also games that allow their players to create their own utopian or dystopian world or society. In such games the players do not start in an already existing dystopian or utopian world, it is their task to guide the gameworld towards one or the other. The players are provided by the game system with tools necessary to shape the world around them, to let them create a dystopian or utopian world. The aforementioned examples—Activision's *Civilization: Call to Power* from 1999 and Lionhead Studios' *Black & White* from 2001—enable their players to shape their own dystopia or utopia. The games above are to be analysed in detail to highlight mechanics and elements of the game systems that enable players to experiment with, and create (as far as game systems allow), various possibilities of utopian and dystopian worlds. In the context of studying the depictions of utopias and dystopias in works of fiction it is also important to highlight that the game mechanics of digital games can be used not only for experiments in worldbuilding of a utopian or dystopian vision of a world, but—in case of the two aforementioned games—also to create a utopian or dystopian narrative. As many game studies scholars argue, for many digital games narrative and story are very important elements of experiencing the game (Simons 2007) or that it is truly hard (especially in the case of such complex games as *Civilization: Call to Power* and *Black & White*) to analyse only the mechanics

or the story of a digital game without mentioning the other aspect in some degree (Consalvo 2012: 117-139). Even if the narrative is created in those two digital games differently than in literature or cinema, still by using game mechanics to form the gameworld into a utopia or dystopia the players, by playing the game and making decisions, do not “merely play” or “use game mechanics” to build a certain version of the gameworld, but also they “tell” a “story” of how certain utopian or dystopian world came to be. That is why it is impossible to analyse specific game mechanics of *Civilization: Call to Power* and *Black & White* in detail in the context of creating a utopian or dystopian gameworld without putting those mechanics in the context of the gameworlds themselves.

### *Civilization: Call to Power*

*Civilization: Call to Power* (hereinafter *Call to Power*) is a 4X game developed by Activision as a successor to the *Civilization* series by Sid Meier. Activision added a number of new mechanics to the game in pursuit to differentiate it from Sid Meier’s *Civilization* series. The term “4X” was created by Alan Emrich and is used as the name for a type of strategy-based games in which players control a country or a nation and their main goal is to “eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, and eXterminate” (Emrich 1993), focusing on maintaining and managing the nation’s economy and politics. Nowadays, the term is used to describe all of the games with similar scope (managing a country or a nation) and design (specific camera view, turn-based gameplay, etc.). Although in such games the economic and technological development and the option to wage wars have significant effect on the outcome of the game, there is a possibility to win the game in a non-military way, what is crucial—this can be observed in the case of “diplomatic” or “cultural” victories in Sid Meier’s *Civilization* series. For every gameplay of *Call to Power* a specific world is created and the players can manipulate many aspects of that world (through options concerning the age of the planet, humidity of the climate etc.) during the creation stage of the new game. Therefore, every game is conducted in a separated and isolated world that players can influence in many various ways, shaping the gameworld (to a certain degree) to their liking. In the context of creating utopian or dystopian worlds in the game the most important mechanics added to *Call to Power* include the pollution mechanics and the mechanics of government types that players can choose for their civilisation during the game.

In the game, after reaching the age of Industrial Revolution, any kind of production in cities creates a certain amount of pollution—including the case of dropping a nuclear bomb on an enemy. As a tool for players that would enable them to create a dystopian world, pollution works on two different levels. One is local, influencing specific cities or only the player's civilisation, while the other one is global and influences the whole gameworld. If players ignore the problem of pollution and it reaches certain levels, the tiles around the city with high pollution output start to turn black and the population of the city will be unable to use those tiles. This can lead to food and happiness problems and, in consequence, to riots; in some extreme cases players can even lose control over an overpolluted city. This situation may lead to problems with happiness in other cities owned by the player, and eventually whole nation can plunge into chaos, or even a civil war. Such scenario creates the local scale dystopia, as the player's country becomes a land of chaos and disorder and in most cases the only way for the player to bring order is to subjugate their own citizens by use of force and the military. In very rare extreme cases the chain reaction of unhappiness and riots can lead to a situation in which the player loses control over owned cities, effectively losing the game.

Large-scale pollution can influence the whole gameworld. The game system distinguishes between local and global level of pollution—the former one is related to specific cities' emissions, while the latter is a combined level of pollution emitted by all civilisations in the particular game. When the global pollution reaches critical levels, the game informs the player about global natural disaster and event that has two possible outcomes: either the icecaps melt and most of the landmass in the gameworld is flooded by water and all the cities near the sea are destroyed or the temperature rises so high that almost all the land tiles turn into a desert—or a polluted wasteland—making them uninhabitable. Therefore, by manipulating the global pollution levels, the player can create a post-apocalyptic dystopian world. In one case triggering the event that covers almost whole world with water and in other case by turning the whole world into a desolated desert.

In some cases, the melted icecaps event can cause players to automatically lose the game if all of their cities were near the coastline. On the other hand, some players may use the natural disaster mechanic as a part of their strategy. During the world creation, players can choose to play in a world with high sea level or in a world consisting of many small islands. In both scenarios triggering the natural disaster that melts icecaps and raises the sea level will almost assure the destruction of all the land

mass along with the cities. However, *Call to Power* allows its players to reach certain level of technological development that enables them to build cities under water or in orbit. Therefore when players manage to achieve a certain technological level they can build at least one underwater or orbital city, then they can trigger the event by dropping a number of nuclear bombs on other players and destroy everything in the world except the mentioned naturally protected cities. This way players can purposefully strive to create a devastated dystopian world as a mean to defeat their enemies and win the game.

The other mechanic available to players that allows creation of utopian or dystopian world in *Call to Power* is the mechanic of government types, which is also tied closely with the mechanics of pollution. By choosing, especially in the late gameplay, a specific government type, the players can not only influence the situation in their own nation, but also in the whole gameworld. In this context the most significant government types are communism and ecotopia.

In the game the government types are showed in a rather simplistic way that highlights mainly those characteristics that are important from the point of view of the game mechanics. Nonetheless developers wanted the characteristic of every government type (at least the historic ones) to reflect the historical facts (as much as game mechanics allow). Communism is a government type characterised by very high productivity and strong military. Nations that choose communism tend to have poor economy, but are very efficient in waging war. Communism is described in the game as a truly totalitarian government. Fascism is another totalitarian form of government that keeps a close eye on its populace. It may inspire a great loyalty among citizens, which helps such nation to maintain a big army without worrying about unhappiness among its citizens. Fascist nations are also characterised by high production, but have weak economies and slow growth of populace and science. Both government types can be used by the players to create a version of a totalitarian dystopian country.

Ecotopia, on the other hand, is an example of a utopian type of government that focuses on finding balance between technological progress and taking care of environment and nature. The underlying idea of ecotopia is that humanity should strive for ecologically harmonious way of life. Despite what the name might suggest, the ecotopian nations will gladly go to war with any nation that produces vast amounts of pollution. Another rather utopian government type is technocracy, which puts the science and technology above all others. As the name suggests, nations adopting this

type of government have high pace of scientific research, high production, strong economy and its citizens are loyal. However, there is even more advanced type of government, characterised by its peacefulness—virtual democracy. This type of government can be distinguished by its strong economy, effective scientific research, and approach to environmental issues—considering them a very serious threat. All of these three government types have many elements associated with various visions of utopian societies, and the players can use them to create a utopia on a level of their nation.

Players can also combine the government system and the pollution mechanic to create dystopian or utopian worlds in *Call to Power*. Every type of government has its bonuses and drawbacks. The government systems provide the players with modifiers to pollution emission and allow access to technologies and wonders that can influence the global level of pollution. So by choosing a specific government, players can greatly influence the global level of pollution to shape the gameworld into an ecological utopia or a post-apocalyptic dystopia. In the context of pollution, the most important governments are communism and ecotopia—mainly because communism has a very high production bonus at the cost of increase in pollution emission by three hundredth percent; also this type of government makes it easy for players to build and maintain substantial nuclear arsenal that can be used to increase the global pollution level in the game. Ecotopia, on the other hand, grants players an access to buildings and wonders that lower pollution level not only in the players' nations but also globally. A prime example of creating a utopian gameworld while playing as ecotopia is the “Gaia Controller” wonder. It is a special building that is available to civilisations that have chosen ecotopia as the government type. Wonders, as in any other *Civilization*-like game, can influence the whole nation as well as the whole gameworld. In the case of “Gaia Controller” it eliminates all of the pollution in the gameworld. After building this wonder, players effectively create an ecologically utopian world in which there is no pollution and the impact that the industry has on nature is greatly diminished.

In the context of creating a utopian or dystopian world in *Call to Power*, the government system has one important limitation. It can be used by players to create, for example, a utopian society, but only on a local level of their nation. Players have no possibility of influencing other nations in the game to change their government types. Only few wonders in the game can influence the gameworld globally, most of



them provide various bonuses only to its builders. Thus players can use the government system or build various wonders to create utopian society limited to their own nation. To be able to influence the gameworld globally, and achieve a utopian world, they need to use both systems (like in the example described above).

*Civilization: Call to Power* is a representative example of a digital game that gives its players an opportunity to create a utopian or dystopian world within the game. The possibility to influence not only certain nations but also the whole gameworld itself comes from the specific characteristics of *Call to Power* being a 4X game. There is another game that allows its players to create a utopian or dystopian society, although on a smaller scale. Right in the spirit of More's *De optimo reipublicæ*, the next described digital game's action takes place on an island in the middle of the ocean and players can influence inhabitants' lives in various ways to create a utopian paradise island or a dystopian living hell—the game is called *Black & White*.

### *Black & White*

The game *Black & White* was developed by Lionhead Studios in 2001. Players are gods who control a number of villages across several islands. Each level of the game is a different island which means that players have control over only one island at a time. *Black & White* features a number of creatures from which players can choose one. The creature can be raised and taught by players to help them convert neutral or hostile people to worship the players' god. Players can choose whether they want to be a good god or an evil one—every action taken by the player influences followers' view of a god. Also players can influence the personality of their creature (god's familiar) and train it to do things that are either benevolent or cruel. One of the most important aspects of the game mechanics is that the god's personality system and the creature's one are separate, so there is a possibility for players to play as a good god with evil familiar, as well as the other way round. There are distinctive visual and sound cues highlighting the “morality” of players' gods and their creatures.

In the context of creating a utopian or dystopian world (island) in *Black & White*, one of the games mechanics is particularly important. It is called “area of influence” (or simply influence). It is an area of an island that is under direct influence of the player. Inside this area the player can cast miracles, move objects and help to build structures—in short, take any available action in the game system. Players can expand their influence area either by helping their villages to grow—in consequence,

gain more worshippers and power—or by converting remaining villages that are not worshipping any god or are under the influence of another god. The only way for players to shape the whole world into their liking is to extend their influence over the island. Once it is achieved they can do whatever they want with inhabitants and various objects on the island. Even though the game allows players to manipulate every object in the game, there are some things that players (even though they are gods) cannot do in the gameworld—namely they cannot modify the terrain on the island. Players can move enormous boulders, move and replant whole woods from one part of the island to another, yet they cannot change its landscape. Meaning that they are unable to level down mountains or raise land to form hills or change the course of waterways.

In *Black & White* players play as gods, and gods' power is measured by the number and devotion of their followers. Players can choose one of two ways in which they interact with people living on an island. By helping villagers with their everyday struggles they can convince inhabitants to believe in them, for example, players can cast miracles, such as providing extra wood or summoning rain on the fields so the crops can grow. On the other hand, players can cast rain of fire on a village to force people to worship them or send their creature to destroy a village, forcing people to worship them. Players can choose to act in a specific way and in most cases train their creature accordingly, in order to become good or evil. When players decide to play an evil god, they can create a gameworld that resembles living hell for their followers and create a variation of dystopian world. As suggested by the game's name itself (i.e. *Black & White*), the indicated visual cues amplify this vision of horrible dystopian world. The evil god's temple is dark with many spikes and bats flying around. Furthermore, instead of regular cursor—resembling a normal human hand—there is a red and wrinkly hand with long, sharp nails. What is more, players' avatar that is being developed into an evil creature is characterised by its special appearance. It is of dark colour and has aggressive and mean features. On the other hand, players which decide to play a good god can help their followers and provide them with everything they may need. In consequence, to win love and admiration of followers, players effectively create a utopian gameworld. This vision is also enhanced by visual cues as the temple of a good god is portrayed using a white smooth tower around with white doves flying around. In this case, the cursor is a smooth and gentle hand, and the creature is white, peaceful and not threatening.

Furthermore, another mechanic of the game can be used by its players to become an evil or good god and, in consequence, help to create a utopian or dystopian world. In order to cast miracles, players need power which they normally gain when their followers pray to them; however, players can get additional power through sacrifice, but they can sacrifice only animate beings, namely trees, animals and humans. Those who decide to sacrifice their followers (human sacrifice gives the biggest amount of power) are considered an evil god. The same relation goes for players' creatures which can be taught to eat specific things like grain, animals or humans. Creatures of players that choose not to teach their familiars to abstain from eating people or training them to devour humans on purpose are considered evil, which leads to a change in their rendering.

The aforementioned mechanics significantly influence the gameplay of players in the context of creating a dystopian world in the game. In *Black & White* players compete against other gods, so the main goal of the game is to win said competition. In order to do that, players need power (the main source of which is, as it was mentioned earlier, prayers of players' followers). Because the developers made the game a competitive one and they tied the only source of power to followers, many players feel more compelled to play as good gods, train their creatures accordingly and, in consequence, create a utopian world. Gamers playing as evil gods sacrifice their followers to gain more power, but also they are compelled to summon destructive forces, by casting lightnings or fireballs, and unleash them on villages to force inhabitants to worship them and to train their creatures to eat humans. All of those actions are characteristic of an evil god and the rules of a dystopian world, but because of the aforementioned mechanics of the game they are dangerous for players and can jeopardise their chances of winning. Killing followers to gain more power, feeding them to creatures or converting them by force may prove disastrous for players. Playing an evil god and creating a dystopian world in the game puts players' main resource (manpower) in danger and lack of cautiousness might cost them the game. Indeed, training a creature to feed solely on humans and building a village only for purpose of breeding more people so a creature has abundant food source fit ideally into the dystopian imagery. However, this strategy, from the perspective of the game mechanics, is very difficult to maintain and also wasteful. So even though *Black & White* offers its players the choice of way in which they want to play—either to be good or bad deity, still the game mechanics make creating a utopian world much easier and rewarding than a dystopian one.

## Conclusion

Most of media representations, because of their characteristics, can only present a certain version of a utopia or dystopia and describe it to the readers or viewers, who cannot change or influence it—they can only admire it or be horrified by it. In the case of digital games the situation is much more complex. The audience of games—players—are not only able to admire or abhor the vision of utopian or dystopian society created by game developers, but also—because of the specifics of digital games as medium—experience it more profoundly and, in the case of some titles, influence a gameworld itself. This paper presented two examples of digital games in which players can go much further in experiencing utopian or dystopian worlds, which is not possible in any other media. In those games the players are allowed to actually create their own (as far as systems and mechanics of those games allow) utopian or dystopian worlds or societies. Furthermore, *Civilization: Call to Power* and *Black & White* are not the only digital games featuring this particular theme—there are other examples of digital games (e.g. the *Populous* series or the *Dungeon Keeper* series) that enable players to create various virtual worlds in accordance with ideas underlying utopias or dystopias. The main goal of this chapter was to demonstrate, making use of provided examples, that in comparison with other media, games present their audience, i.e. the players, with decidedly different tools to experience and experiment with the idea of utopian or dystopian worlds.

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## VIII

### *SimCity: Where the City Ends*

MICHAŁ KŁOSIŃSKI

#### Introduction

The newest title in the *SimCity* franchise, published in 2013 and named *SimCity 2013*<sup>1</sup>, is the first multiplayer version of the widely acknowledged city builder game. This specific genre focuses on delivering players two things: an advanced virtual simulation of economy which governs the game world and, specifically, the city; and the ability to plan, construct, erase, and control particular elements of the virtual city (types of roads, city transport, terrain designated for commerce, housing or industry, tax system etc.).

This chapter aims to present an analysis and interpretation of the specific conditions of the existence of *SimCity 2013* as a tool to create virtual utopias. The questions posed in this part are strictly linked to the manner in which the rhetoric of the game's newest expansion called *The Cities of Tomorrow* functions to present and advertise it, not only as a city builder but also as a utopia builder:

<sup>1</sup> To avoid bias and misunderstanding, I have decided to always utilize the full title of the game *Sim City 2013*, as the whole franchise is also differentiated by the year of production of every *Sim City* title. It should also be noted that *SimCity 2013* is analysed here also as a representant of the whole franchise but due to the subject chosen in this text there will be no historical analysis of how certain elements of the game were changing over the course of its development. Such analysis could be used also to present how certain neoliberal economic myths and visions of utopia change in one specific medium.

What kind of future will you build for your city? Will you build a utopian society underpinned by clean technology, allow a giant corporation to feed your Sims' insatiable consumerism, or build into the sky with enormous multi-zone MegaTowers? (SimCity.com 2015).

Unlock two new city specializations that allow you to build a resource-hungry mega corporation powered by a low-wealth workforce, or an urban utopia that develops clean technology and is controlled by the rich (SimCity.com 2015).

The text will utilize the philosophical reflection about the city presented by Jacques Derrida in the article *Générations d'une ville: mémoire, prophétie, responsabilité* (Derrida 1992) to formulate critical questions about the status of a virtual city and its utopian claims. Moreover, the main argument is to prove that *SimCity 2013* is an ideological dys-utopian tool which depicts a world where the only possible utopia is a neoliberal one. Thus, the neoliberal utopia begins with the end of the city (as memory, prophecy, responsibility).

## SimCity—A Neoliberal Utopia

To start analysing the city-builder game, it is imperative to see its relation to the utopian framework. Lyman Tower Sargent in his well-known article writes that:

Utopia [is—M.K.] a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space [...]. Eutopia or positive utopia [is—M.K.] a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived (Sargent 1994: 9).

This definition allows us to enumerate certain features of the society of Sims (the inhabitants of every *SimCity*), which perfectly fit Sargent's definition. Firstly, *SimCity 2013* is a simulation of a non-existent society located in a time and space of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, or as in the case of the *Cities of the Future*, as it suggests—in the near but unspecified future. Secondly, the main selling point of the game is the level of detail put into simulation of the city life which is designed and governed by the player—the game simulates, for example, traffic, economy, social atmosphere, problems of unemployment etc. Third, and probably the most important utopian aspect of *SimCity 2013*, is the assumption that the player has to deal with all the socio-economic problems of the city for it to be ideal, perfect, and better than any other city in the world. Moreover, the player is tested as a responsible mayor because the city exists as long as the player can afford to sustain it,



therefore, in a long run, one cannot neglect unemployment, lack of green spaces, healthcare or crime rates, otherwise the Sims will pack their bags and leave. Thus, this simulation model promotes players-mayors who take care of their subjects needs in order to sustain a stable flow of cash into their city treasury.

To conclude, *SimCity 2013* is a tool which quite clearly outlines the conditions one must fulfil to create a utopian city, where everyone is happy, has a job, never falls ill, is protected from crime etc. All that, in turn, is converted into profit for the player and further ability to expand the city or build new ones. At the same time, *SimCity 2013* can take a dystopian turn when the city drowns in garbage, crime, disease, and is eventually consumed by flames (if one does not care to build a fire brigade). All dystopian cities end the game quite fast, as they plunge the player-mayor into insolvency and debt.

This short analysis shows that *SimCity 2013* tests players on several levels such as economy, social responsibility, planning, creativity etc. It also depicts the axiom, underlying the simulation of a perfect utopian city, namely that the only good decisions are the ones which generate profit. This leads to a conclusion that *SimCity 2013* promotes thinking about a city in general as an enterprise focused on profit, and a form of neoliberal utopia (Boelens, Getches, Guevara-Gil 2010: 27-52). One can argue that it is obvious to think about a city as an enterprise, but I do not. David Harvey wrote in his *Brief History of Neoliberalism* that:

We can, therefore, interpret neoliberalization either as a *utopian* project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites. In what follows I shall argue that the second of these objectives has in practice dominated (Harvey 2005: 19).

Harvey explicitly points up to the fact that neoliberalism can be understood as both a political or a utopian project. I believe that these two interpretations are somehow interconnected and cannot be simply divided. Moreover, in *SimCity 2013* the utopian project can be perceived as a way of reproducing the political ideology. Thus, the neoliberal vision subjected to the analysis forms a kind of a double helix in which the utopian project mirrors the political one—and I do believe that these two are just different names for the neoliberal utopian program (Jameson 2005: 2-5) and its totalitarian realization (Berardi 2012: 95).

## SimCity—Where the City Ends

In *Générations d'une ville: mémoire, prophétie, responsabilité* Jacques Derrida states that "a city is a memory and promise which never coincide with the entirety of what is currently visible and constructed, and which can be represented or inhabited" (Derrida 1992: 44). The main point of Derrida's article is that cities are no longer complete topological entities—*poleis* understood as public things, and thus we should accept the fact that no city will ever be "complete" as a city-state. He presents an interesting and very important aspect of cities in general, which Francesco Vitale also points out in his translation:

A city must remain open to the fact that it does not know yet what it will be: it is necessary to inscribe the respect of this not knowing into the architectonic and city-planning science and skill, as it were a symbol. Otherwise what else would one do but carry out some plans, totalize, saturate, suture, suffocate? (Vitale 2010: 223-224)<sup>2</sup>.

According to Vitale, the point Derrida makes about the "axiom of incompleteness", presented in the quote above, is the politics of architecture which enables the community to be at the same time opened and ambivalent towards the other whom it designates in order to confirm itself (Vitale 2010: 224). Thus, Derrida tries to write about the architecture of a city as a part of an ethical system. This will be our point of departure into the depths of *SimCity 2013*, understood as a tool representing specific ideological and ethical goals. But how does the simulation of the utopian neoliberal city relate to Derridean axiom of incompleteness? The first and foremost problem with *SimCity 2013* is the fact that it is a tool to build city-states, however, it does not allow anyone to build a city within a state (a country with a specific economic and social system). The city in *SimCity 2013* is and must be self-sufficient as far as it produces and spends money within and outside its borders—on a global market. This of course results in rethinking Derrida's ideas about the contemporary city:

Questions such as: "what is a city" and "what is a capital?" have additionally a melancholic or eschatological character nowadays, as—in my opinion—and this would be the untold hypothesis of this text—the agglomeration, metropolis, *polis*, city-state are no longer strong, finished topological units, units of habitation, work, communication, strategy, trade, that is, in a word: society and human politics, politics

<sup>2</sup> In this fragment Vitale both translates and paraphrases Derrida, therefore, the author chose to relate to Vitale and not to the exact Derrida's text.

which should change its name, since city as a *polis* or *acropolis* does not reflect the meaning of *res publica* (Derrida 1992: 45).

Thus, *SimCity 2013* with its city-state model not only harbours the futuristic and neoliberal dream of a city-enterprise, utopia of capital, but it also represents the longing for a complete and finished topological unit of one politics. This, unfortunately, cannot be said about the meaning of *res publica*, which Derrida posits as an ethical axiom of the ancient cities. *SimCity 2013* does not see the city-state as a republic, but as a corporation (in American English understanding) which is a: “large business or company, or a group of companies which are all controlled and run together as a single organization” (Collins Cobuild 1994: 316). That is the reason why the player is given god-like privileges such as creating and destroying habitable, production, and commercial zones as one pleases whether they are occupied by the inhabitants of one’s city or not. Furthermore, the social services such as police, fire brigades, hospitals, and schools can be turned off or destroyed, as they formally belong to the mayor. This of course translates to the whole thinking about the city as an enterprise: if the city does not earn enough through various taxes or export, the player may shut off a school or a police station to lower the costs of maintaining his business. No income? Shut down that university. Low on money? Get rid of this hospital. The most important buildings and facilities in the city which we deem absolutely necessary in our contemporary world, e.g. public transport, schools, police stations, fire brigades, hospitals, and universities, are loss-generating, expensive, and financially dangerous institutions. *SimCity 2013* represents them economically as a necessary evil and financial nuisances. From players perspective, the social spending is a struggle for their growing enterprise. These problems are present in *SimCity 2013* and are all linked to the fact that it is a city-state builder; moreover, this particular city-state runs in accordance with the neoliberal idea of profit encrypted in the games mechanics. How does it relate to the Derridean axiom of incompleteness?

Firstly, *SimCity 2013* promotes cities which are industries that generate stable profit, meaning that change is only required to a certain level beyond which the city cannot make more money. The game does not end with a creation of a perfect utopia, it just stops needing the player, as a perfect neoliberal city is in a state of stillness<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>3</sup> Oswald Devish also pointed to this fact in his analysis of *SimCity 4*: “From the moment that the game’s rules are known, the game becomes predictable. At this point, the player cannot get any better, thereby removing the reason for playing” (Devish 2008).

and literally becomes a self-sustaining machine to generate money. That is why the best profit-making cities in the game are the ones founded on huge corporations either governing tourism, hazard and gambling, producing and trading the natural resources or, like in the *Cities of the Future*, expanding the influences of Omega—an ideal Ubik-like substance (Dick 1991: 77-85)<sup>4</sup>. The corporations are absolutely crucial to every city, as by placing them, the player unlocks additional buildings which are helpful in generating profit. Taking all these things into consideration, one may see that the city in *SimCity 2013* has to follow neoliberal rules in order to strive and at the end of each struggle it turns into a finite and completely planned city-state enterprise. *SimCity 2013* as a project forms itself on the rejection of the axiom of incompleteness as it is never a republic, it is a centralized tyranny of the capital.

### *SimCity*—Memory, Prophecy, Responsibility

Why does one talk about Derridean memory, prophecy, and responsibility in case of a city-state utopia building simulator? This question must be posed in the light of a trend started at the beginning of the twenty-first century to try and incorporate various iterations of the *SimCity* franchise into city planning education. These ideas have been present since 1998, also in the article *Teaching and Learning with SimCity 2000* (Adams 1999), and through such works as: *A CITY IS NOT A TOY: How SimCity Plays with Urbanism* (Lobo 2005), *Simulating Planning SimCity as a Pedagogical Tool* (Gaber 2007), *Should Planners Start Playing Computer Games? Arguments from SimCity and Second Life* (Devish 2008), *Toying with the City? Using the Computer Game SimCity™4 in Planning Education* (Minnery, Searle 2014) and many more—the positions mentioned above were based on Google Scholar list of appearances funded on number of citations. Moreover, among other papers worth mentioning would be an empirical study: *Simulated real worlds: science students creating sustainable cities in the urban simulation computer game SimCity 4* (Nilsson 2008). Let us just quote the concluding comments, which point to the fact that *SimCity 4* is an interesting teaching tool; Elisabet Nilsson writes:

<sup>4</sup> It cannot be excluded that the OMEGA substance in *SimCity 2013 Cities of Tomorrow* is a direct reference to Dick's UBIK and thus an interesting intertextual context, but so far there are no other confirmed similarities between the two substances/products except for their mythologised and simulacrum-like properties.

When reflecting upon their cities the students applied (correctly or incorrectly) scientific concepts, and discussed scientific phenomena appearing in the game. Also processes of reasoning and balancing were observed, e.g. when laying down the different city zones, or when choosing power sources. When deciding which power plant to install the students considered relationships between cost, amount of power generated, and environmental damage. They got to experience consequences of their actions and how they influenced the development of the city, e.g. citizens moving in or out, level of pollution, budget and tax problems, factors that in this paper are referred to as simulated real world problems (Nilsson 2008).

As we can see, *SimCity* as a franchise is perceived here and in other works as a valuable teaching tool, but most importantly, it is evaluated as a tool that quite adequately “simulates real world problems”. What Nilsson shows us is that this simulation game teaches responsibility and prophecy (in the Derridean sense), which may be utilized to depict the cause-effect side of the city planning decisions. Moreover, the empirical study she conducted explicitly showed that *SimCity 4* reproduces the Western (US and European) value system in the game rules and mechanisms. It might be worth noting that the students were given the task to construct an ideal city of the future, which seems relevant in our analysis of the game as a utopia-builder. This task also depicts the fact that there is a clearly visible example of Ernst Bloch's utopian impulse (Jameson 2005: 2) that can be noticed in both the game itself and in the teaching programs which try to utilize it. Nilsson concludes the realization of the utopian task given to the students with an interesting remark that most of them felt that the game system and rules were too restrictive in limiting the futurization of their cities. This of course shows that the prophetic tool can only give a predetermined prophecy, and the future is sealed within its prescribed mechanisms. This is the true paradox. The future is impossible within the *SimCity* franchise as a closed and finite simulation model which cannot surpass itself into the unknown, as the future has been turned into an aesthetic artefact but not an unknown possibility. As the simulation is always self-referential, it cannot go beyond the future it already made into a concrete and finite entity. To conclude, *SimCity 2013* as an example of the whole franchise of *SimCity* games offers the responsibility of planning but without the unknown future or—as Derrida would say—“the axiom of incompleteness”. This responsibility turns into finding the one, perfect, and logical outcome given by various factors present in the given system. *SimCity 2013* at its core, through its mechanisms, turns all future into finitude and all responsibility into exploitation of the system—which Nilsson called in her analysis of *SimCity 4* the “meta-strategy” (Nilsson 2008).

The other problem of Derridean triad of memory, prophecy, and responsibility in the case of video simulation is how *SimCity 2013* turns all cultural landmarks, artefacts, and elements of heritage into tools for earning money. For example, it is possible to build a Globe Theatre or an Eiffel Tower in any given city. But these buildings do not have an aesthetic function *per se*, they are a part of the greater financial system which counts how many people visited them and balances their maintenance costs against their earnings from tourism. If the Eiffel Tower is ruining a city's economy, it can be turned off or destroyed. Is it not here that we touch upon an absolutely crucial problem of memory? Writing about Prague, Derrida points to the fact that the city of Prague is not a monolithic unit that it was, but it is and always will be in the process of making:

With what is it possible to identify a subject, identical in itself throughout discontinuous history, which wandered the epochs: gothic and baroque architecture, demolition of ghetto, establishment of Czechoslovakia, first German, then Soviet protectorate, The Prague Spring, normalization and subsequently the latest revolution in the making? (Derrida 1992: 47).

Could we say these things about the city in *SimCity 2013*? No, we could not. The only history we could write about each unit in the game is the history of its economy, as the economy has become the only possible way of writing the history of the simulated city. This can be seen in various graphs and mathematical formulae depicting the growth of the city's capital. It is of course possible to describe various stages of the city's growth (from a small town into a metropolis), but these are purely economic and number-based technical information. The status of the Eiffel Tower is, therefore, different as it ceases to be a part of the identity of a historical city-persona and turns into what Roland Barthes calls a myth (Barthes 1991: 110-115) or a sign of fashion (Barthes 1990: 213-224). We shall understand a myth as a connotation (met-alanguage) which turns the sign of the first semiological system into a signifier of the second one and adds its own signified into this new structure. By the sign of fashion, we will understand the object which lost its pure functionality or denotation and has been transformed into a sign-object with a superficial meaning and function invested with the rhetoric of the new social communication. The game describes the Eiffel Tower as follows:

Gives your city a large dose of French style! Standing over 300m tall, the Eiffel Tower is open 24 hours a day and also serves as a shop. French-style high wealth, medium density houses and shops will develop in residential and commercial zones around the Eiffel Tower (Simcity2013wiki.com 2015).

The in-game definition of the Eiffel Tower describes it as both a mythological construct and a re-functionalization, according to the game rhetoric. Firstly, the myth takes the sign: “the Eiffel Tower equals French style”, turns it into a signifier and completes it with a signified from a different order: “24h shop, wealth, and commerce”. The Eiffel Tower is now not only a symbol of France, it has been transformed into a myth signifying the French high-class, economy, tourism and social order, not to mention the never ending consumerism. Secondly, the game turns the Eiffel Tower into a fashion sign-object and functionalizes it anew. From this perspective the Eiffel Tower in *SimCity 2013* is: a sign of status—it is only obtainable as a part of Deluxe Downloadable Content the player has to pay for; a re-functionalized in-game object rising the price of terrain, earning money and transforming its surroundings architecturally; and an ideological sign-object grounding the belief that culture and history serves economy and is otherwise unnecessary. The Derridean argument about the memory of the city is irrelevant in this situation, it only shows that the city in *SimCity 2013* turns the artefacts of history and memory into functional objects of fashion or mythological objects of ideology. In this sense the simulation of the city brings the end to city itself as a living entity, as a persona.

### *SimCity*—A City of Death

Thinking about the ethics of planning a city, Derrida writes:

Desire to comprehensively solve all the city problems during the lifetime of one generation, not giving time or space to the future generations, not leaving it for them as a heritage, that is a catastrophe to the city plan, because for «the ones who know», architects and town-planners, it seems that they know in advance what tomorrow should be and they replace the ethical and political responsibility with their own techno-scientific programming (Derrida 1992: 49).

In this part I would like to focus on thinking about tomorrow and future generations which seems very problematic in case of *SimCity 2013* as the game does not factor any demographic variables (except for immigration and emigration) into its mechanics. As a result, a paradoxical situation arises when the detailed simulation of the city economy and social system assume that the only way to gain citizens is to bring them from the outside of the city-state. No life was or will ever be born in *SimCity 2013*, it can only migrate into it. The city in *SimCity 2013* does not “produce” life as a part of its economy oriented mechanics, but it can and will induce death if

poorly managed. The society of Sims is plagued by fires, disease, crime and catastrophes if the player does not invest in education, healthcare, security and clean technologies. Of course, the education functions here as a factor in lowering the Sims tendency to cause fires and causes them to recycle more trash, allowing the player to invest in recycling which can be very profitable. But the most fascinating thing is how the pinnacle of education in *SimCity 2013* is organized. The university—a very expensive building—has five possible departments-expansions: Business, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Science. No humanities, history, philosophy, social sciences—no, these would not fit in the general purpose of the university in *SimCity 2013*, as its main and only function is to unlock patents like new power plants, fire, crime, and disease prevention facilities and upgrades for the industry. In a nutshell, the education in a perfect society of immigrants is only needed to produce patents, or as a prevention from littering the streets and setting fire to their own belongings...<sup>5</sup>. What *SimCity 2013* does with university as an institution is interesting in the light of Derrida's deliberations on future generations and in the context the previous parts of this chapter which concentrates on the cultural artefacts, memory, and history. The exclusion of humanities from the university in *SimCity 2013* is in perfect harmony with the fact that this specific society does not need to know its identity, does not need to write its own history, does not have any existential problems (it can always move out), does not need to change the rules of its own functioning, and finally it does not know anything about natural death. That is why *SimCity 2013* is such a great tool for projecting neoliberal ideology of profit and accumulation—because it avoids the real cycle of life and death and substitutes it with a utopian vision of eternal life governed by the eternal economy of gain. Jean Baudrillard criticized this vision in his *Symbolic Exchange and Death* writing that:

Our whole culture is just one huge effort to dissociate life and death, to ward off the ambivalence of death in the interests of life as value, and time as the general equivalent. The elimination of death is our phantasm, and ramifies in every direction: for religion, the afterlife and immortality; for science, truth; and for economics, productivity and accumulation (Baudrillard 2000: 147).

Baudrillard's thesis helps to understand that *SimCity 2013* excludes both "natural" death and humanities as a part of one cultural project. Moreover, it also depicts

<sup>5</sup> This would be funny if contemporary humanities were not in crisis because of the neoliberal tendency to privatize general intellect, but that is a different problem.



why the city in *SimCity 2013* is unethical in Derridean terms. The power to plan the perfect city and to govern its eternal inhabitants is in fact the power coming from the elimination of death of both the citizens and the player-mayor, whose only demise comes with insolvency. The city in *SimCity 2013* has never needed the future generations, it has never needed to leave any heritage because it promotes the almighty city-planners and a vision of a city complete with all its problems solved, a profit-generating enterprise where death does not take place—a neoliberal utopia.

But this vision itself is a vision of a necropolis, a dead city or a city of the dead, because without the future generations and without anything to leave to the ones from the future, the city turns into some sort of a caricature, a machine, or a mechanism where citizens live, being only puppets and sustaining the city economy. An eternal city of accumulation is a city of the living-dead, a place where nobody is born and nobody dies. Thus, the neoliberal vision of the city turns into an anti-utopian warning that the city ends precisely in the very moment in which it excludes its own death and rejects the possibility of becoming a heritage for future generations.

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## IX

# *“Building the Future and Keeping the Past Alive Are One and the Same Thing”—A Rhetorical Analysis of the “Metal Gear Solid” Saga*

SVEN DWULECKI

### One Game to Awe Them All

War has changed. It's no longer about nations, ideologies, or ethnicity. It's an endless series of proxy battles fought by mercenaries and machines. War—and its consumption of life—has become a well-oiled machine. War has changed. ID-tagged soldiers carry ID-tagged weapons, use ID-tagged gear. Nano-machines inside their bodies enhance and regulate their abilities. Genetic control, information control, emotion control, battlefield control. Everything is monitored and kept under control. War has changed. The age of deterrence has become the age of control. All in the name of averting catastrophe wrought by weapons of mass destruction. And he who controls the battlefield controls history. War has changed. When the battlefield is under total control war becomes routine (Globalgamereport 2008: 1:24-3:00).

This introductory monologue leaves no doubt that the world of *Metal Gear Solid* has taken a turn for the worst in its last instalment. As we take a closer look at this opening scene, we see how a game exposition may serve as a forward glimpse of upcoming dystopian events; we also remark the highly rhetorical character of the game. The monologue describes how the entire world became one giant war theatre while structuring its content deliberately through the tagline “war has changed”. Parallelisms and epistrophes emphasize the importance of structural changes in society. At first glance the visual layer seemingly contradicts the narrator, as pictures of a

convoy in a Middle Eastern environment draw comparisons to the Afghanistan or Iraq conflicts yet both levels reinforce each other in order to create a strong connection between contemporary society and potential dystopian outcomes in a nearby future. The state of total warfare marks the apex of a tetralogy that seeks a match among videogames. Its highly developed rhetoric is often attributed to Hideo Kojima who will be regarded as the orator of this game franchise.

The primary goal of this chapter is to investigate the basic factors that videogame orators can utilize to engage their audience(s). The *Metal Gear Solid* saga serves as an excellent subject for investigation, considering it covers about twenty years of videogame history while being credited as one of the most influential games of all time (GamesRadar Staff 2015). The first step is to clarify the reason for videogames being a difficult medium for rhetorical intervention. Secondly, the analyzed game franchise *Metal Gear Solid* is to be introduced. While its vast narrative would overextend the limitations of this chapter, it is necessary to understand the basic dystopian themes and acknowledge their rhetorical presentation. The core unit *Painting a Picture with Pixels* introduces the four basic levels of game rhetoric: stage, agents, agency, and immersion fractures, the last one of which is one of four new theoretical concepts. Immersion fractures and its antonym, immersion shatters, will be equally introduced as ludo-performative stasis and the *homunculus digitalis*. The former describes the necessity to engage in the activity of playing in order to activate narrative or persuasive content, while the latter explains how the game's artificial intelligence serves as proxy for distance communication.

## Videogames and Rhetoric—An Unlikely Couple

Games can be just as persuasive as speeches or books. A longstanding misconception of videogames is their seemingly limited ability to transmit meaningful messages. In the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* [*Historical Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*] one may read that games have no persuasive capabilities whatsoever (Pekar 2009: col. 1069). Many consumers might verify that statement with common phrases such as "It's just a game" or "Nothing more than a game". But does that equal a "Game Over" for any kind of game rhetoric? Not at all. The rhetoric of videogames is a strikingly under-researched field and scholars has just begun to examine how games develop unique means to attract its users.

Gonzalo Frasca's theory of simulation and Ian Bogost's procedural rhetoric might be considered cornerstones of persuasion research in games. According to Gonzalo Frasca, the core element of videogames is simulation. The idea is best explained with the simple example of *Microsoft Flight Simulator*. This game imitates the behavior of planes under different circumstances and represents its natural real life abilities (Frasca 2003: 223f). Bogost combined this idea with Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. Procedural rhetoric is considered here to be "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (Bogost 2007: ix). A rhetorician is enabled to influence his audience by creating rules within the game that represent the nature of any given system through the simulation of procedures. The orators can utilize the communicative power of computers in form of procedural rhetoric. Bogost describes in *Persuasive Games* his understanding of digital texts and their persuasive potential:

I suggest the name *procedural rhetoric* for the new type of persuasive and expressive practice at work [...]. *Procedurality* refers to a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes. And processes define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operation of systems, from mechanical systems like engines to organizational systems like high schools to conceptual systems like religious faith. Rhetoric refers to effective and persuasive expression. Procedural rhetoric, then, is a practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular (Bogost 2007: 2).

The term "system" is of major importance in his theory. Bogost does not align himself with the systems theorists like Luhmann or Esposito et al., but remains loyal to his computer science background. For him, computers are systems which are capable of understanding and executing rules and exactly this feature makes them a promising object of study. For Bogost "the ability to execute a series of rules fundamentally separates computers from other media" (Bogost 2007: 4). This so-called procedurality is the crucial criterion of distinction. Jonathan Lessard concisely defines the exact meaning of this term as such:

[Procedurality] describes an object whose actual manifestation results from the strict application of a specific set of rules (or procedures) to a particular context. Procedurality allows for the delivery of responses to changes in input and setting. [...] Being particularly suited to the rapid carrying out of large sets of instructions, computers have become a natural medium for procedural objects (Lessard 2014: 407).

Therefore, computers are machines that generate rule-based replies. Yet these replies require at their inner core a structuring mind and—in case of communicational intentionality—a strategic communicator. Bogost utilizes this leverage point and defines procedural rhetoric as “a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created” (Bogost 2007: 3). The remaining question refers to the extent to which Bogost’s understanding of rhetoric can withstand the demands set by scholars in rhetorical studies. Bogost concentrates his theory exclusively on Aristotle’s work on argumentation (*logos*). Following Bogost’s theses, computers are capable to represent regularities in our actual world through their simulative nature. These representations, however, are not complete argumentative schemes, but merely enthymemes. Only the participation of the recipient can reveal the silent premise of the argument. It leads the user towards active interaction with the theme while it also forces her to reflect about the situation at hand. A procedural enthymeme would, therefore, result in a situation where “the player *literally* fills in the missing portion of the syllogism by interacting with the application, but that action is constrained by the rules” (Bogost 2007: 34). The orator becomes the decisive force that determines which rules are implemented and therefore transmit meaning<sup>1</sup>.

## The *Metal Gear Solid* Saga—A Synopsis of Dystopian Motives

The main theme of the series deals in general with militarism with all its facets and nuances. Tobias Meißner describes the achievement of *Metal Gear Solid* as such:

Although the game deals with the use of violence and militaristic precision [...], cause and morality are repeatedly questioned in an unusual insistent kind of way. During the constant radio-contact with combat head office, all schemes of loyalty and motivations are uncloaked as a complex construct of disinformation and delusion (Meißner, Mertens 2002: 89f)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Bogost’s insufficient transformation of Aristotle’s theories is addressed in a separate paper *Advertisers Beyond Borders*, which is to be published in Polish by Facta Ficta Research Centre in a forthcoming book *50 twarzy popkultury* [50 Shades of Popular Culture].

<sup>2</sup> Translated from: „Obwohl das Spiel von Gewaltanwendung und militärischer Präzision handelt [...] werden auf ungewöhnlich insistierende Weise immer wieder Sinn und Moral in Frage gestellt. Während des andauernden Fundverkehrs mit der Einsatzbasis entpuppen sich sämtliche scheinbar festgefügt Schemata von Loyalität und Motivation als komplexes Geflecht aus Desinformation und Selbsttäuschung”. If not stated otherwise, all translations from German are mine.



The narrative has evolved over time into a grand scale criticism of developments within contemporary society and refers to its dangerous dystopian potential. Unlike other intellectual properties that focus on specific themes, yet tell an independent story with each game, *Metal Gear Solid* constitutes a grand tale of human struggle to prevent rising dystopia and displays conflicting personal vision of a utopian society. *Metal Gear Solid* set the standard and revealed the bright future of modern video game rhetoric.

*Metal Gear Solid* (also *MGS1*) is regarded as the cradle of the series. Released in 1998, it was an exclusive title for the Sony PlayStation and subject of a remake for Nintendo's GameCube in 2004 under the subtitle *The Twin Snakes* (Lechner 2012a). The story takes place in a not so distant future of 2005 at Shadow Moses Island; a nuclear waste disposal facility to the public eye and a secret black ops R&D site below the surface. The main protagonist, Solid Snake, is sent to stop members of his former unit *FOXHOUND* (Lechner 2012b). These rogue agents threaten the US president with several nuclear warheads that they have captured while taking over the facility. By doing so, they gained control of the top-secret super-weapon called *Metal Gear REX*, which becomes the constant theme throughout the series and after which the series is named. REX is a bipedal weapon system that allows launching nuclear warheads from any location without the need of rocket propulsion. These projectiles would be undetectable for satellites and end the doctrine of mutual assured destruction in favour of its owner's victory. Throughout the game, the player realizes that many of her early assumptions about the roles and power dynamics within the scenario are different than expected and they hint towards a dystopian society.

Dystopian ideas reoccur throughout the *Metal Gear Solid* saga and *MGS1* lays out the ground work for it. In the very beginning of the game, the plot suggests a potential dystopian outcome if the player fails in her mission. Foxhound's threat of using nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip is a direct reference to the continued real life threat of MUF (Material Unaccounted For) and its destructive potential in the hands of terrorists (Office for Nuclear Regulation 2006, KefkaProduction 2016: 48:00-49:40). Likewise, the presence of genetically enhanced soldiers as well as human clones alludes to structural changes in the military. Instead of searching and training humans to become better combatants, gene manipulations shall engineer the qualified specialists (KefkaProduction 2016: 13:00-14:38). Humans lose their value as individuals and are represented as tools. This narrative framework perfectly supports the

gameplay. Instead of buying into these ideological premises delivered by the antagonists, the player always has to keep her cover and preserve lives by not engaging in direct conflicts. Overall, the topic of weaponization is present not only through human enemies. The secret development of super weapons like Metal Gear REX is a Janus-faced element. The idea of superior battle equipment as a solution to the conflict encapsulates the utopian hope of militarists willing to reach a distinct pivot point, at which confrontation is useless because one power massively surpasses the other. However, the game clearly states repeatedly that such weapon systems are not tied to a certain entity (KefkaProduction 2016: 4:54:23-4:54:43). Eternal warfare is an equally likely scenario portrayed in the game as well as the danger of a single dangerous individual abusing the destructive potential of such superior weapons.

Released 2001, *Metal Gear Solid 2—Sons of Liberty* was the flagship product for a new *Playstation 2* and took an unexpected narrative turn. In 2007 Snake has left the military and founded "Philanthropy" with his friend Otacon. This fictional NGO pursues the quest to stop the distribution of Metal Gear units. In a prologue level, the player sneaks into a tanker just to witness how Revolver Ocelot, one of his opponents from *MGS1*, steals a Metal Gear Ray unit and sinks the entire tank. Two years later, the protagonist of the game infiltrates the offshore clean-up facility Big Shell that was constructed to deal with the massive oil spillage of the sunken tanker. Like in the first game, the agent enters the scenery by diving. In an iconic homage of *MGS1*, the character lifts his breathing mask in the first elevator and shocks the audience. Instead of Solid Snake, the player is in control of a new character with the code-name *Raiden*. This rookie agent must fight against a group of rogue agents called *Dead Cell* that threaten to destroy the facility.

If the story sounds familiar at this point, it is neither a coincidence nor laziness of its creators, but a dystopian narrative of data control that is revealed over the course of *MGS2*. Raiden turns out to be the king's pawn in the elaborate plot of The Patriots. This secret-society planned and staged the entire attack on Big Shell in order to "create" a second Solid Snake (Stanton 2015). After the Shadow Moses incident, Solid Snake has become a legend. By posing the same challenges to another talented soldier, The Patriots hoped to engineer a new superior fighter (Lechner 2012c). As a result, the player has to face enemies that highly resemble the foes from the first *MGS* title. The dystopian narrative is interwoven in every part of *MGS2*. The Patriots not only are a threat to a liberal society by secretly taking over the economy, military, and politics but they also execute programs to restructure society (Howell 2016). The

entire game refers back to the questions of the first game and goes a step further. The idea of weaponization is extended to the flow of information in the form of „Arsenal Gear”. This new super weapon not only is a giant battle station but contains the super-computer *GW*. It was designed to integrate itself into the internet and serves as an instrument for information control with the power to alter or delete any form of digital data (KefkaProduction 2013a: 03:16-56-03:19:50). Taking into account that *MGS2* was released in 2001, it is a strikingly accurate prediction of up-coming ideas like the *PRISM* surveillance program. Total information control as a way to reorganize and control society is one of the most explicitly described dystopian nightmares presented in the saga.

*Metal Gear Solid 3—Snake Eater* goes back to the future with its audience and says “Welcome to the Jungle”. The game series, released in 2004, does not continue its narrative path of an imminent future, but it moves back to the year 1964. In the middle of the Cold War, the player gets to understand how the legendary Big Boss earned his namesake in the rain forests of the USSR. *MGS3* is a James Bond-esque tale of loyalty and betrayal. Focusing this time on the agents, the dystopian narrative poses the question of soldiers losing any meaning due to the rise of super weapon such as *Metal Gear* (KefkaProduction 2013b: 02:02:07-02:04:35). This super weapon serves again as a metaphor for the strife to raze out established power structures. Once more, militarists’ utopian hopes collide with the overall dystopian consequences.

The Cold War is reframed and understood as the seed of dystopian futurism. While the player is aware that no dramatic negative incident could have happened in this timeline due to the a priori knowledge of the franchise to that point, several distinct moments hint towards the origin of future problems dating back to these events. A very prominent moment is the dialogue between Snake and Aleksandr Granin. It turns out that the former director of the weapon design bureau is the inventor of the Metal Gear concept (KefkaProduction 2013b: 01:24:42-01:25:36). His designs at that time were too advanced to be realized but marks the rise of a dystopian phantasy slowly realizing itself. The same holds true for The Patriots. Their origin is intensely discussed in the game and states that a vast secret fund to finance the war effort against Nazi Germany created the precursor of this organization and explains its source of influence. This scene can be interpreted as “a typical dystopian confrontation between equally impersonal instances of The Lord of Logos and The Enemy of the State” (Maj 2013: 71). Snake represents the rebel that tries to single-handedly overthrow the Russian forces. Meanwhile, Granin can be understood as a

Lord of Logos. Despite his discharge, he keeps shaping history behind the curtains—originally, as the architect of Russian military power, later as the traitor who allowed to raise Metal Gear technology in the west. In both cases, his acts lay the foundation for the entire dystopian narrative frame of the MGS-saga. He is the untouchable puppet master pulling the strings, whose death can only be caused by a mentally deranged antagonist, and still it has no impact on his overall legacy.

*Metal Gear Solid 4—Guns of the Patriots* leaves the past behind and confronts the gamer with a possible dystopian future. The game, released in 2008, was again a flagship title for Sony and its *Playstation 4*. *MGS4* offers the most complex storyline so far and reunites different narrative threads. The player is back in control of Solid Snake. The protagonist body ages at an accelerated pace due to a genetic malfunction and has only very limited time to live. "War has changed" (Globalgamereport 2008: 1:24-1:28) is the main theme under which the game presents various dystopian notions. Most importantly, this tag line sums up the entire experience of the game that the player gains. Not only have the pacing and controls changed in comparison to the older *MGS* games, but so has the storyworld.

In 2014 unfolds militaristic dystopia in which large private military companies dictate world events. Technological advancements of all kind further extend their might by increasing effectiveness and progressing dehumanization of the individual soldier. Meanwhile, the series antagonist, Revolver Ocelot, plans to overthrow The Patriots and re-establish the mercenaries' utopia *Outer Heaven*. Originally founded by the deceased Big Boss, Outer Heaven stands for an army without a nation that only responds to its own agenda. At this pivotal point, it is most apparent how "utopian impulses" become the driving force in the narrative of the game franchise (Jameson 2005: 5). Each antagonist operates on a utopian impulse that motivates the character to restructure society. In the end, a utopian hope's origins lie in a dystopian weapon: the *FOXDie* virus serves as a blueprint for *FOXALIVE*—a computer virus that destroys the entire surveillance and power structure of The Patriots (MGS 2008). As a result, society regains a chance to negotiate a new social contract.

## Painting a Picture with Pixels—Fundamentals of Dystopian Game Rhetoric

Videogame rhetoric operates on four levels. Like other pieces of art, games consist of a multilayered fabric of individual components that (if assembled in a purposeful manner) may establish a game's rhetoric. In order to deliver a more comprehensible picture, games can be imagined as an empty canvas. The artist's obligation is to add content to this hollow realm until the intended status has been reached. All games originate from the state of non-being and transform into a virtually shaped form. Nonetheless, they still carry this core as a final product. Only the player's interaction unfolds the entire magnitude of textual information to the audience. This state can be described as *ludo-performative stasis*. As long as no one plays the game, its contained information remains locked. Ludic interaction dissolves this stasis, yet pure interaction may not reveal all the content embedded in the procedural structure of such artefacts. It is entirely dependent on the ludic performance of the player to what extent information is revealed. Consequently, videogames remain stuck in the nexus between rhetoricians' dystopia and utopia. Unplayed or unrecognized persuasive texts within a game become in the virtual realm space of non-existence. These remain invisible to the eye of the user and can be described as a dystopian nightmare for any strategic communicator. However, successful reception by the audience shall be considered the utopia of the persuader. It is rarely seen by its creator, often only imagined in its mind and only traceable with modern technology<sup>3</sup>. Strategically thinking rhetoricians strive for such insights in order to improve their set of instruments (*organon*). These tools create and embed persuasive messages in videogames and communicate those across the time and space. They establish a multidimensional construct that allows to gain influence over its audience throughout different levels. In order to differentiate those distinct layers, four dimensions shall be introduced in the following chapters and be dissected in a more thorough manner: *Stage*, *Agents*, *Agency*, and *Immersion Fractures*.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most effective methods of tracking player progression are so called trophy or achievement systems which record player performance and reward certain in-game accomplishments with digital badges or points.

## Stage

The groundwork for every game is the virtual world itself. Standing in front of the imaginative white canvas, the rhetorician may start a picture with the storyworld. None of the upcoming structures—neither agents nor agency—can be built without the circumventing elements that position them and their relations. Games are not defined by mere encounters, but of those encounters embedded in their surrounding environment. Just like an empty space signifies a realm of infinite opportunities and requires the audience's creativity to fill in the visual gap (*totum pro parte*), so does a fully developed environment, narrowing itself down by referring to a specific place (*pars pro toto*). Nonetheless, these places allow for the rhetoric of proxemics. The way a space is arranged, its defined limitations and embedded references, determines how recipients can abstract from these virtual worlds an impulse for action in the real world. Metaphoric and exploratory stages are two examples of rhetorical intervention in the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise.

A prime example of the structural importance of the stage is *Shadow Moses Island*. This fictional space is the origin for the hero's journey of Solid Snake, the main protagonist. Ludo-performative mechanics were already present in the first game, for instance, they appeared in a segment in which the player has a thermo-sensitive key card. Only if the player understands that through spending a specific amount of time in a freezing warehouse and respectively a furnace in order to change the shape of the key card will one be able to progress. Therefore, the stage itself became an intrinsic part of the game's mechanic. However, more interestingly is an overarching comparison between the nuclear disposal facility in its first and the last game's appearance.

In *MGS4*, Shadow Moses Island serves as a place of remembrance equally to the players, as it does to Snake. The level's start frames the spatial significance with a rhetorical device that is explained later onwards as an immersion fracture. Without any explanation, the player finds herself confronted with a game passage from *MGS1*. To be more precise, the game presents the second level of Shadow Moses Island—the chopper landing zone in front of the main gate. *MGS4* emulates all aspects of the original title, including visuals and gameplay mechanics. After reaching the air vent, the game reframes this short level as Snake's dream. This scene is significant in two respects. Firstly, instead of using the visually updated version of Shadow Moses Island, the player is transferred back into a gaming experience dating back twenty

years from the release of *MGS4*. These cues express not only the past time for Snake but also for the franchise itself and those players who stuck to the game franchise. Secondly, in the moment Snake suddenly awakens, the overall game world is depicted in the usual graphics; however, his head remains in the *PS1* version for a second before being replaced by its current counterpart. This moment is a harbinger for the upcoming gameplay element that shows how Snake and the loyal player refer their current experiences to the original Shadow Moses Incident. Throughout the entire level on Shadow Moses Island, Snake passes through iconic spaces of the military complex. As he reaches these spaces, audio flashbacks are triggered. The player can listen to specific audio files present in the original game. For Snake and the players familiar with *MGS1* this point marks the close connection between spatial location, auditory narration and ludic action. In this instance the virtual stage is the trigger for memories and offers a chance for comparison. While the fictional world of *Metal Gear Solid* deals with the same object—Shadow Moses Island—the player is confronted with a real-life progression. The game mechanics of the original game are actively (re)experienced in the beginning of the level and contrasted by the visual and mechanical advancements of the game. While Snake narrates in the beginning of the game how the world has changed, the players experience that change most prominently during this level. Forced to feel the limitations of the past, experiencing established progress between these game systems and finally witnessing the connection between past and present helps the player to understand how the world of *MGS* has dramatically changed. This act of procedurally established comparison creates a powerful rhetoric. It combines the different levels of a storyworld into a unified experience of considerable transition. It is a place of remembrance.

## Agents

The second level of rhetoric creation is performed by agents. They are the main subject and focus of any game. Like no other medium, games profit from nearly limitless possibilities. Prior to digital entertainment, a rhetorician was restricted by the availability of recourses and structural determinators. Without the power of computer simulation, films can only represent what is present in front of the lens. If a producer could not find an actor with the right looks or enough talent, the problem cannot be resolved. The highly praised written medium *book* is even more limited. It required from the reader a sufficient amount of imagination to transfer the writing

descriptions into a proper image in her mind's eye. Videogames can create everything that is necessary in their virtual reality. Only the abilities of the orators set limitations. Like books, games can present everything that did, could or might exist. However, the mode of perception is different. While books merely communicate through the written word, games can freely choose between visual and auditory channels as well as different semiotic codes. Provided with distinct output devices, like a *DualShock* controller, even tactile feedback is possible. These structural determinators pose a severe threat on the orator's abilities for distance communication. A rhetorician can hardly predict circumstances of reception. Games hold the potential to solve this issue.

The artificial intelligence (AI) of a game constitutes a *homunculus digitalis*. The *homunculus* is originally an alchemistic theory (Lachman 2006: 7-10). It refers to the creation of an artificial life form. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Goethe's *Faust* both protagonists strive towards this goal (Lachman 2006: 7-10). Their digital counterparts have unusual rhetorical qualities. The AI offers a so-far untapped pool of opportunities for persuasive actions. The most natural rhetorical situation is the face-to-face communication (Knape 2009: 14). Distance communication equals a one-sided letter exchange where the only feedback is delivered through a common acquaintance. Distance communication is problematic due to its lack of options for intervention. The orator is forced to anticipate the situation of reception without or with just limited insight into its specific configuration. For instance, a novelist can hardly predict who is going to buy his or her book, unless it is sold in very specific book stores with a small target group. The same applies to advertisement. A marketer might envision a certain mode of reception, but has almost no influence over the precise positioning of the posters. Videogames suffer under the same basic principle, but profit from procedural adaptability. The game creator cannot sit next to each and every player, but the AI can. The *homunculus digitalis* can represent the creator and communicate in his place. This proxy can be filled with a wide array of commands. According to its core definition, the options within a game are always limited<sup>4</sup>. Although it might encapsulate thousands—if not millions—of combinatory options, there is a curb. If the orator addresses each of these choices by programming

<sup>4</sup> According to Johan Huizinga (1950: 13), Roger Caillois (1961: 10) or Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003: 96) games are rule-based. This predetermines all possible outcomes within the game.



a procedural set of rules, the *homunculus digitalis* is theoretically capable of addressing each action of the player with a proper response. The effort can be immense, however, its advantage is obvious. While the author is bound by his physical presence, a digital agent can be easily multiplied and distributed. It can adjust and configure its strategies in accordance with situational needs. A simple example is built into every MGS-game. At the beginning of the game, the player is asked about her previous knowledge of the series. Depending on the answer, the game adjusts. For instance, in *Snake Eater* the player shall communicate which title she prefers. If *MGS1* is chosen, the stamina bar will decrease slower, while *MGS2* will result in Naked Snake wearing a Raiden mask. The *homunculus digitalis*' influence takes place on a macro level, controlling a segment of the game secretly.

## Agency

Agency is the driving force behind any agent's action—especially the player's. Agency is often described as “a person's ability to control their actions and, through them, events in the external world” (Haggard, Tsakiris 2009: 242). Game characters only seemingly possess this ability. The *homunculus digitalis* serves its creator's will and simply executes orders. Its simulation of human features, like agency, is the result of rhetorical consideration to convey a sense of likeness. Agency is more relevant for the player and plays a central role for any persuasive intervention due to the permanent danger of *reactance*. This state of perceived threat to one's freedom of action increases mental defences and lowers the likelihood of persuasion (Gröppel-Klein, Königstorfer, Terlutter 2010: 129). Videogames are especially prone to this problem. As mentioned before, the rhetoric of games is subjugated by its necessity of offering a choice to the player. Consequently, the creation of procedural links between agency and causal effects serves a clearly rhetorical goal.

The boss fight against *The Sorrow* exemplifies how game mechanics can express agency. This enemy appears several times in *Snake Eater*. What is noteworthy is the circumstance that within the narrative continuum of *MGS* The Sorrow died about two years before the first encounter with Snake. The Sorrow is a materialized ghost who tries to protect The Boss. The showdown between the unlikely opponents takes place at a long river. Snake must move upstream to reach his next destination. The Sorrow's prime ability is to reanimate the souls of the dead and uses his skill to impede Snake's advance. The boss fight's mechanics are crafted in such a manner that

they actively respond to prior actions by the player. The more enemies that have been killed up to this point in the game, the more ghost enemies that have to be dealt with. These antagonists cannot be attacked by Snake. Evasion is the sole option to prevent damage here. The procedural link between violence and mental damage creates a strong argument against the act of killing. With every eliminated opponent, the risk of damage increases in this level and reduces the likelihood to succeed. The so often bemoaned lack of consequence for virtual murder is a vital game mechanics. If the player would have chosen to refrain from any lethal methods, only the ghosts of the dead Cobra Unit members would be present, who died no matter which solution the player picked. Each ghost can be interpreted as the felt guilt that is linked to the act of ending a human life. If a certain amount victim is surpassed, the mental damage is unavoidable. Congruously, the only way for Snake to win this fight is to die. After using a fake death pill or actively being killed by The Sorrow, the player has a short timeframe to use a revival pill. To a certain extent this game mechanic demands retribution for committed offenses. The player will be confronted with her choices so far in the game. At its core, it puts the question of necessity: Was is absolutely necessary to kill these soldiers and was it worth the now occurring trouble? In the game that heavily favours stealth over action, this question ties back to the realization that murder is a last resort and a consequence to prior failure to solve a task without brute force. The next example is quite the opposite, declaring consequences first and following up on those threats much later in the game.

## Immersion Fractures

The most promising level of persuasive intervention is a phenomenon that shall be called immersion fracture. It has become a rarely challenged assumption that immersion is the holy grail of videogame design (Pulsipher 2008). The videogame user shall forget about all her surroundings, dive into a virtual reality, and feel as a meaningful part of this alternative existence. This mental swap between worlds is a concept, not new at all, to human kind. Aristotle's idea of *catharsis* anticipates a certain degree of immersion in order to emotionally respond to the drama on the stage (Wolf 2013: 42). Games operate on very similar assumptions. If the fictional world is experienced on an equal level to the actual world, messages of all kind may be transferred. At this point, a new concept of digital rhetoric shall be introduced, i.e. immersion fractures. While most developers strive towards the total immersion of

the user, I argue, by contrast, that a well-crafted strategic use of immersion interrupting actions can actively support the wider rhetorical goal. Immersion fractures shall be called all phenomena that deliberately deconstruct the immersive effects of videogames and replace it with the direct address of the gamer. This new term should not be understood as a statement against immersion, nor is it the intention of the author to doubt that the quest for more immersion is in general a proven method to keep players in the game. However, immersion also entails a problematic aspect of all fictional world theories. Taking into consideration the words of German rhetoric researcher Joachim Knape, rhetoric only takes place in so-called “normal communication” frames, while art is an enpragmatic realm that is not only distinctively different from the actual world but also moves within the sphere of “special communication”—special types of communication that lift *Gricean Maxims* of communication<sup>5</sup>. These maxims postulate four basic rules that establish communication: avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), and be orderly (Grice 1975: 46). Art is not bound to these rules and neither are games. In other words, due to the fact that games do not exclusively portray the world in its current state, it supposedly lacks persuasive power—at least, if one follows the predominant theory. In order to become rhetorically relevant, game developers may apply immersion fractures to communicate pragmatic messages to its audience<sup>6</sup>. In the concrete case of videogames, this means that an immersion fracture occurs within a game session by consciously breaking the fictional/ludic frame and establishes for a short instance a direct contact with the player. In a manner of speaking, the game characters stop interacting with each other and instead start addressing to the gamer.

In order to support this concept, I would like to refer to Roland Barthes and his thoughts on the photography in *La chambre claire* [*Camera Lucida*] (Barthes 1981). Barthes created the twin concepts of *studium* and *punctum* that was meant to be applicable to all kinds of art; therefore, it can be easily transferred to the videogame realm. The primary mode of access for Barthes is *studium*, directly relating to the Latin route “to be invested in” (Barthes 1981: 26). The recipient engages with the photography,

<sup>5</sup> The original terms are *Normal-* and *Sonderkommunikation*. Both are further explained under the following article (Knape 2008: 894-927).

<sup>6</sup> There are certainly other means to persuade a gamer with(in) games. This paper argues that immersion fractures allow for rhetorical interaction within the standard communication standards. The way games can be used to endorse products and brand through games is discussed in further detail in the aforementioned text *Advertisers Beyond Borders*.

analyses it and tries to combine individual with cultural knowledge to decode the intertextual semiotic codes. The gamer engages precisely in the same manner. The game is literally *studied*, meaning deconstructed, and allows the player to successfully interact in the digital world. Under perfect circumstances, the player experiences the state of immersion. The second mode of entrance is very different and described by Barthes with the following words: "This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is the element which rises from the scene, shoot out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call *punctum*" (Barthes 1981: 26). Barthes perceives this wound to be the source of power for many pieces of art to captivate people (Barthes 1981: 27). In the realm of videogames, the metaphorical wound that breaks the studium finds its equivalent in the immersion fracture. Like the punctum, it breaks the studium (in that case immersion) and replaces it with something painfully remarkable.

Originating from this line of thought, the term immersion fracture is consciously crafted. It signifies a specific relationship between the intensity of immersion suspension and its rhetorical influence. Like the fracture of a bone, its intensity of destruction determines the pain that is caused. Immersion fractures can be compared with moderate bone fractures. They cause pain (*punctum*), but cause for a limited time a stronger bond (*systasis*). The equivalent to the medical callus is, rhetorically speaking, persuasion (Knape 2000: 34). For some time after the immersion fracture, the player is captivated by this extraordinary occurrence. Both instances might lose their intensifying influence, however, the memory of this moment remains. Immersion fractures are unique moments and stand out in a game. In order to do so, the inflicted intensity of disruption is a key aspect. Again, the medical comparison helps to grasp the differences. A small, clean break does not cause the creation of a callus. In a game, tiny fractures might not be consciously understood by the player. They fail to cause the necessary pain Barthes described. Conversely, if the force turns out to be too great and the damage too intense, the entire immersion collapses. As a result, the player may perceive the game to be deficient. This occurrence could be understood as an immersion shatter and defines the antonym for immersion fractures. While immersion fractures serve as a useful and intentional effect, immersion collapses are unintentional failures to sustain the suspension of disbelief and hurt its author's intention. As a consequence, the creation of effective immersion fractures is a calculated undertaking that requires caution and utmost calibration of

force. Hideo Kojima proved himself to be an elaborate artist who frequently used immersion fracture to awe his audience and communicate messages beyond the game relevant realm.

The boss fights against *Psycho Mantis* are prime examples of immersion fractures. The *Metal Gear Solid* saga never frowned upon supernatural elements. As his name already indicates, Psycho Mantis is a psychic, blessed with the ability to read the mind of his opponents (Concelmo 2007). While other abilities, like levitation, are certainly noteworthy, it is his defining feature that exemplifies the mechanics behind immersion fractures at its best. This reoccurring foe shall be discussed for his appearances in *MGS1* and *MGS4*. The player first encounters Mantis in the head bureau of the Shadow Moses Island. In order to prove his supernatural abilities to Solid Snake (and the player alike), he involves himself in a triad of challenges in with each challenge is more difficult than the previous one. At first, Mantis tries to prove his ability of mind reading after elaborating upon the playstyle of the gamer. Fundamentally, this is a verbalized scoreboard that responds to the number of kills, alarms, or saves caused by the individual player (Concelmo 2007). This is not entirely impressive, unless the player also possesses other Konami games. In that case, the *homunculus digitalis* reads its save files, identifies Konami titles, like *Castlevania* or *Pro Evolution Soccer* and asks whether these games were enjoyable (Concelmo 2007). The direction of addressing is important. With Solid Snake being introduced as a technology-averse person, it is highly unlikely that Mantis is truly addressing Snake, yet instead talking with the player. The player becomes a witness of a shift in communication mode. In that instance, Kojima is basically ignoring the presence of Snake. The gamer witnesses how the situation develops out of fictional framing, leaves its agents behind, and opens up a brief interplay between Kojima and his addressee. The player is actively rewarded for being a customer of *Konami* prior to the acquisition of *Metal Gear Solid* by unlocking this personalized discourse. Commercial prowess is also rewarded in the next stage of Psycho Mantis ritual of proving himself. As the next step, Mantis exemplifies his telekinetic abilities. If the player owns a *DualShock* controller, the game will properly respond to this. Psycho Mantis keeps ignoring Snake and demands from the player to position the controller on an even surface or floor. Then, Mantis will seemingly move the *DualShock* with the power of his mind. What really takes place is a series of executed commands that active the vibration motors inside the controller. Through the vibrations, the controller will start to move slightly on the floor (Concelmo 2007). Looking at the communication aspect of this scenario,

the frame has widened up again. Instead of just transmitting texts through the digital proxy of Psycho Mantis, Kojima is now directly referring to a larger context. The player is addressed as a player, commanded to enact a series of small tasks in the physical world (instead of the digital one that would be constitutional for normal digital play) and becomes a voyeur of the resulting events outside the screen and in front of herself. After these demonstrations of power, the ludic frame is reinstated and the player seemingly engages in just another boss battle. However, the player is about to enter the third test of Psycho Mantis. In the beginning of this fight, it is impossible to hit the enemy; Mantis evades all bullets, explosives, and physical attacks (Concelmo 2007). He frames those instances as a result of his mind reading abilities thanks to which he discovers Snake's plans. This time, the player has to realize that only by following the demonstrated pattern of immersion fracture one will deal with the situation. The game is impossible to win within the virtual world itself. The *homunculus digitalis* constantly executes the rule that any kind of action will be countered with a reaction, until the player starts to reframe her thinking. It requires a significant alteration in the game's setup. The solution is to pause the game, unplug the controller from slot 1 and insert it in slot two (Concelmo 2007). That way Mantis loses his "connection" to Snake's mind. By uncoupling the gamer's actions and Mantis' reactions, the boss fight becomes winnable. In a subtle manner, the player is persuaded to alter her reference frame from the digital towards the real world. This examples illustrates how immersion fractures enable behavior change and therefore rhetoric even within videogames.

## All Good Things Come to an End

"I'm no hero. Never was, never will be"  
— Solid Snake

This statement is a quite unusual self-description of a main protagonist that functions primarily as a soldier extraordinaire. However, the entire *Metal Gear Solid* saga is unusual with regard to its rhetorical goal. While other games series are frequently in doubt to endorse violence, *MGS* always emphasizes its critical position on the subject of war. It is a tale of the constant struggle of mankind to build a utopia and causing hereby transitory states of dystopia. However, the most remarkable aspect of this franchise lies in its limitless potential to connect with all different aspects of research.

This chapter focuses on *Metal Gear Solid* in order to present the four cornerstones of game rhetoric. As alluded to earlier, every orator working with virtual realities is to paint a picture using pixels. The stage serves as the room that creates relations and allows to connect different levels of gameplay, like Shadow Moses Island does connect the player's/Snake's memories with specific spaces. The agents allow for persuasive intervention. The AI serves as a proxy for the orators and executes his orders. This *homunculus digitalis* allows for a simulation of face-to-face like communication situations. The sense of agency decides over the rhetorical success of the game. Procedural rhetoric allows game designers to create arguments that question decisions already made by the player. Ludo-performative stasis means that as long as no one plays the game, its contained information remains locked. Only ludic interaction dissolves this stasis and activates persuasive content. The concept introduced at the last part of the chapter is the immersion fracture. These strategically placed interruptions allow for short shifts in communication frames. Roland Barthes' modes of perception fit remarkably well in the context of videogames. Immersion fractures are the equivalent of Barth's *punctum*. The antonym immersion shatter expresses the wrongly calibrated utilization of this technique and does not support any rhetorical goal. All these aspects can be found in *Metal Gear Solid*. Hideo Kojima mastered the right measurement of these individual components. His saga is so vast, its narration so complex, and its influence on the industry so extensive that it does not matter how many pages would be filled with the analysis of these exceptional games—with all their strengths and weaknesses—it will remain a scholastic utopian goal.

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*Digging the Trench: Fictional Accounts  
of Utopian Communities and Utopian Closure*

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## Introduction

King Utopus, [...] brought the rude and wild people to that excellent perfection in all good fashions, humanity, and civil gentleness, wherein they now go beyond all the people of the world, even at his first arriving and entering upon the land, forthwith obtaining the victory, caused fifteen miles space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up. And so brought the sea round about the land (More 2008: 50).

Musing about the purposes of utopian communities, Lyman Tower Sargent suggested that such projects “demonstrate that living a better life is possible in the here and now” (2010: 8). In the three novels discussed in this chapter—Gilbert Imlay’s *The Emigrants* (1793), Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), and Edan Lepucki’s *California* (2014)—the success of the attempt at “living a better life” depends on whether closure for the depicted communities can be established. Building on Fredric Jameson’s proposition that “utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space” (2005: 15), this chapter concerns how the novels depict such enclaves in relation to the “real social space” in which the communities start out. In other words, I am drawing attention to how three different novels describe the spatial requirements for the establishment of a utopian society within the respective “here and now”. As I will argue, a precondition for such utopian enclaves is closure—as achie-

ved in Thomas More's *Utopia* by "that great trench [...] which alone allows it to become Utopia in the first place: a radical secession" (Jameson 2005: 5)—and each of the narratives discussed below comments on whether finding or establishing such closure is possible, and if so, what the consequences would be for the attainability of utopia<sup>1</sup>.

## Utopian Communities and Utopian Closure

The texts discussed in the following chapter are not, in a strict sense, literary utopias, as a "utopia" provides a description of a non-existent place of "radical difference, radical otherness" (Jameson 2005: xii), and its "people going about their everyday lives and [...] marriage and the family, education, meals, work, and the like, as well as the political and economic systems" (Sargent 2010: 4). Instead, the narratives that are referred to in this paper revolve around a form of utopian practice, namely utopian communities—also known as intentional communities<sup>2</sup>, communes, or practical utopias etc. (Sargent 2010). While the accounts are fictional, i.e. the communities described are non-existent, these projects are in so far no utopias as they are still in the process of trying to establish the place of "radical otherness" and, therefore, are portrayed as connected to, interacting with, and situated close by, the social, political, and economic system from which they originated. In other words, the novels fictionalize utopian practice instead of depicting a utopia.

To provide a more concrete example: Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888) describes in detail an entire society that differs in many ways from the United States of the late nineteenth century. It is separated from the society in which it was written, and from which the narrator originates, by more than a century, in which significant changes to said society occurred. Not only in its fictionality and its seeming perfection but also in its totality, the society in *Looking Backward...* is utopian, as the political and economic system as well as many aspects of the social and everyday life in the entire nation (actually, in a good part of the world) have been reworked. On the other hand, the hippie commune described in T.C. Boyle's *Drop City* (first published in 2003) is no utopia, because the novel emphasises the struggle

<sup>1</sup> Some of the considerations and conclusions provided reflect the groundwork for my project on utopian communities in US American fiction, a work still in progress.

<sup>2</sup> "Utopian community" and "intentional community" will be used synonymously within this chapter.

of its members as they try to establish their ideal of a society, instead of presenting an already functioning system in detail. Because this fictional account describes the attempts at putting utopia into practice within a non-utopian reality, instead of detailing an already established society, Drop City, as described in the novel, is a utopian community, but *Drop City* is no literary utopia.

This distinction may become more obvious when considering the peculiar spatiality of utopia. Commonly, utopian places are characterized by removal, “must be located somewhere other than the author’s own society” (Moylan 2014: 3). This “somewhere” may be either geographical (on an island, a previously undiscovered continent, or another planet) or temporal (most commonly in the future), or even otherwise dimensionally removed (i.e. in a parallel universe). While this removal does not constitute a utopia as such, it is a crucial criterion, as it creates the closure necessary for the society to become total, and for the extensive changes to be affected. This definition for anything “utopian” based on the spatial criterion of closure and totality builds on Jameson’s analysis of utopia and science fiction, in which he connects the content of utopia, “a system radically different from this one” (Jameson 2005: xii), to its totality: “the properly Utopian program or realization will involve a commitment to closure (and thereby to totality)” (2005: 4). Therefore, “it is closure which enables the existence of system, which is to say, of the imagination [...] Totality is then precisely this combination of closure and system” (Jameson 2005: 4-5). The “utopian secession” (Jameson 2005: 3) creates, or moves the society into, what he refers to as a “utopian enclave” (Jameson 2005: 10). In More’s *Utopia*, the namesake not only of the literary genre but of the entire concept, “the mark of this absolute totalization is the geopolitical secession of the Utopian space itself [...]: the great trench which King Utopus causes to be dug in order to »delink« from the world” (Jameson 2005: 39). Therefore, digging the trench is a necessary process for establishing a utopia, securing its autonomy from “the world”, and enabling its totality.

Fictions on utopian communities, on the other hand, differ from literary utopias since they do not primarily claim to describe an alternative world, “located somewhere other than the author’s own society”. Yet they are linked to utopias as the communities they depict try to establish such an alternative, a connection implied by terms that were and are commonly used to refer to such communities, “a number of which relate directly to utopianism, such as utopian community, utopian experiment, practical utopia, alternative society, and experimental community” (Sargent 2010: 6-7). In their utopian striving, they often opt for closure: Timothy Miller, an

eminent authority in communal studies, defines intentional communities as “gro-up[s] whose members deliberately separate themselves from the dominant society” (2002: 335). This separation may not be as drastic as that instigated by Utopus, yet a desire for separation and distinction, or, as Kenneth M. Roemer puts it, “purity” (1976: 52), may frequently be observed in such groups, which suggests that closure is felt to be necessary in order to allow the radical change to be affected.

Michel Foucault likewise observes a level of isolation and exclusivity to be characteristic for such quasi-utopian places. In the terminology proposed in his *Of Other Spaces* (1986), he introduces the concept of “heterotopias”, a term he applies, amongst other examples, also to intentional communities. Different from utopias, “sites with no real place” (Foucault 1986: 24) heterotopias are “real places [...] a kind of effectively enacted utopia” (1986: 24). In order to operate, they “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (Foucault 1986: 26). In this sense, utopian communities try to attain “the transformation of the everyday” (Sargent 2010: 4), and thereby the totality that marks a utopia. However, because they are still in close proximity (temporal, geographical, and economic) with the society from which they originated, they remain in some ways “penetrable”. While the prospective utopian space in the narratives discussed below is not closed yet—no one has dug the trench all the way around it, so to speak—they all feature such systems of opening and closing, and aim for eventually ensuring totality.

Thus, this chapter will explore the spatiality of utopia by looking at fictional accounts of intentional communities. The novels provide an insight into the spatial criteria that were deemed necessary for a utopian project and in this way into the attitudes towards the attainability of a radically different society at the historic moment in which they were written. Therefore, I understand the narratives discussed in this text as commenting not only on the practice of establishing and living in intentional communities—on utopian practice—but also on utopian conceptualizations as such.

## Geographically Determined Utopia in *The Emigrants*

In the first example, Gilbert Imlay’s *The Emigrants*, an epistolary novel published in 1793, utopia and utopian closure are in part enabled by a form of “geographical determinism” (Smith 1971: 251), a term taken from Henry Nash Smith’s immensely influential *Virgin Land* (1950). In this study, Smith investigated the development of a



powerful myth of the United States, i.e. “one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward” (1950: 4). *The Emigrants* connects this “dominant [symbol] of nineteenth-century American society” (Smith 1971: 124), that of the West as a garden, “a cluster of metaphors expressing fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth” (1950: 124), to utopian possibilities. However, in the novel, this space is not open to anybody, but preselects its inhabitants. As the following paragraphs argue, *The Emigrants* implies that this exclusive “vacant continent”<sup>3</sup> is the reason for the community’s success at its utopian attempts, i.e., establishing a utopia appears to be dependent on finding Edenic territory that also provides sequestration from Western civilization.

The core of the plot of *The Emigrants* revolves around a family from England that moves across the Allegheny Mountains to Kentucky, and some of its members who join a small community of former American soldiers, forsake the eastern states of the (still infant) United States, and build up their own social and governmental structures (Piep 2004, Verhoeven 2004). The final glimpses that the novel allows suggest that the group has successfully established a small community which it deems “in epitome the model of a society” (Imlay 1793: 233), where it is impossible for those “replete with sentiment” (Imlay 1793: 248) “not to experience in this way of living, every degree of felicity” (1783: 248). The utopian community promises to be on the way to a self-contained utopia (here in the sense of eutopia).

The existence of parts of the world that were unmapped and “untouched” by Western civilization at the time allowed for this relatively simple conception of utopian enclaves, while the promotion of utopian possibilities furthered expansionism across the west of North America in search of such places, just as utopian fiction in the early modern era had informed overseas colonization, and vice versa (Knapp 1994, Hatzenberger 2003, Balasopolous 2004). Both the idealization of the land of the North American continent and the belief in the necessity to move away from the “old world” inspire the emigrants in Imlay’s novel. Throughout, Kentucky is described in ways that critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will come to

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the scope of this chapter does not permit to discuss the connection between colonialism—in particular the strategy of rendering an inhabited land “vacant”, a *terra nullis* or a *vacuum domicilium*—and utopian literature as well as utopian practice. Jeffrey Knapp (1994), Antoine Hatzenberger (2003), and Antonis Balasopolous (2004) have contributed insightful studies on this in utopian studies otherwise still largely neglected issue.

think of as characteristic for American literature<sup>4</sup>, as a plentiful, unsettled land, offering the opportunity to start over. This is a “virgin” country, “morally unsullied” (Shields 2012: 29), and it resembles a fruitful garden, suitable for the—supposedly morally beneficial—agrarian lifestyle that the settlers will practise. The heroine Caroline and her future husband encounter pristine lands: “he turns to the western territory as the site of his new society, named Bellefont, »as its infancy affords an opportunity to its citizens of establishing a system conformable to reason and humanity«” (Verhoeven 2004: 159). Not only is it “infant” as in not yet settled by Europeans but it is also so fertile that it can easily provide plenty; in addition, the depiction of the country suggests the attainability of an attractive, “simpler” life. Thus, the novel evokes a popular ideal of the eighteenth century, “the powerful romantic attraction of primitivism, dating back at least to Rousseau—the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living” (Cronon 1995: 76). The establishment of a utopia based on such romanticized ideas of “primitive” life is aided by the immensely advantageous properties of the North American countryside.

However, this garden is not open to just anyone. The Allegheny Mountains separate the still relatively unsettled Kentucky from the rest of the United States, which, so the protagonists in the novel agree, is a society as corrupt and as undesirable as Great Britain. However, rather than providing a material barrier, the Alleghenies are selectively permeable, form “not so much [...] a physical but [...] a moral watershed” (Verhoeven 2000: 192). While some of the characters conquer the mountains with ease “more like a picturesque tourist than a pioneer” (Verhoeven 2000: 193), and claim that “[t]he fatigue of travelling to this country is merely imaginary” (Imlay 1793: 23), others bemoan the lack of commodities along the way, and find the journey to be far from pleasant. The track is even repeatedly referred to as almost “perpendicular” (Imlay 1793: 16, 39), as “the roughest road for a carriage perhaps on the whole world” (29). These contradictory accounts of course symbolically mark those complaining as not suited for the space they are approaching, as not ready for a new start away from corrupted Anglo-American civilization, because they are fixated on presumably superfluous luxuries. The seemingly perfect space in *The Emigrants* appears

<sup>4</sup> Even though the emigrants establish their own government and forsake the society of the United States, the portrayal of the West in the novel resembles renderings of the landscape that coincided with the expansionism of Colonial America and the United States (Verhoeven 2000).

as a “wilderness”, with the presumed hardship having a selecting effect, deterring those not ready to live away from Anglo-American society

Even further, the presumably ideal space not only attracts and selects a certain kind of person but it also aids the improvement of those who still need some refinement. John Seelye summarizes: “the emphasis of the novel is [...] on the influence of the western landscape on eastern mores” (Seelye 1987: 205). In this way, these inconveniences serve to keep the utopian space free from the corrupting influence of Europe and the United States, and the land selects and even creates its utopian inhabitants.

In addition, the remoteness of the settlement on the Ohio River is repeatedly stressed in various correspondences between Pittsburg and Bristol, Philadelphia, and England. Various letters mention the distance between emigrants and the United States and Europe, and some even arrive belatedly, as emigrants are separated from the rest of the world by barely surmountable obstacles such as “immense quantities of snow” (Imlay 1793: 140), so that they are effectively cut off from communication. Those instances of retardation further emphasize the “trench” as a “moral watershed” that divides Kentucky from Europe and the eastern states of the USA. Geographical distance, which had previously served as an argument for American Independence from British rule, here makes the case for the independence of the western frontier. Instead of a vision of the United States expanding continentally, the west seems naturally secluded, underlining its potential for establishing sufficient closure from the “old” world further.

In *The Emigrants*, the land in the west encourages some as a garden, promising to make “a better life” attainable, while it denies itself to others as a wilderness. The existence of the Allegheny Mountains as a border creates an enclave and allows to establish utopia, which implies a belief in “the trench” in a very literal way. The repeated emphasis on this line of separation between the old Anglo-American order and the new utopian one suggests that utopian success is in part determined geographically, namely by finding a space that is not only like a paradisiac garden but also surrounded by the right kind of trench.

### Utopia and Annihilated Space in *The Blithedale Romance*

Almost six decades later, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) is informed by the disappearance of unmapped space, and as a result by the impossibility

to find, or even to imagine, the spatial conditions for a utopian enclave. Hawthorne himself was briefly living in a utopian community, yet *The Blithedale Romance* provides no realistic account of that time. Instead, it is an extremely complex romance, challenging the community's notions of escaping "an encroaching technological and urban revolution and to preserve the agrarian ideal of an earlier America" (Levy 1968: 3) and "finding some plot of ground still in a natural state and working it into organic representations of their own ideals" (Baym 2011: 285), and the binary on which such ideas are grounded. *Blithedale*, so I argue, connects the community's struggles to their inability to find or establish closed, utopian, space.

In the beginning, the narrator, despite all odds, enthusiastically embraces the new start: "there was better air to breathe. Air, that had not been breathed, once and again! Air, that had not been spoken into words of falsehood, formality, and error" (Hawthorne 2011: 11). On arriving at Blithedale, he tries hard to establish closure, most strikingly by concocting a fever that is meant to signify his personal transformation and passage into utopia:

My fit of illness had been an avenue between two existences; the low-arched and darksome doorway, through which I crept out of a life of old conventionalisms, on my hands and knees, as it were, and gained admittance into the freer region that lay beyond (Hawthorne 2011: 44).

This fever, which his new friends deem nowhere as serious as he does, serves as a metaphysical threshold into the utopian community and his supposedly new life. In addition to the agrarian lifestyle and this disease, his frequent romanticization of the community's members removes the project from the "mundane" world. So he endows some of the women of the commune with magical powers, the two men who threaten the existence of the community with devilish attributes, and renders the head-farmer, steaming from arduous labour, "vaporous and spectre-like" (Hawthorne 2011: 15). Yet, these mystifications never hold: only a sentence later, the farmer is described as disappointingly earthbound, smelling of dung and hard work. The narrator tries in these different ways to establish the community as utopian, yet these attempts are constantly undermined, resulting in the inconsistency of the romantic mode throughout the narrative.

With all other members of Blithedale being less optimistic (and maybe more realistic) than the narrator, he struggles to remove the community from said reality and turn/move it into a utopian enclave. Most strikingly, the word "utopia" itself is tabooed in Blithedale, and understood to be "latent satire" (Hawthorne 2011: 27-28).

The same goes for utopian musings. Dreaming up future generations “looking backward” on the commune as the venerable ancestors of their blissful way of life, the narrator is stunted by one of his fellow communards: “You seem to be trying how much nonsense you can pour into a breath” (Hawthorne 2011: 90). Thus mitigating the enthusiasm for intentional communities that surged in the 1840s, the novel suggests that even the community’s members are not capable of full-heartedly believing in their success, of excluding doubts from their utopian project.

Furthermore, the utopian community described in *The Blithedale Romance* is not set in the edenic land of *The Emigrants*. On the contrary, the narrator arrives there during a snowstorm, and exclaims disappointedly, “How cold an Arcadia was this!” (2011: 28). No matter how much he wants to believe otherwise, the land is not a paradisiac garden. In fact, the community’s members have to labour so hard that the narrator fears they are losing sight of their higher intentions, and will “cease to be anything else” (Hawthorne 2011: 47) than farmers, whereas, in *The Emigrants*, farm work is a part-time job (Imlay 1793: 247). In addition, as Lauren Berlant (1989) has elaborated, Blithedale’s land is far from being “virgin”, but covered “fathom-deep with the dust of deluded generations” (Hawthorne 2011: 90), i.e. with reminders of other, failed, attempts at establishing utopia. In this way, the self-proclaimed romance subverts any nostalgic longing for a more utopian-friendly past, and any notions of an enclave outside history. The claim to exceptionality that is inherent in the geographical determinism discussed above is perverted, as in this case, the land seems especially unfit for utopian endeavours.

Critics, such as Berlant (1989), Teresa A. Goddu (1997), and Nina Baym (2011), have observed that the notion of previously failed utopian projects and the growing reach of industrialization and capitalism seem to pervade every aspect of the narrator’s world. For one, closure is disrupted by the communards themselves: “People are civilized, which means that they bring with them, because they have within them, attitudes that they thought were purely external” (Baym 2011: 285-86). Not only are the members themselves not suddenly perfect utopian subjects but also the community constantly has to face the realities of the society on the “outside”, and the lack of closure that destabilizes the utopian project. To the narrator’s discomfort, they have to consider how to sell the goods they produce while members frequently visit their city apartments, and outsiders stroll into the community. Finally, even the narrator returns to his old life easily: “Old habits, such as were merely external, returned upon

me with wonderful promptitude” (Hawthorne 2011: 134). Back in the city, he explicitly draws attention to a worldwide disappearance of enclaves: “As it was already the epoch of annihilated space” (2011: 134), he can travel the world, but cannot find any closed, let alone utopian, space. In the end, the pastoral idyll barely lasts for months, as worldly matters in the form of financial issues ruin the budding romantic hopes of the founder and drive her into suicide. With her, another utopian project is, quite literally, buried on these lands. Closure, so *The Blithedale Romance* suggests, is not available.

Enclaves in general have apparently disappeared, and even the spiritual world cannot claim closure. Goddu notes that the mesmerizing act, which reappears throughout the narrative, symbolizes the ubiquitous influence of “the market realm”. Exploiting a young woman’s psychic powers, the exhibitor of this act peddles publicly what appears private and veiled (Goddu 1997). Crossing into such spaces—treading “a step or two across the boundaries of the spiritual world” (Hawthorne 2011: 6)—he purports a different kind of vision in which totality is achieved through expansion across all boundaries, a “new era that was dawning upon the world; an era that would link soul to soul, and the present life to what we call futurity, with a closeness that should finally convert both worlds into one great, mutually conscious brotherhood” (138) in his collusive mesmeric act. Thus, the market works even through spiritualism towards “annihilating space”.

Concluding, *The Blithedale Romance* expresses doubts whether there is any space for utopia in a world in which closed enclaves are impossible to find. The “question of the possibility of reconstructing society on larger and more generous principles than a narrow and repressive materialism” (Baym 2011: 288) is answered in the negative. The lack of geographic closure and the history of failed utopias correspond with the disillusionment of the communalists and, finally, that of the narrator, and the overall failure to establish a utopian community. Utopian enclaves in the United States, so *The Blithedale Romance* suggests, do not exist.

## Capitalist Enclaves in *California*

The last section of this chapter will focus on a contemporary novel: *California* by Edan Lepucki (2014). The novel reflects the current *zeitgeist* regarding the state of utopia as seeming “strangely out of place in the age of globalization” (Tally 2013: vii), foreclosed by the globalized capitalist system, negating the existence of any closed

spaces and total systems but for one: globalized capitalism. While the novel describes spaces that are extremely insulated and appear to be enclaves, they maintain this system, do not subvert it.

Lepucki's novel largely takes place in a strongly fortified and strikingly nostalgic community, founded after a combination of climate change and rampant capitalism have exacerbated the situation in the United States to dystopian levels. The two protagonists flee L.A. and try to survive autonomously off the land in the woods of California, eventually encountering the agricultural commune. Its members seem to live relatively comfortably, enjoy the advantages of communal life, and, suspiciously, have access to luxury goods such as chocolate and disposable plastic razors. By and large, though, their lifestyle suggests a desire to move "backwards" in the sense of reverting back to (a nostalgic notion of) the nineteenth century. Significantly, the commune is built into the "ghost of a ghost-town" (Lepucki 2014: 130), an abandoned miner city that was turned into a historic site in the twentieth century, and then again abandoned. Their flirt with the past is also evident in the re-establishment of out-dated gender roles, with the community's decision-makers all being male, and alumni of an all-male school, in which a general fondness of literature from "dead white men" (Lepucki 2014: 32) was encouraged. The community tries to recreate this school's feeling of being "lost in the past" (2014: 34)—drawing from works such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, while refraining from using digital media, and separating themselves the best they can from the contemporary society. In addition to this temporal removal, they repeatedly stress that they believe in containment (this is quasi the community's motto: "We believe in containment"), and maintain secrecy at all costs. They generally do not accept outsiders, nor is there any way to apply for membership. This is also evident in the setup of the community, as they are not only withdrawn into the hinterlands of California, but have fortified their grounds with watchtowers and a maze of spikes. Only two members ever leave the community, while the rest spend their lives in this almost completely closed system.

As the main characters slowly come to realize, despite all of these measures to create closure, the utopian enclave is an illusion, created in order to provide fresh produce for the wealthy gated communities in the cities. Gated community and commune circulate luxury goods, and also parallel each other in form, as both believe in containment:

The [gated] Community wasn't its own city, not yet, but it had exploited a loophole: it ran its own schools, funded its own police force and firefighters, and anyone hired to protect and work within its

borders either had to be related by blood to one of its residents or pass a rigorous application process. But nobody knew how to apply because the details weren't on its website (Lepucki 2014: 88).

Strikingly, the only outsiders ever allowed inside the intentional community, the two protagonist who initially tried to make it by themselves in the Californian woods, also gain entrance solely due to nepotism. Likewise similarly, gated and utopian community play with the appeal of a better, "outside" place in an otherwise dystopian world, and both are exclusive, built on the mind-set of the privileged<sup>5</sup>.

Not only is the utopian community complicit in the system of privatization that they condemn but they are simultaneously at its mercy, depending on the benevolence of the urban communities for their protection, and tolerate severe constraints, most strikingly the prohibition on having children. Living in constant fear of marauders or outsiders who could upset this balance, the members accept these restrictions. Much like More's Utopia, this is not only a strongly fortified place to keep outsiders out, but also a strictly structured space that encloses and controls its members. Thus, the supposedly "outside" space is a work camp, controlling the labour force that produces luxury goods.

Neither the intricate system of fences and guards (a physical trench) nor the complete sequestration, nor the wilful oblivion with which the community's members treat their situation (a psychological separation from the outside world), nor the reversion to hunter-gatherer or peasant modes of production (the attempt at temporal removal), can provide the necessary closure. Significantly, the protagonists, initial dropouts from suburbia, end up being transferred into the suburban gated community described above. Despite all its fortification, the intentional community is, therefore, unable to establish an alternative: enclaves create the illusion of closure and containment that ultimately serves the global capitalistic system.

In this sense, *California* points to an understanding of utopia that is not so much dependent on geographical closure (as *The Emigrants*), nor does it suggest that enclaves have disappeared (as in *The Blithedale Romance*). Instead, the attempt at establishing a utopia fails because any enclave is always already within a larger system, in this case capitalism. *California*—and similar novels featuring intentional communities, such as Octavia E. Butler's *Parables*, or Lauren Groff's *Arcadia* (2012)—deals with utopia in crisis under globalization, which pertains, so I argue, to its spatiality. The

<sup>5</sup> For a short discussion of the spatiality of gated communities in relation to utopia, see Harvey 2000: 148-50.



novel implies that the capitalist system does not preclude separation and enclaves in an obvious way and enables the illusion of utopian spaces outside of itself: not being a singular entity<sup>6</sup>, it permits multiple enclaves, from gated community, to agricultural commune, to hermit life in the woods. Yet, in the end, it is nevertheless total. Thus, the search for, and the move into, an enclave equates the participation in the system that was supposed to be left behind.

## Beyond the Trench

To sum up this brief overview of utopian closure in three works from three different centuries: while the utopian community in *The Emigrants* was initially enabled by geographical conditions of the “real social space”, in *The Blithedale Romance* this conception is challenged due to the seeming ubiquity of western civilization and industrialization. Thus, the land which the United States has claimed is no longer the pristine garden that wards off corrupting influences, but instead has become a place in which utopian communities founder among the wrecks of their predecessors, constantly struggling to find a utopian enclave in this “epoch of annihilated space”. By the end of the twentieth century, fictional accounts of utopian communities such as *California* imply, however, that finding closure may not be the issue, because such enclaves are an illusion of globalized capitalism to begin with. Instead, a critical analysis of the compliance of “utopian enclaves” in the capitalist system points to the necessity of questioning the utopianism of previous times, and of finding new ways to conceptualize utopian space, an alternative to “digging the trench”.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of global markets and utopia, see Hodgson 1999, Tally 2013.

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## XI

### *Classical Utopian Model. On the Melancholy Status of Jan Parandowski's Ancient Discourse*

RAFAŁ SZCZERBAKIEWICZ

#### Desire of the Past

Is utopia necessarily a project for the future? Does it involve, in the sense of a desire, a kind of aspiration? From the perspective of the structure of a desire, nothing else may be inferred. Yet, the inversions of desires projected backwards (and also, perhaps, the structure of a utopian desire, as understood by Fredric Jameson who called it the “archaeology of the future”) prove that there are exceptions to this rule (Jameson 2005). The utopian temptation is a desire of ideological nature and refers to the socio-political construction of a community<sup>1</sup>. It may be imprinted onto a strictly po-

<sup>1</sup> As reads a passage from Ruth Levitas: „[...] one must of course be able to locate something which remains constant while content, form and function vary. This element, I would argue, is that of desire—desire for a better way of being and living. To say this is not to make a claim that there is an essential ingredient in human nature with its source deep in the human psyche, reaching towards utopia (as suggested by Marcuse and Bloch). We may claim that all utopias have something in common without making claims about the universality of utopia or the existence of a fundamental utopian propensity. Rather, where such desire is expressed—and the scope for this will itself be historically variable—it will not only vary markedly in content but may be expressed in a variety of forms, and may perform a variety of functions including compensation, criticism and the catalysing of change. [...] In conclusion then, a new definition of utopia is offered, which recognises the common factor of the expression of desire. Utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being. This includes both the objective, institutional approach to utopia, and the subjective, experiential concern of disalienation. It allows for this desire to be realistic or unrealistic. It allows for the form, function and content to change over time. And it reminds us that, whatever we think of particular utopias, we learn a lot about the experience of living under any set of conditions by reflecting upon the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies [all emphases—R.Sz.] (Levitas 2010: 8-9).

litical project or treated as a schematic design of a potential social opportunity. However, it always does have a source. The utopian matrix is always situated in relation to political traditions, in a paradigm of historicism and linear perception of history. Most often, the opposing relation towards these traditions can be noticed, however, a couple of positive models can be found throughout the history. The myths of the golden age, now bygone forms of history, were a vehicle for nostalgic resentments (also in modernism), indicating potential patterns of social emancipation—the signs of what has been turning into utopian impulses.

[...] History itself in its modern stage [...] amounted to nothing but an imbroglio with no exit, and as though everyone had now begun to unmake this history with an ardour equal in every way to that applied earlier to its making. Restoration, regression, rehabilitation, the revival of old frontiers, differences, specificities and religious beliefs—and everywhere, even on the level of social mores, the change of heart: apparently all the marks of liberation won over the last century are now fading, and perhaps they are all destined to disappear altogether one after the other. We are in the midst of an immense process of revisionism, but not in an ideological sense: History itself is what we are revising, and we seem anxious to finish the job before the end of the century [both emphases—R.Sz.] (Baudrillard 1993: 98).

From this perspective, melancholy is an easy way of fulfilling ideological fantasies of a creative subject. Easy, because it is devoid of any dangers and difficulties of actually turning an ideological design into reality. The lost object, together with its entire ideological background, becomes a purely intentional being which is an effect of symbolic personification and a utopian desire shaped in a text. It can be clearly seen that a melancholic ideological fantasy usually remains extremely at odds with the dominant ideological social reality of a given age. In other words, the Symbolic representation of an ideological design, meticulously crafted in the text, turns out to be completely non-real in the Real space, i.e. Absent. In this sense, it is—after the next Atlantean illusion sank—a utopian non-location. Jan Parandowski, a writer of tradition and history and at the same time a modern author through and through, locates his utopian melancholy in the classical past of the Continent. The ancient utopia only seemingly is an anachronistic notion. In the culture, society, and history of Greek-Roman antiquity, which except for couple of traces is not present anymore in the world, there is room for cultural desire, Homeric, Platonic and later strategies of a world-creating narrative. Many ancient texts feature mechanisms enabling idealization of the past. Antiquity specified the dilemmas of happiness and success of *æcumene*. If a cultural formation of Mediterranean Antiquity is now present in culture, it is in the melancholy position of the “object lost” by some modern subject

which longs for the forms of a social order from before the modern history, from Athens.

This restoratory and regenerative tendency largely applies to the literary formation of the generation of artists of the early—and still enthusiastic—modernism such as Jan Parandowski. He was always characterised by a kind of split creative personality. Being a writer, he was always dreaming of becoming a researcher. His passion and unfulfilled fantasy of archaeological profession resulted in many works in antiquity which were for him a kind of “an archaeology of the word”<sup>2</sup>. He seemed not to aspire to create alternative worlds in a sense of getting the enjoyment from shaping their fictional status. For him, the only literary alternative to modernity was a kind hypothesis of the past and antiquity as the source of civilisation. The formula of “the revival of old frontiers” ideally describes the constant creative zeal of a writer-archaeologist—in essence, it is his utopian impulse. In his monumental work, he tried to cover the entire process of Mediterranean history and myth, suffering often from inconsistencies inevitable in a project of this size.

This is where an irremovable aporia comes forth. The Mediterranean myth is, in large part, founded on the Absence—in a topical sense: “non-location”. The reality of “what has been” is an existential paradox of people who study history. Due to a modest amount of preserved empirical materials, it may be assumed that Parandowski, in his need to organize knowledge, hypotheses, and cultural myths, is a quite characteristic representative of a scientific utopia. The manifestation of the past in the text is supposed to mean not a meeting with a phantasm, but rather with the Real—this is the realisation of the past. In the literary work, therefore the most important is the type of knowledge and skills which enable to credibly pinpoint a precise (in the sense of probability) status of the past evoked in the text. The history and the archaeology, serving as building blocks of a literary vision, are one of the most effective methods to reclaim the “what has been” and yet an entire ocean of non-locations and non-subjects remains.

The Absence, as a necessary and determining aspect of reality, is a nightmare haunting the ancient historians and becoming their phobia. There is not—understood as radical non-existence. There is not—regarding people and things being

<sup>2</sup> A paraphrase of the title phrase from the classic study by Michel Foucault on *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1989).

the subject of their work, what they write about. Even symbolic vestiges, commemorating “what has been”, are mostly irreversibly destroyed by the wheel of time. This kind of a strong Absence is not only a description of the actual situation but also a severe aspect of a shortage of signs and symbolic content, constituting the tools and materials used by a modern historian, writer, and essayist. This fundamental ontic shortage needs to be at least partly supplemented in the process of cognition. The existence turns out to be here an intentional outcome of the paradox of material vestiges of the past and of imaginary status of creative evocation. The contradiction enables creation. The archaeologists, while researching remaining scant vestiges, work with fragmented, out of necessity attempts (essays) on reconstructing the past. They evoke its symbolic representations.

But where does this strong imperative of regeneration originate? It is borrowed straight from the notions building the nostalgia of Rebirth: *regeneratio*, *renovatio*. Similarly, the “Mediterranean myth” (Jastrun 1973) in modernity became an important mirror of the melancholic version of the society’s modernistic desire. Seen as such, the past—presented as a gesture of *recreatio* and *renovatio* is not a sign of conservatism. In Poland only recently secularized and not yet post-Christian or post-Catholic, the neopagan revelation has become quite a revolutionary gesture. If not a revision of history, then a revision of the stereotype in the perception of the Western world history can be noticed... And this utopian, revisionist gesture is being realized through the evocation.

## Evocation of the Past

The evocation suggests a possibility to replace the impasse of the Absence with the shortage, being replenished with a phantasm. The longing for an objective state of things provokes the writer’s evocative impulse. The effect of overcoming the creative aporia (the manifestation of non-existence) is the creation of fantasy within the empirical fragments of knowledge of the shadows. In the autothematic, commemorative sketch *Olimpijskie prace i dnie* [*Olympian Works and Days*] Parandowski writes directly about the evocation of Ancient Olympia as a world-building method of writing the novel *Dysk olimpijski* [*Olympian Discus*]. He was interested in making his vision of the Olympic Games to constitute a probable account of what had happened, referring to journalistic and chronicling categories. This form is what anachronistically became a modern genre: an honest sports reportage which depicts the truth of the



time as a category mimetic to the spatial and temporal location of the novel's *diegesis*. Of course, the condition was the retainable honesty towards the scant bits of historic knowledge of the Greek Olympic Games. The author realized, however, that the historical and archaeological honesty is not a method of manifesting the inviolable status of historical truth but a mere suggestion of an intangible spectral shape of "what had passed". Instead of that, one receives a hypothesis of the full shape of things in a phantasmal complementation of the existing shortages. With the absence of people and things, this anachronistic reportage could be bound together by fantasy only.

Their [the characters of *Dysk olimpijski*—R.Sz.] presence was supported by the fact that my contestants had not been "made up". Except for a couple of names, all of them can be found either in Olympian records, or in the golden book of Greek sports—in the Pindar's Odes. Maybe not all of them participated in these Olympic Games (only the winners are confirmed), but the probability was so high that I succumbed to it with no second thoughts. In this evocation of the ancient world, I would feel uneasy if I lived among the shadows who never knew a human body [emphasis—R.Sz.]. I was warmed by the thought that I can return the names wandering in the void until now, withering in scholias, that is in the comments to Pindar, knocked around in scientific works and being pushed down into their »lows« i.e. the footnotes, to the sunlight, to the track and field, and noble agons (Parandowski 1953: 26)<sup>3</sup>.

The evocation understood by Parandowski is not the usual process of manifesting in the text the utopian dream of antiquity based on a schematic image, a model of "what has been" which underpins the conceptualisation and demonstration of antiquity. The writer wants to be precise in his projection and observes that he dreams of the most accurate possible account of "what has been". He wants to be rational in his creative effort but does not steer away from the dream (*phantasm*)—the only appropriate material of the literary evocation. Thus, the evocation is defined as a peculiar characteristic of literature which brings back through linguistic mediation "what had passed" and is actually Absent from a form on intentional and virtual life. This is where an element of dispute with the science appears and it deepens the Absence with formalism and scepticism of the cognitive tools ("the void of scholias, comments, lows of footnotes", Parandowski 1953: 26). Fragmentary knowledge fed carefully and unemotionally into a scientific study does not regenerate the past. For the Absence, in order to become the Presence, the nearly magical gesture of the

<sup>3</sup> All translations from Polish are mine, unless stated otherwise.

creator must be made. The names—representations of specific Olympians—will return in *Dysk olimpijski* to the sunlit track and will compete in agons. The literature recognizes a live voice of the past in these names. What is this gesture? A rich range of the writer's evocative techniques is best defined by the famous title of a collection of essays devoted to the art of the word. And what if *Alchemia słowa* [*The Alchemy of the Word*] (Parandowski 1956) is also a symbolic figure of the utopian desire?<sup>4</sup> Why does the writer, always careful and rational, use a notion which, even if used metaphorically, is esoterical down to its core and as such absolutely obscure to an enlightened scientist?

The answer is simple and refers to the phenomenological intentionality of the work. The literature, seeking the ideal in its world-creating instinct, conjures quasi-locations, quasi-beings, quasi-persons. Hence the evocation of a socio-political phantasm is a reference not only to a specific location but also to another signature, an ideological dream, and a utopia (non-location). Understood as such, the evocation of the past is not an impossible realistic description of a past situation or a no longer present space, but something called a "description without place" (Žižek 2008: 5-6) by an English poet Wallace Stevens. A large part of descriptions in Parandowski's works does not have their locations and substance in reality anymore.

This is not a description which locates its content in a historical space and time, but a description which creates, as the background of the phenomena it describes, an inexistent (virtual) space of its own, so that what appears in it is not an appearance sustained by the depth of reality behind it, but a decontextualized appearance which fully coincides with real being. To quote Stevens again: »What it seems it is and in such seeming all things are«. Such an artistic description is not a sign for something that lies outside its form (Žižek 2008: 5-6).

A description without place seems like a notion close to the utopia. In this formula the signature precedes (or replaces) the Being and establishes a new concept of world order (since we are unable to bring the utopian worlds into real existence). In this way, the reality of what has been reveals its merely symbolic aspect precisely through and within art. If *Iliad* led Schliemann to discover the material remains of Troy, then the art can be an alchemic vehicle effectively storing the representation of the past shape of world.

<sup>4</sup> We still rely on the understanding of "utopian desire" as portrayed by Fredric Jameson and Ruth Levitas. For further investigation you may consult Luisa Passerini (2002).

The Greek art, as we see it now, is just a reflection; what remains of it is just a swarm of planets shining with borrowed light, when their sun had already been lost to eternal darkness [emphasis—R.Sz.] It was, however, enough to cause the highest admiration and establish models for the modern art of various ages. And even less so, as what has been admired from the Renaissance to the 19th century came from the last period, from the times after Alexander the Great. Only the archaeological works in Greece in 19th century allowed us to discover the archaic sculpture (7th and 6th century) and classic sculpture from the 5th and first half of the 4th century (Parandowski 1978: 48).

The absence of the object and the perceptible presence of the spectre is called here “a reflection of past splendour”, i.e. a description without place and object. The reflection may be understood as a reflection of light in a mirror. What remains is just the spectral part of the light spectrum of things, the reflection as a spectral trace of an image. A reflection in an eye’s pupil, in an eye’s bottom, may also denote a reflected image retained in the cultural/signatural memory of the humanity. So the spectre is only a fragment, a “monogram” of things. The author, restricted in his cultural fixation to such objects, often resorts to this metaphor. The “borrowed light” is a “reflection” of light often already reflected many times. Planets are poor copies of originals. Suns—sources of light—are gone forever. A reflection of a reflection increases the spectrality, blurs the edges, textures, colours and shapes of things. The reflections are here also a visualisation of a metonymic process of consolidating similarities. The source inevitably fades in repeated copies from copies. Hence later in the quote the writer notes that the oldest artefacts seem to establish themselves most weakly in the aesthetic consciousness of modernity. Their spectrality is a memory of a signature and nearly completely lost awareness of their appearance.

What is a spectre made of? Of signs, or more precisely of signatures, that is to say, those signs, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A spectre always carries with it a date wherever it goes; it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity. This is why old cities are the quintessential place of signatures, which the flâneur in turn reads, somewhat absentmindedly, in the course of his drifting and strolling down the streets. This is why the tasteless restorations that sugarcoat and homogenize European cities also erase their signatures; they render them illegible. And this is why cities—and especially Venice—tend to look like dreams [...] In the city, everything that has happened in some lance, in some piazza, in some street on some sidewalk along a canal, in some backalley is suddenly condensed and crystallized into a figure that is at once labile and exigent, mute and winking, resentful and distant. Such figure is the spectre or genius of the place [both emphases—R.Sz.] (Agamben 2011: 38-39).

The genius of the place which exists no more is a sign, our ever-present utopia of a symbolic culture which saves our inevitably dying worlds in spectral forms. It

must be noted that Agamben expands the notion of a spectre, adding to it an important signatural aspect. He writes about Venice both as a trace spectre and an important signature. Parandowski sees this place exactly as a signature transferred through the memory of culture. In the material legacy of antiquity, a reliable record of the past is rarely found, but signs, digits and monograms generate a trace memory of a place, inspiring to complete the gaps. If they stubbornly persist in the memory of humanity, they determine an amazing status of “non-existing existence”, a holy and actual place. They determine this status in the chain of historical and cultural transformations of the signatural motive. They wander through the history of culture in the desire-like mechanism of mirrored repetitions. Finally, they return as “fixed signatures” of cultural artefacts in the tendencies of a given culture to build an “intrigue of sense”, as Lévinas calls it perversely (Lévinas 1982).

It should be noted that Agamben also refers to the fragment from Foucault’s writings which sets forth that emulations and sympathies are returning signals of analogies and relationships of meanings. The features, gestures, and words, returning in this rhythm of repetitions, reflect the core of a signature which work is not based on a mirrored reflection, but on “another” metonymic reproduction<sup>5</sup>. In the text, which directly analyses the theory of signatures, Agamben observes that it invalidates the conviction that *signans* neutrally denotes *signatum*, and proposes in this place the interpretation of sense by distributing signatures, calling archaeology the study of signatures<sup>6</sup>. What is more, he states that the nature of human language indicates its source to lie in the senses of signatural nature—returning in metonymic approximations of signatures of things. A language without signatures is impossible, because

<sup>5</sup> “Resemblances require a signature, for none of them would ever become observable were it not legibly marked. [...] What form constitutes a sign and endows it with its particular value as a sign?—Resemblance does. It signifies exactly in so far as it resembles what it is indicating (that is, a similitude). But what it indicates is not the homology; for its distinct existence as a signature would then be indistinguishable from the face of which it is the sign; it is a n o t h e r resemblance, an adjacent similitude, one of another type which enables us to recognize the first, and which is revealed in its turn by a third. Every resemblance receives a signature; but this signature is no more than an intermediate form of the same resemblance. As a result, the totality of these marks, sliding over the great circle of similitudes, forms a second circle which would be an exact duplication of the first, point by point, were it not for that tiny degree of displacement which causes the sign of sympathy to reside in an analogy, that of analogy in emulation, that of emulation in convenience, which in turn requires the mark of sympathy for its recognition. The signature and what it denotes are of exactly the same nature; it is merely that they obey a different law of distribution; the pattern from which they are cut is the same” (Foucault 1989: 32).

<sup>6</sup> “The theory of signatures (or of statements) rectifies the abstract and fallacious idea that there are, as it were, pure and unmarked signs, that the *signans* neutrally signifies the *signatum*, univocally and once and for all. Instead, the sign signifies because it carries a signature that necessarily predetermines its interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy according to rules, practices, and precepts that it is our task to recognize. In this sense, archaeology is the science of signatures” (Agamben 2009: 64).

no sign could function without this archaic (following Foucault—archaeological) place in speech, which does not yield to the discourse and seems to border with magic (alchemy) of the word. Importantly for us, in the analyses of signatures, building the utopian evocations of the past in Parandowski's texts, all hermeneutics in humanist and especially historical contexts, are closely related to the signaturality of the entirety of human culture. Consequently, the human memory is, in fact, based on the metonymic system of mirrored similarities of signatures. When researching the archaeology of the word, it can often happen that what initially seems to be a fundamental idea or, for example, a utopian desire, eventually turns out to be “merely” a reflection of such a signatural sense<sup>7</sup>.

And in reality, the history is a mysterious desire of a human soul which, walking along the stream of moments and days, keeps glancing behind at what had already passed—a mysterious desire of a human soul which seeks harmony with the past time and keeps sweeping it into a never-ending presence. The memory has been the humanity's guide from its birth, and old Latins described this function of the memory with the word *recordari*, with *cor*—heart being the core of this word. In the Latin concept, the heart is the host of the memory [emphasis—R.Sz.] (Parandowski 1970: 122).

The symbolic order of the ancient historians is definitely superior to Lacan's idea—the Real one. *Re-cor-dari*: the history written with the heart. In other words, this is the utopia of the memory of civilisation, cultural accounts of social (non)personifications of *Agape*. The ideology is in this perspective a melancholic phantasm, helping to design idealistic aspirations of humanity. The memory (of the heart) is an idealizing distortion of the past, an anamorphic phantasm of always-possible golden age. In Freudian terms, this is wishful thinking reoriented towards the past, a process of history rationalisation which emotionally interferes with unemotional shapes of spectres and signatures. *Re-cor-dari* complements the spectra with affectionate penumbrae of social sensitivity of the modern author. This constant presence of the spectre of the past which haunts the author is the mortifying force of *destrudo*—

<sup>7</sup> “[...] the whole of language [...] shows its originary belonging to the sphere of signatures. Before (or better, together with) being the place of signification, language is the place of signatures, without which no sign would be able to function. And speech acts, in which language seems to border on magic, are only the most visible relics of this archaic signatory nature of language. [...] All research in the human sciences— particularly in a historical context—necessarily has to do with signatures. So for the scholar it is all the more important to learn to recognize and handle them correctly, since in the final analysis they determine the success of any scholar's investigation. Gilles Deleuze once wrote that a philosophical inquiry entails at least two elements: the identification of the problem and the choice of concepts that are adequate for approaching it. It is necessary to add that concepts entail signatures, without which they remain inert and unproductive. It may even happen that what at first appears to be a concept is later revealed to be a signature (or vice versa). Thus, we have seen that in first philosophy the transcendentals are not concepts but signatures and “passions” of the concept of “being” (Agamben 2009: 76).

death instinct—the violence of symbolic order which alluring power transcends the biological limitations of a live human organism, residing not only in the normal libidinal desire of the subject but also in paradoxically painful sphere of sensual pleasure—*jouissance*<sup>8</sup>. The memory of the past feeds the energy and power of the Great Other, which is a symbolic instance and cultural matrix of our behaviour in accordance with the utopian model. For Parandowski, the memory understood in this way becomes the source of sense and the quality of human life. Beginning with his early work *Dwie wiosny* [*Two Springs*], he consistently writes that the matrix of civilisation is the only sense (and a record at the same time) of humanity's existence.

## Heterotopia and Heterochronia

The memory is a warranty of this matrix. It is an important and personal fragment in which the author establishes, through a philological analysis of the word memory, the sense of his literary activity of remembering and reviving what is dead. The contamination of the two notions, lost in our linguistic consciousness, seems to be the key to understanding the need to revive spectres. If in Latin memory is the domain of the heart, then the sphere of the special obligation of utopian—because social—love's (specifically as the non-egoistic, universalist *Agape* and not the pagan *Eros*) movement becomes the “dead past”. To illustrate this, a longer passage from the author's essay is to be put forward:

Rome is something common and ordinary only for Rome itself. I saw two girls jumping onto the old Della Scrofa fountain to take a handful of water from its high bowl to quench their thirst caused by a hot evening; cars stop by the fountains at St. Peter's Square, by the wonderful foamy manes, embroidered with a rainbow by the light, to wash off the dust in the thick rain of drops; in the Palatine Hill, I saw a young man lying on grass which grew over the foundations of the temple of Cybele: he was reading the last Moravia's novel; lovers embrace in the niches of baths of Caracalla; children loudly run around in the deep moat—separated from the old ruins and covered in cypresses—encircling the Mausoleum of Augustus [...] I needed this visit, I have been planning it for a long time, as I wanted to write a novella which plot was to be set under the colourful ceilings of this palace. With this in mind, I sat dawn on the capital of a broken column at the entrance. At that moment, a school trip was approaching—two rows of girls and boys led by their teachers, with Neron's name being recognizable in their chatter. They were joyful with good weather, the sun, flowers, touching sharp stones as they went past

<sup>8</sup> It must be clearly stated that the text does not follow the classic Freudian understanding of the “death instincts”, but its reinterpretation proposed by Lacan. For further reading consult de Mijolla's *Death Instinct (Thanatos)* (2005) and de Lauretis' *Freud's drive: psychoanalysis, literature and film* (2008).

them—drawing with these signs of affection the fable of the world now dead closer to the fable of their young lives [emphasis—R.Sz.] (Parandowski 1970: 62).

The love of the alive to the dead is typical of historic locations filled with the presence of living people. The city of cities: Rome equals the Polis in the author's essays—the topical ideal of both a society and a civilisation. As it turns out, it is not only an ancient ideal, but an ideal constantly manifested—heterotopic in this sense. Why do we reach for a notion contrary to a utopia when discussing the utopian impulse of the ancient historians? The category of heterotopia, proposed by Foucault, describes the “place of places”, which as a concept remains in a “mirror-like” relation to the notion of utopia, “a place without a place”. Yet, it enables to locate or dislocate the space of one's desires. This idea proves to be especially helpful in describing the desired anamorphosis of the past. Tangled networks of relations determine the locations and the reconstruction of the principles of functioning in a constant (re)creation in (discursive) social practices. The heterotopia and heterochronia are accumulated in the modernist melancholic execution—which is of interest to us. “[...] First of all, there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example museums or libraries. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit” (Foucault 1986).

In the quoted ekphrasis of the old Rome, the description is a domain of fairytale heterochronia. The movement of metaphoric associations is consistent: dead—childlike; old—young. The circle of life and the myth of return justify the ideological phantasm of *renovatio*, the turn towards the sources, “the lap of childhood” (Herbert 1990). The ancient utopia is the return to the natural state of history, which has not yet gone mad but existed within human measure and scale. Using the essay-reportage technique of fast editing of random social scenes from the daily life of Rome, the writer presents them against the background of a constantly present and updating plan of history. Even the notion of the “background” is not precise enough, as it suggests an area in a tourist photograph which is a museum-like, still object interrupted by an egocentrically dominating image of the traveller. The background of a photograph is in fact separated from us, it undergoes the process of mortifying sacralisation. This museum-like status is definitely not a permanent presence of the past in the present. It is a terrifying form of a dead spectrality which prevents any participation. In the mentioned social situation, it is exactly the opposite—the museum-like separation is discounted with the context of a modern life. The revival is a joyful, amorous and profanatory act of touching the traditionally untouchable *sacrum* of the

past. Parandowski is glad that the Romans did not care too much about the monuments around them, probably because of a superabundance of them, and thus they do make them fetishes separating us from the reality of the past. In the kaleidoscopic montage of the essay's sequence, it is important to capture the life and currency of the city within the historical space to embed and use temporal signatures for daily, profanatory (i.e. getting rid of the barrier of the sacred) purposes<sup>9</sup>. Such is the heterotopia of Parandowski in Rome. It is brought about by every gesture "revitalising" seemingly dead places for biological (and not only symbolic) signs of current life. This normality is nearly a personified, dreamlike evocation of the ancient in its live form. The naturality of Romans towards the antique is a gesture removing the museum-like qualities from the ancient Rome, making one aware of its universally human dimension and the symmetry of the past in its utilitarian daily life, habits, etc. In the evocation process, the overlay of the contemporary daily life on the nostalgic (*recordare*) image of the past makes one aware of the heterotopia and heterochronia of the culture. It must be also emphasized that the daily life is here understood in the most sensual, libidinal sense. The past needs this supplementary remains (added value)—the ordinary physical passion of a sample couple kissing in Roman ruins, as a specific ignition of evocation bringing life to a dead space of a historic location. The ancient utopia exists inasmuch as it is based on the really live emotions of the time current for the author, in the meaning of a sensual experience of the author. If Rome is still a heterotopian Polis of the Western civilisation, it is so only thanks to the intentions of the subject. A similar concept is expressed in the conservative thoughts of Hanna Arendt, whose diagnosis has often been compared to the sociologic concepts of Michel Foucault.

The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. "Wherever you go, you will be a polis": these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely,

<sup>9</sup> "Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, the one which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized" (Agamben 2007: 77).



the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly (Arendt 1998: 196-197).

Parandowski is, as not many others, highly aware of how the ideological code of the Western culture (e.g. the notions of politics, democracy, tyranny, agora) stems from the Greek source. It should be noted that this fascination is ultimately validated by the belief of currentness based on the simple constative that the “Odyssean”—from the individuation perspective—way of the Western literature leads to the discovery of the symbolic Grail, i.e. the promise of the eternity of culture. And this connection with Homer is here the paradigm core of the polis. The journey of Ulysses in his search for Ithaca was supposed to lead the European civilisation to a social conviction that polis is a community, and that polis is everywhere the Hellenes are.

We remain in the culture thanks to this confidence in universal community of enduring symbolic representations of ephemeral objects/subjects. We remain in similarity to the past, because we know that polis is everywhere we have been and are, as the Greeks. The fact of remaining, as a feature of a symbolic culture, is an important advantage of antique melancholy, easy to contrast with a definitely weaker universal foundation of the catholic culture or—even so—atheism. “Wherever you go, you will be a polis” (Arendt 1998: 196-197)—but not in actual Athens or Rome. Only in heterochronic image of the past-present-future is the currency of a social dream brought to life, the eternal renewal of the Greek design of an individualistic civilisation. So, does the common *axis mundi* of Europe (Hellas, Athens, Rome) enable the constitution of the heterotopia of Paris, New York, London, or—in the past—Venice? The “location of locations” is “everywhere” thanks to the mechanism of a phantasm casting onto the modern polis (today maybe even a post-polis), mimetic projections of the past. But this “everywhere” means also “is nowhere” (Jarry 1969)<sup>10</sup>—a desire-like nature of utopia as such. The “location of locations”, internalized in the cultural dream, occurs only symbolically and is considered as a utopian location inside us, endangering the Reality of the figure of a modern location. New York may be a utopia (a city without a location), because in essence it is within the

<sup>10</sup> A vulgar wretch like Ubu, a common little adventurer, a mister nobody from nowhere (Jarry 1969). In his introductory speech to *Ubu Roi*, Jarry stated that the action would take place ‘*en Pologne, c’est-à-dire Nulle Part*’ (OCBP I, p.401); and Père Ubu, escaping from his Polish adventures at the end of the play, claims that “*S’il n’y avait pas de Pologne il n’y aurait pas de Polonais!*” (OCBP I, p.398). In 1898 there was no state of Poland—therefore the *petits Polonais*, in the rigorous contortions of Ubuesque logic, can be no more than *petits hommes*. (Fisher 2000: 49).

phantasm of a New World (like in Baudrillard's *America*) only a carrier of old signatures, a library of signatures—as Alexandria used to be in the past. If so, then are the melancholic mimetic practices always only a recreation of a utopian ideal of antiquity? Probably this enticing metaphor is too radical, yet it would definitely convince Parandowski.

The evocation of the past as the utopian ideal sometimes takes the form of extreme subjectivisation in Parandowski's work. These are emotional examples, coming from the religion of the heart, which are described in secular *Niebo w płomieniach* [*Sky in Flames*], e.g. in the character of Teofil Grodzicki. But the most exemplary illustration of the utopian fictionality of the image of antiquity is the collection of essays entitled *Dwie wiosny* [*Two Springs*]. The book is especially subversive, as it reveals the desire-like status of the fetish of the island of idealized Greek civilisation. Again, the sense of melancholic ideology of antiquity is enhanced by words/signatures, like such “dawn” or “Spring”, which are meaningful and pivotal in the context of Mediterranean culture on which the West had been founded. A couple of striking quotes:

Nothing compares to this freshness of a spring. This was an actual spring, this was the most honest originality, owing nothing to anybody, and this is what exhilarates in Greek thinkers.

Greece is the magnetic pole of our civilisation.

I completed a pilgrimage to the holy land of our civilisation.

The thought of Greek religion imbues us with joy and happiness, because it shows us an image of people who lived in a fairy tale.

I wrote my book with simplicity typical of the Greek concepts, and I want it to be read in the same way. The Greeks mustn't be assessed against those moral concepts, at which we arrived after many centuries of chaos in our thinking. Had they known our hypocrisy, they would have said that they had not been mistaken in their opinions, calling barbaric all that resides outside of the blessing of the Greek sun (Parandowski 1926).

These are the affective arguments; but does the discourse allow also “intellectual arguments” based on the knowledge of the spectres of antiquity? Despite everything—yes, it does, even though, also here, the phantasmal melancholy of the ancient historians distorts the picture. Just a single sample fragment of Parandowski's essay:

In comparison with what the Romans did and had to keep their body clean, a modern man with a measured amount of water, cramped bathrooms at home, with the poverty of public baths, may seem an uncivilized barbarian. Anyway, the invention of waterways was almost abandoned with the Rome's

decline. Medieval Europe returned to simple wells which survived until the 19th century. The waterways in our cities are quite recent constructions. I myself, being a child, accompanied a servant on her way to a well where cans were filled with water. [...] But even today, despite impressive leaps in technology, waterways are not yet spread wide enough to reach every town in Europe in a way e.g. Pompeii—a small town of just a couple of thousands of inhabitants—had been. The Romans brought their civilisation everywhere they ruled, and one can see today the aqueduct arches in African deserts, in the wilds of Asia Minor. And similar facts are to be found in plenty of other areas of life, which shows how strangely incapable the world became after the Greek-Roman civilisation had left, how long leaps have now to be made to refer to what those people had achieved long time ago (Parandowski 1978: 137-138).

Parandowski sees and emphasizes from his post-Enlightenment perspective the superiority of the social design of Rome over the narrow-minded character of modern cities. In his layman's point of view, the baths are a better example of a higher social organization than even the most beautiful temples erected on their foundations. In this sense the baths become a useful metaphor of Rome's pragmatic nature. The subject is continued in ironic taunts over the modern level of hygiene—another argument for the superiority of the antique civilisation. After 2000 years modernity only matches those achievements. In the Roman context of a ubiquitous culture of industrial pragmatism, a special value is given to the “mega-political” city, but also to the system of water distribution in the empire. The technology of transporting fresh water from mountain springs and providing it for free to millions of Roman citizens via a thick system of aqueducts, fountains and baths is, from a modern point of view, a beautiful and optimistic utopia<sup>11</sup>. The fusion of antique and modern horizons marks the heterochronic nature of Rome. The clumsiness of the human world after the fall of *Pax Romana*, the best of all existing civilisation paradigms in the history embeds the technological development into the ideology of the imperial Roman civilisation as an element of its heterotopical reading<sup>12</sup>. This perspective is not far from

<sup>11</sup> Architecture was first described as a configurative discipline—a kind of utopian pattern making—in the writing of Italian architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), and it appears again in the writing and architecture of Dutch architect and theorist Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999), especially in their shared ideas regarding the reciprocity of city and house, and house and city. It is with patterns made up of interdependent parts, and the potential of these for making comprehensible wholes, that optimism and utopia begin to illuminate something about the nature of exemplary architecture that genius alone cannot explain. Across this trajectory of associations, exemplary architecture is revealed as being as much a product of genius as the result of a mind conditioned by optimism to see a small contribution (a single building, for example) as a part *within a potential whole* that begins to form it. Although he does not call it utopia, this view of architecture—room, building and city—as parts within a potential whole borrows from David Leatherbarrow's idea that each architectural invention ought to learn from past efforts in order to surpass them, and that each building ought to be envisioned as the partial completion of a potential whole (Coleman 2005: 11).

<sup>12</sup> From a Roman perspective, the contrast was one of civilization and barbarism, of a divide between “us” and “them” based upon ancient Mediterranean beliefs that urban communities and the civic culture that they sustained were inherently superior to technologically and politically less complex, rural, warrior societies. From a twenty-first-century perspective, the artificiality of this categorization is painfully evident. “Civilized” and “barbarian” are subjective referents

the position of modern technocrats and industrialisation enthusiasts. Parandowski is led here by a more subversive thought that the progress of civilisation should not necessarily be taken for granted after the fall of antiquity. The last sentences of this lengthy quotation are especially telling—the striking is not only the clumsiness and primitivism of the world that remains after the Greek-Roman civilisation achievements are destroyed but also the difficulty in reconstructing the social ideal that had already been there. The culture of exploitation, as displayed by Parandowski, is based here on a deep conviction that all which remains for us is just an incompetent repetition of signatures of antique “non-locations”.

The Roman Empire, in comparison with the history of the Mediterranean Sea until its time, pretended to the role of an unexpected ideal. It brought peace, safety, prosperity. All national disputes disappeared, it was impossible to have e.g. Egypt conquer Syria, or Athens—invade Sparta. This multitude of individual nations would consider itself a single society. This world felt like a strong, solid house, which gates, doors and castles are completely to be trusted. All borders were guarded by trained legions in fortified camps, with good provisions, forming a living and dangerous wall capable of repulsing every attack. An inhabitant of Rome, Athens or Alexandria saw no war for over two hundred years. A similar level of safety was ensured internally by the authorities and police (Parandowski 1978: 94–97).

An “unexpected ideal”—it is the utopian potential of Winckelman’s marble image of Hellas and Rome. The image which today is virtually anachronistic. But Parandowski of early modernism inherited the idealizing illusions of German ancient historians. The constative that Rome is for the author an “unexpected ideal” is connected with its ideological universal—which basically means: paradoxical—construction. Firstly, Parandowski writes here about *coincidentia oppositorum*—the political multitude in unity, highlighting the civic awareness of empire inhabitants: various nations, one society. He is interested in the correlation of the aspect of Roman unification of Gauls, Brits, and (even culturally) much older Greeks and Egyptians with the consistent support of individual characters and cultural and ethnic particularity of these peoples. This conviction does not apply to the Republic, “insular” in its interests, but to the open empire in the imperial project<sup>13</sup>. Parandowski evidently com-

based upon perceptions and traditions designed to legitimize one group at the expense of others by affirming a hierarchy of cultural difference and moral worth (Smith 2005: 9).

<sup>13</sup> “As a matter of fact the provinces of the Republican empire did bear some resemblance to those of our counter-factual model, but under the emperors the cultures of Rome’s subjects were transformed utterly. Cities sprang up where there were none before, new temples were raised to new gods, and even the most intimate details of life were refashioned. In Gaul men literally came down from the hills, shaved off their beards and learned to bathe themselves. Nor did these

bines this premonition and feeling with the awareness that the essence of universalism is the notion of *humanitas*. Paradoxically, the real influence in this category, in *Pax Romana*, remains closely connected with the imperialism as a colonial ideology. In connection with that, in the late social history of Rome, *humanitas* was also perceived as the opposition to the notion of barbarity<sup>14</sup>.

Secondly, regarding the external peace, internal safety, economic prosperity, and mobility enabled by lifting internal borders, the author emphasizes the practical dimension of the realisation of individual aspirations of the—essentially free—individuals inhabiting the Roman world (free at least in comparison to inhabitants of the Eastern empires). A subversive context of this pragmatic liberalisation of life of common people around the Mediterranean Sea is the fact that these freedoms are based on the political violence of the Roman law and the military power of imperial authorities supporting the Roman state at the cost of limiting the tribal, national, ethnic freedoms, and cultural and religious freedoms, etc. to a minimum extent. In other words, Rome received a right to organize a form of a social order of the whole community and in return provided a package of individual civic freedoms. These mechanisms allow to see the Roman Empire, as described by the author in his essays, as an authoritarian utopia which came true in the history of the world.

That was a time of great prosperity, and the standard of living has considerably risen. This is evidenced even today by the ruins of cities well-designed and equipped with solutions and comforts that could be an object of envy of some even contemporary cities (Parandowski 1978: 94-97).

changes affect only the richest and most prominent. The humblest altars and the cheapest pottery vessels testify to the creation of a new Preface civilization. Changes of this sort might be documented from all over Rome's empire, but did not result in a culture of imperial uniformity. Rather each region witnessed the creation of distinct civilizations—crudely described today as Romano-British, Gallo-Roman and so forth—that reflected their various predecessors but nevertheless converged on, and formed part of, an imperial whole" (Woolf 1998: IX-X).

<sup>14</sup> "[...] the idea of *humanitas* underwrote and was sustained by a particular configuration of power, and it reflected an understanding of the world and of history that was inextricably linked to the fact of Roman imperialism. *Humanitas* encapsulated what it meant to be Roman, and understanding it is central to an understanding of how a Roman identity was acquired in Gaul. [...] Eventually *humanitas* was transformed into a characteristic of imperial civilization, opposed to a barbarism increasingly conceptualized as confined beyond the moral frontiers of the empire. Elaboration and literary subversion of these ideas were always possible. Barbarians might be represented as free from the corruption of civilization; individual Romans might be presented as behaving barbarously, and barbarians might even be attributed alternative wisdom, like the Druids, portrayed not only as savages who indulged in human sacrifice, but also as natural philosophers who taught the transmigration of souls. But these rhetorical games and intellectual speculations depended for their effect on more common Roman understandings of *humanitas* and barbarism, understandings that were little discussed precisely because they were so widely accepted" (Brucia, Daughtery 2007: 55, 60).

Altogether, we have a *quasi*-utopian novel about the success and the satiation of the civilized world which inherited the ideological universals, enabling a political incarnation of the universal success, from the poor Greece. With a shortage of a material testimony, Parandowski is keen to evoke the reality, materiality, and even the empiricity of signatural beneficiaries of this—in fact practical—civilisation. He highly values the pragmatic aspect of the Roman history and, interestingly, there is not even a hint of idealising tendency in him to compensate the Romans' materialism with some form of their spiritual elevation. In a heterotypical image, the Romans present themselves as symmetrically secular in comparison to the modernity of his dreams presented in *Niebo w płomieniach* [*Sky in Flames*].

## Glosses

To conclude, two quotes, seemingly at odds, yet displaying in their antinomy Parandowski's awareness of describing in fact the desire-like status of his utopian vision of the ancient world. The first of these two fragments is written from the modern Enlightened standpoint. The melancholy is here revealed as the effect of a modernistic change and the lack of satisfaction with the result of this change. The ancient historian escapes into the safe zone of unprocessed grief over the lost ideal of his desires. For a melancholic, no matter how modern, the lost object becomes a replacement of the both socially and civilisation-wise unsatisfactory effect of modernity.

Our civilisation seems to us to be the only one possible and sensible. Not deceived by the often heard complaints, grumbling and mockery, deep down we know that it cannot be any other way, it even should not. This is a civilisation of progress, development and power over the world. Upon all of the other civilisations that preceded ours, we look as steps slowly leading where we are now. The science and expertise of the past eras, just as the economy and comfort of those times, seem primitive and illogical (Parandowski 1967: 207).

It turns out that for a still modern—regarding the ideas—author, it is still too early to display signs of a correction of a rational paradigm of development (Should it be from the position of critical modernity or maybe from the expectation of post-modern culture?). His writing about the history of civilisation, despite the cruelty of modern catastrophes, remains triumphantly modern and in the described symmetric perspective of the modern culture, it results from and contains the memory of the best traditions of rational Europe, i.e. the Greek and Roman order, Renaissance, and Enlightenment.

At the same time, this fragment sounds like a manifest of a blinded and nearly totalitarian in its determinism vision of modernity. Parandowski places himself here—with his propagandistic tone, with the affirmation of the idea of development, with his characteristic lexis—almost at the centre of the mainstream official culture of the Polish People's Republic. Progress, development, and control—these words signal confidence, not hesitation. Perhaps it should be noted that even in the 60s such comments sounded not modernly in Poland, but rather bizarrely inadequately, both to the situation of the civilisation after the Second World War, and to the socio-political situation in Poland, as well as in the context of a global bipolar conflict of ideologies. But we do not have to charge the author with the writer's servilism towards the system. The paradox of his standpoint, its anachronistic nature, results rather from the double source of the melancholic fixation. In it, equally important is the idealisation of ancient rationalism as is the idealisation of the post-Cartesian paradigm of enlightened rationalism. If this coincides with the tone of state ideology of the Polish People's Republic, it is only because of a shared optimistic vision of history. In Hegelian terms, morality is not an unequivocal instance.

The second quote is even more perverse. The pure perversion of a modern progressor and a declared liberal. A vision stemming from an ethnic complex and cramped Polish particularism. Yet, it must be asked: what if this is not only a negative expectation, but also a concerning premonition of the costs of restrictions which we pay for the burden of cultural nostalgia? An unintentional acknowledgement of Dmowski and his, contrary to the modernity, worryingly alive tradition of thought:

It is truly a pity—he said—an irreparable loss that young nations let themselves to be civilised by Rome which for a couple of centuries had already been merely a corpse. Instead of living on their own substance, full of its own juices, they fed on a rotten carrion. They renounced their gods, songs, they abandoned traditional construction methods of their homes which housed their knightly past for a thousand years, they forgot much of the old habits, they tainted their language and instead of developing it, they incorporated poor Latin into their books. How beautiful Europe could be, had it not made this fatal mistake! How much quicker would the Renaissance have come—and not that artificial one sustained on the quotes from the antiquity, but a fresh one, truly a new one, coming from the very core of those fine Celtic, German and Slavic tribes! (Parandowski 1994: 318).

The standpoint presented by the radical in the polyphonic *Niebo w płomieniach* [*Sky in Flames*] is characteristic for the early twentieth century and the Europe of national homelands. In the emotional tone and categorical approach, it seems nationalistic, if not fascist, and definitely describes an ideological position far from Parandowski. Intriguing is the bitter awareness of the author that it is possible to locate the

I totally differently and negatively towards the utopia of the ideological phantasm of the Mediterranean myth. The borderline fascist extreme of this polemic opinion within the (post)secular novel is merely a proof that the writer knew how radical his own universalistic and antinational position is. But let us skip over the risky rhetoric of ethnicity and keep from these phrases just the consideration of the fatalistic force of the past Roman and Greek utopia, determining archmodels of the modern culture. Parandowski touches here upon the sensed, while hidden perversely, real strangeness of antique to the Slavic tradition. Just as Jan Sowa describes this problem in his recent phantasmal concept of the Republic of Poland (Sowa 2012). Not only as a Pole, but maybe even firstly as—as per his declaration—a sceptical European, Jan Parandowski wrote much too few of such sentences.



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*Parodies of Authority in the  
Soviet Anti-utopias from 1918-1930*

ANDRZEJ DRÓŹDŹ

## Introduction

After the abolition of censorship ensuing from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian social science fiction of the 1920s was provided with a new perspective for research in literary history. In Russia literary anti-utopias evoked a particular interest of the researchers. “Who read science fiction utopia in 1920s? This is difficult to measure”—writes Richard Stites (Stites 1989: 173). No less difficult is to define how to read utopian and dystopian literature as censorship did not allow to conduct research for decades in the Soviet Union. Russian researchers emphasize the flexibility of the determinants of literary genres of utopia, so the terms anti-utopia and dystopia are used frequently interchangeably. It also happens in publications of eminent authors: Vyacheslav P. Shestakov defined Zamyatin’s novel “We” as “an anti-totalitarian utopia” and even goes a step further: “Utopia of Zamyatin was so a pamphlet on the present, like a warning for the future” (Shestakov 2012: 52, 54). Ambiguous utopia is features in some parts of novels indeed and it was confirmed by Morson, who writes that some of them contain both “Utopian and anti-utopian visions” (Morson 1981: 154).

Today’s distinction between anti-utopia and dystopia had no place in the perspective of the Russian authors from the first half of the twentieth century. There

was, however, a clear conflict between their literary comments on the utopia of authority confronted with utopian ideas of the Bolshevik regime. The concept of utopia or anti-utopia helps to explain the phenomena of political and social issues of Bolshevik revolution (Heller, Nekrich: 1988); therefore, separate studies on the complexities of genres are not conducted too often. According to Aleksandra Lyubimov “anti-utopia serves to verify the socio-political models and debunks the ideological myths (Lyubimov 1994: 95). After the October Revolution, utopian and social influences were expressed mainly in the visual arts. Among the supporters of Bolshevism, the October Revolution instilled utopian faith in the forthcoming communism, which hid the camouflaged waiting for the saviour—the Comforter (Paraclet).

Utopian science fiction of the 1920s as a genre summarized the experiments of the Revolution—or from long before it—and synthesized them into larger pictures of the future. Like slogans, posters, and agitational literature, these stories were signposts and guidebooks for the current march (Stites 1989: 174).

This kind of images of reality, which served for ideological propaganda, were mocked by the authors of anti-utopia.

## Anti-utopia and War Communism

Efim Zozulya, Andrei Marsov, and especially Yevgeny Zamyatin, Mikhail Kozyrev, and Andrei Platonov had the courage, despite censorship and commonly used persecution against opponents of Bolshevism, to write critically about the alleged equality and justice in the first in the world state of the workers’ and peasants’ democracy. In their novels parodies of the authoritarian rule and the enslaved people grew to a kind of contemptuous mimesis. The Russian Revolution inspired by the communist ideology deeply redefined social norms and perverted behaviour patterns. On the ruins of the old world a founding myth of the new Soviet state was created. In the years of War Communism (1918-1921), the positive characters of the novels were revolutionary activists or Red Army soldiers—role models for “the new man”. Red Army soldiers were the main social base for the Revolution and an exemplar of the disciplined society (Bogdanov 1999: 335). They were subject to the military regulations, had to live in the barracks, were given the same uniforms to wear, and in case of desertion were executed. “The Red Army man, it explained, was the hero in the battle

to win back *pravda* for the people. The resonance of »red star« thus shifted from a rational to a religious-mythic tale of good and evil” (Stites 1989: 85).

At the time of War Communism, the fundamental aim of Lenin and Trotsky was to impose ironclad principles of the barracks discipline on the whole nation. “The Workers’-Peasants’ Red Army produced strictly authoritarian structures” (Bogdanov 1999: 335) out of politically shaped soldiers, who constituted the largest consumer group which was fully controlled by the Bolshevik authorities. On 9 May 1918, the decree for general mobilization of workers and peasants was issued. It obligated them to contribute to the fight against counterrevolution, and in June of the following year the mobilization was extended to include unions and supervisory personnel. The Bolshevik authorities had the right to dispose of workers at their own discretion. Absenteeism was regarded as desertion, and being late to work meant sabotage. In dystopia *We*, Yevgeny Zamyatin presents the scene of a raid by three Chekists carrying out a random house search. The fear of the secret police engulfed the whole Soviet society especially when Bolshevik regime intensified the dekulakization and deportations in 1932-1933 (Heller and Nekrich: 1988: 238). The foundation of the Bolshevik Revolution fell apart in the mid-thirties as a result of widespread terror, whose victims were also old revolutionaries. “Bolshevik party is dead, and no force will resurrect it”—Trotsky summed up the “betrayal of revolutionary” ideals after the murder of Kirov and the liquidation of political factions (Trotsky 2004: 79).

The Bolshevik system of class struggle enforced the utopian schematic order of the society. At the same time, there also took place substantial ideological, aesthetic, and political transformation within literary circles, i.e. from the state of relative independence in the 1920s into absolute obedience through the act of approval of socialist realism and the mandatory oath of allegiance to the Soviet Union in 1934. In response, some writers reduced their literary activity, others were forced to emigrate, but the majority were subordinated by the power of the predominant standards. Anti-utopian literature from the years 1918-1930 was a response of merely few authors to the propaganda campaigns by Proletkult, which were intended to cover up tragic consequences of the Revolution. “The Soviet Proletkul’t was not a specifically literary movement, but in 1920 it inspired the formation of a group of workers, known as Kuznitsa (The Forge), which issued a manifesto intended to be “The Red Flag of Proletarian Art”. This group convened what was eventually to become the permanent Rossiiskaia Assotsiatsiia Proletarskikh Pisatelei (RAPP, All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers)” (Morgan, 2001: 2108).

People resistant to the authorities fell victim to repressions, so writers started to read aloud their works to small circles of friends. So did Zamyatin, Kozyrev, and Platonov, whose anti-utopias and dystopias are today monumental testimonies to the period; however, dystopia, a literary genre which describes the worst state of life conditions, emerged as the most distinctive in the evocative novels of Zozulya, in which the courage to confront with terror had a negative impact on the opinions of authority about their author. Among the Soviet authors writing in the 1920s and 1930s there is no division between utopian enthusiasts, or even sycophants, and anti-utopian mockers, as any type of deliberation of the social science fiction genre and the contemporary politics inevitably led to a conflict with the authorities. Alexander Chayanov, Vadim Nikolsky, Vivian Itin and Mikhail Kozyrev were shot. Viktor A. Goncharov and Andrei Marsov mysteriously disappeared. Efim Zozulya, Yakov Okunev, Alexander Belyaev, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Yan Larri and Andrei Platonov were targets of more lenient pressure, like publication bans, imprisonment, and persecution of family members. On the assumption that there is lack of the above mentioned division it should be noted that the anti-utopias of that period are not parodies of literary utopias, as asserted Saul Morson (Morson 1981: 115-116), but they are parodies of social deformities of the Bolshevik system.

## Anti-utopian Criticism and Literary Dystopias

The first part of *Golden Little Book* by Thomas More is comprised of a critical analysis of the social relations in England under Henry VIII. There is a certain similarity between the process of enclosure in Henry VIII's times, which meant mass termination of tenancy agreements with English peasants, and the brutal collectivization of the agricultural sector in the Stalin Era with meant ousting the *kulaks* from their farms. The second part of the *Golden Little Book* is a metaphor for the world expected, in which social justice comes from equal material and legal status. Examples from reality as well as its allegories and metaphors are the categories helpful in distinguishing between utopias, anti-utopias, and social dystopias. While the Bolshevik utopias wanted to dazzle the reader with the rationally ordered world in terms of class consciousness and historical dialectic, the anti-utopias and dystopias questioned that order from the perspective of a single man. The authors of the latter genres used two stylistic strategies. Some of them, in order to confuse vigilant censors and for their

own safety, created a parabolic picture of reality, masking it with allegories and metaphors, as Zozulya, Itin, Marsov and Zamyatin did. Others, like Kozyrev and Platonov, referred to reality, but clearly siding with opponents of Bolshevism.

In 1918, during the Russian Civil War, Efim Zozulya published a short parabolic novel titled *The Doom of Principal City*, which provided associations with the dictatorship of the proletariat imposed on the Russian people. The novel tells about the invasion of enemies on the “Principal City”, which can be perceived as a parabola of the Bolshevik Coup. After the surrender of the corrupt army, the sky over the defenceless city is getting covered with propaganda banners and public notices of the conquerors. Shrill giggle of “machine laughter” (Zozula 2016: 46) reminds the conquered that they are defeated because of the “detrimental epidemic of optimism” (Zozula 2016: 47) with which they were infected for many years. The giggle of the machine drives people crazy. Some commit suicide, others torch their houses. The novel’s instrument of torture called “laughing machine laughter” corresponds to the real-life’s satirical Rosta windows printed by the Russian Telegraph Agency ROSTA. They were posters mocking enemies and victims of the Revolution. The invaders start to wield the authority and force the defeated to connect the roofs of their houses and on such structure to build the Upper Town with no access for those living below. To humiliate the vanquished, they found for them the “Association of Love to the Man”, intended for total surveillance, and create the so-called “Humble Government” for fighting the rebels. Residents of the Lower Town, afflicted by poverty and deprived of access to light, decide to blow up the foundations of the upper buildings; however, while their oppressors manage to evacuate shortly before the catastrophe, they themselves die under the piles of debris. In Zozulya’s dystopia, the Upper Town is an allegory of the system of dictatorship, and so called *lishentsy*, i.e. “the deprived” living in the Lower Town, are an equivalent of the class enemies, who lost their basic civil and social rights under the constitution of 1918. In 1919, Efim Zozulya published the dystopia titled *The Dictator: A Story of Ak and Humanity*, which can be seen as a literary commentary on the anti-Soviet poster “Peace and Freedom in Sovdepiya”, which was created in the Kharkiv branch of the propaganda agency working for Anton Denikin’s counter-revolutionary army. The Tamerlane’s mounds of human skulls are a well-known historic example and established symbol of war atrocities. This motif appears in the poster by an anonymous author that depicts an execution in the Kremlin dungeons watched from the height by a monster with Leon Trotsky’s

face. On 26 June 1918, Lenin approved introduction of the Red Terror. This campaign of mass killing was designed to be the method for increasing the pace of establishing communism. Literary scholar Dmitry Likhachov, who in 1918-1919 lived near the Peter and Paul Fortress, noted that just to open the window at night was enough to hear shots from pistols or machine-gun rattle from behind the walls (Likhachov 1997: 153). The killings were systematic and executed in accordance with the adopted doctrine explained by Cheka deputy director, Martin Latsis, who claimed that: "We are not waging war against individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class" (Pringle 2006: 48).

Zozulya wrote a devilish parody on the utopian Bolshevik eugenics aiming to cleanse the world of "human trash". Comrade Ak, the eponymous character of the novel, signs a decree ordering all citizens to appear with their families before the Court of Supreme Decisions to undergo an examination to obtain a certificate for life. The decree stipulates that "Human trash that makes it impossible to rebuild life on the principles of justice and happiness must be ruthlessly eliminated" (Zozulya 2009: 202). Crowds of people become horrified and gripped with fear of death. Everyone rushes to escape, but the way is barred by the cordons of soldiers with batons and guns. The survivors hide in their houses, but police officers catch them and take for interrogations. Zozulya focused his attention on human emotions, i.e. on despair of family members being torn apart and on their dramatic begging for life, though in each particular case a ruling is the same—no reasonable claim for life. The report on convicted worker no. 14623 clearly shows that the place of the action of the discussed dystopia is Bolshevik Russia. During the October Revolution, the given worker carried a red flag and was very active in politics; however, later he lost his enthusiasm and gave in to his old habits. It takes one hour for the Court to pass a hundred death sentences. Consistent development of the narrative in a specific direction would expose the author to ideological allegations, so Zozulya ended it with the scene of condemnation of Comrade Ak, who is guilty of genocide.

The White Movement, the Red Terror and the lost war with Poland led the Soviet state to ruin, so in March 1921 Lenin announced the principles of the so called New Economic Policy (NEP). In a remarkably short time, a significant economic recovery took place. Around 500 private publishing houses were established, which supplied the book market with (Mandiel 2011: 181, 207), among others, on 1923 more or less 42.5% of the books in the field of literature (Blum 1993: 179). Relative freedom



of publication made the communist authorities set up in July 1922 the official censorship organ called Glavlit to prevent any ideological contamination from occurring. Writers whose publications were rejected by Glavlit, for the time, could enjoy a certain amount of freedom and participate in privately organised literary meetings, during which they read aloud their works. For example, Yevgeny Zamyatin in such circumstances read aloud fragments of his dystopia *We*. Its structure is based on intertwining two conspiracy themes. The first one is about a sabotage of the orders “lex sexualis” biding in The One State, committed by a pair of lovers: him—the constructor D 503, and her—the sensual I-330. The second theme tells about an unsuccessful attempt to take over the spacecraft named “Integral” with the intent to overthrow the tyranny of The One State. Zamyatin drew on a journalistic deception that was disseminated by the White Army propaganda, pertaining to the alleged distribution of women who were to sexually satisfy party activists. Rumours about this appeared in February 1918 in Saratov and in a short time they were picked up by the White Army newspapers (Carleton 2005: 10), which combined them with the Marxist idea to abolish the bourgeois family model, the decree of 16 December 1917 on divorces and statements by an advocate of free love, Alexandra Kollontai, to be the instruments of that idea. Futuristic conceptions of sexual liberation were known as soon as before 1917, but a typically utopian affirmation for supposedly scientific adjustments of sexual selection was presented in 1920 by Yakov Okunev, the author of utopian *The Coming World 1923–2123*. However, anti-utopian and parodic texts were published more often. In a dystopia *Leningrad* (1926) Mikhail Kozyrev condemned sexual promiscuity of Bolsheviks. In an anti-utopia *Love in the Fog of the Future* (1924) Andrei Marsov portrayed a tragic fate of Jerry and Donna, who prefer to die rather than to undergo the obligatory scientific procedure of sexual selection.

Anti-utopian writers saw an opportunity to oppose the centralized power in authenticity of feelings and in the traditional model of family. They believed that only out of true love there shall be born a will to revive the old world and its fundamental values. In anti-utopias the protagonist always ends up physically defeated, but not before one manages to expose hypocrisy of the utopian regime. In most works of the social science fiction genre, a feat of technology plays a role of accomplice in the system of coercion. In Zamyatin’s dystopia *We*, The One State reaches a new stage of development thanks to the machine that can remove one’s imagination, and thus one’s free will. In Marsov’s novel the totalitarian system of control, introduced by the Council of Global Reason, is based on the indestructible technology of seeing

through one's thoughts hence potential crime is spotted on time. In dystopias authored by Zamyatin and Marsov there is no trace of the ancient ideologies heritage. It is replaced with blind obedience. The utopian human is mentally and morally degraded due to the submissiveness towards authority, but also because the dependence on technology makes a person mathematically easily recognized. The rebellious I-330 reproaches D 503 for that dependence, saying "numbers crawled over you like lice" (Zamyatin 1952: 153). The scope and effectiveness of the wielded power is to be determined by Integral—"the agitating spacecraft" (Leinwand 1998: 200). Before he joined the conspirators, D 503 writes about the craft that it "will be like a flaming Tamerlane of happiness" (Zamyatin 1952: 79). The mounds of skulls are represented here by the "mounds" of standardized minds. Having gone over to the rebels' side, D 503 still wants to use Integral, but this time to destroy The One State itself. But the Mephi Revolution ends in defeat. After the operation for the removal of his imagination, D 503 writes his last note: "No more delirium, no absurd metaphors, no feelings-only, facts" (Zamyatin 1952: 217).

In that context, a victory of "facts" over feelings means a victory of the totalitarian rule. Anti-utopian novels by Zozulya and Zamyatin were created under the influence of events of War Communism, while the extraordinary anti-utopia *Leningrad* by Mikhail Kozyrev (1892-1942) was written in 1926 against the backdrop of the NEP, at the height of its success (Kozyriev 2014). The style of the latter can be described with the words of Zamyatin, "no absurd metaphors", only facts matter. The author, called the Russian Swift, enjoyed huge popularity in the 1920s. He, like Zamyatin, read aloud fragments of his dystopia to his friends, not suspecting that there are informers among them. The nameless protagonist of *Leningrad*, a worker of the Azov's plant in St. Petersburg, has a rich revolutionary past. In 1913, he gets battered during the May Day demonstration and is taken from the street to the prison hospital. To avoid deportation, or maybe even execution, he yields to persuasion of a fakir who stays in the same hospital, and promises that he will put him into lethargy for a few days and revive him in the cemetery. But the awakening comes after thirty-seven years. Miserable residents of Leningrad that he meets after waking up refrain from giving him any support, as helping beggars is banned. He tries to steal a roll at the bakery but gets caught and arrested. Theft is punishable by up to ten years in prison. Fortunately, he has a worker's card from pre-revolutionary times when he worked in the Novy Azov plant, which saves him from trouble. On seeing the card, the court absolves him of the charge, as the binding class law allows, in special circumstances,

a proletarian to dispose of the property belonging to a member of the bourgeoisie. He is given a carer, who explains to him all the changes that took place after the October Revolution. Thus he learns that the proletariat—the new elite of the society—comprises of former revolutionaries and party activists with their families. Now they enjoy many comforts and privileges allowing them to work only two hours a day. Yet, they are prohibited from getting in touch with the “bloodsuckers”, as the bourgeoisie is called. In exchange for the comforts of life, the proletariat is subjected to close scrutiny by the secret police. Every day till late at night, each of them completes a questionnaire on one’s daily activities broken down into minutes. The questionnaire is then examined by the carer of the relevant residential block, empowered to search particular flats. The rule is: if you have a clean conscience, there is nothing you should worry about. The lowest part of the “new bourgeoisie” class includes also ordinary workers, exploited by the Soviet state to the same extent as they used to be under the Tsarist regime. Thus, they are coerced into sixteen hours of hard physical work a day and into living in terrible conditions, but they do not try to rebel because of the lack of class conscience. Rare cases of law violation by the proletarians result in their demotion to the lower social class. According to the penal code, the bourgeoisie is subject to even heavier penalties, including capital punishment. The awoken from lethargy a proletarian becomes journalists’ favourite overnight. The Soviet authorities grant him a comfortable flat, previously confiscated from a granddaughter of the Tsarist officer, as well as a high pension, a car with a driver, and free meals in the government canteen. He is irritated that the proletarians he meets cannot say a word of their own but cite leaders of the Revolution. And as they do not know quotations relevant to the contemporary state of affairs, they never discuss matters of current politics. Invited by his neighbours for tea, he finds himself in a cluttered living room full of knick-knacks from the previous era, but in a corner of the room, below the golden inscription “Lenin’s area”, there are icons with faces of communist leaders. Even playing cards bear their images.

Mikhail Kozyrev captured the characteristics of the party upstarts, typical of NEP times, and the fact that they covered their conformism with the help of the Marxist phraseology. On the initiative of Lenin, every few years there were purges in the Bolsheviks’ ranks, relieving them of con men, opportunists and careerists. Shortly after the introduction of NEP and following a resolution of the Tenth Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), over 24% of the Party members were deprived of a membership card (*Bol’shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*

1934: 653), and four years later, after the Thirteenth Congress in 1925, the Party was reduced by a further 25% of the members, in order to adopt about million next communists (TSK KPSS 1939: 259). During those purges, the censors allowed to publish satirical comments on the reviving bourgeoisie, the weekly *Krokodil* [Crocodile] was leading the way. In the Kozyrev's anti-utopia the parodies of the "new man" emerge, as the ignoramus and the conformist, who submits without any resistance to propaganda manipulation. Widespread hypocrisy and social injustice soon provoke the risen from the dead revolutionary to action. Kozyrev hid name of his literary hero. Anti-utopia Leningrad gives the impression of narrative devoted to presentation way of forming the underground conspiracy. Regime agitators and censors were going to be used for propaganda purposes risen revolutionist as a relic of the past. They created him a false biography in such a way that according to it he was exiled in Siberia several dozen times and sentenced to hang seven times but still each time he managed to escape the pursuers. His protest against the censors' manipulation results in the first conflict with the authorities. A censor patiently explains to him that in the Soviet state anything is better than in the Tsarist regime, so the censors must be more effective too. His personal carer of hero advised him not to worry over the distorted biography so much, because in the world around them apart from the idiots nobody reads books, besides idiots while decent people are impressed only by covers. Soon in the press accusations against him appear. His personal carer reproaches him for addressing topics reserved exclusively for the twenty-five top party leaders, which is breaking the law. He is criticized for not maintaining class vigilance and for being in contact with members of the bourgeoisie which is illegal. Repeated denunciations in the press eventually bring about his demotion to the lower social class, which he welcomes. From now on, he can freely organize revolutionary groups. Unfortunately, there is a traitor among the conspirators and the armed riot scheduled on 1 May 1951 ends with the massacre of the workers. The history has come full circle. The workers again stood up to fight for a better life. Their first defeat was adopted as a boost in the quest for revenge.

## Conclusion

Totalitarian terror, exposed in novels by Zozulya, Zamyatin and Kozyrev, was to be fuelled by the Marxist-Leninist dialectics of class struggle, but in rural Russia with the consistently implemented policy of NEP the class revolution would eventually

come to an end. Yet Stalin added fuel to the flames of the Revolution by deciding that the *kulaks* were a separate social class of exploiters which should be exterminated. The fifteenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1927 was said to have re-established serfdom in the country, but the most brutal methods of fighting with villagers within the framework of the collectivization were employed only after the publication of Stalin's article The Year of the Great Breakthrough in *Pravda* [Truth] on 7 November 1929. The slogan popularized by propagandists, "Eliminate the *kulaks* as a class", served as justification for the mass murder. Literary equivalents of such propagandists depicted by Platonov use propaganda slogans in various combinations, helplessly citing party leaders and timidly following one another in order to observe political correctness.

In 1929 Platonov wrote the novel *Chevengur*, about a rule of Bolsheviks in a remote village beyond the Urals. The village Chevengur is a microcosm of revolutionary Russia. A small group of people pretending to be communists, in fact local idlers and nitwits, confident of validity of their beliefs, decided to round up all people belonging to all the class enemies in the market square, including former shop assistants and widows of the expelled bourgeoisie and kulaks. Then, they are clubbed to death, shot, or driven away. In January and February 1930, party activists with the help of the army and the NKVD forced sixty million peasants to join collective farms. The eradication of the "kulaks" became one of the main themes of the anti-utopia *The Foundation Pit* written by Andrei Platonov in the same year. On establishing the kolkhoz "General Line", proletarian activists pull frightened opponents of the collectivization from their houses and kill most of them on the spot. The rest of the victims are floated on a kulak's raft down the river. The scale of crimes committed during the collectivization was so great that on 2 March 1930 Stalin published in *Pravda* the article *Dizzy with Success*, in which he condemned overzealous party activists. Soon they were accused of working in favour of enemies of the Soviet Union and being Trotskyist spies. A parody of Stalin's belated justice is showed by Platonov in his dystopia *Chevengur* (1930), in which the county authorities send army to the place of where the *kulaks* were massacred of the *kulaks* on assignment to bring lawlessness of the local activists to an end. Discussed here examples of anti-utopian literature provide parodic portrayals of tragic people devastated by the dogma of interclass hatred, but mostly of people ignorant of their situation, deprived of family and religion. To accomplish the ideological transformation, the all-embracing desacralization of the Soviet society was indispensable. Before the Revolution, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky

and Gorky, being under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, proclaimed the death of God and prepared the so called “god-building”, i.e. a materialistic religion of the new man (Lunacharsky 1909). During the Revolution, Lunacharsky, as the People’s Commissar for Education, believed that the Soviet man was a link in the chain of changes that would lead him to the position of a superhuman (Rosenthal 2010: 69). The Proletkult literature was to provide that religion with spiritual strength.

In 1919 Lunacharsky “was extolling Proletkult as a new incarnation of the “Church militant”, as distinct from the “Church triumphant”, a classless society (Rosenthal 2010: 160). The given materialistic religion of the new man was embedded, against the intentions of Lenin, in the founding myth of the worker-peasant State, yet it did not transform a Soviet proletarian into a superman. Quite the reverse, it brought ideological chaos. In Platonov’s dystopia *The Foundation Pit* (1930), the workers digging foundation trenches for the “shared, all-proletarian house” lose faith in the sense of their work after the death of an orphan girl, Nastya, a symbol of hopes for happiness of future generations. Around 1930, Stalin started to cool the revolutionary frenzy among the Soviet people. The ideological radicalism, meaning Trotskyism, was eradicated as much as the counterrevolutionary activity was. During the Great Terror (1936-1938), the parabolic novels of the social science fiction genre, standing against any kind of the authoritarian government, ceased to appear. The anti-utopian literature stimulated critical thinking of the system of the communist government, therefore, it was banned by the censors. Some of the above mentioned anti-utopias became known to Soviet readers in the late 1980s, the rest of them came onto the market only after the fall of communism. At present, anti-utopias by Zamiatin and Platonov are required readings in Russian schools, which raises hopes for happiness of future generations.

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*The Analysis of the Element of Space in Negative Utopias*  
*by Antoni Lange, Jan Dobraczyński & Vladimír Páral*

ALEKSANDRA PALUCH

## Relational Character of Space

Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz proposes to comprehend space from the perspective of the “hermeneutics of place”. Namely, understanding space means treating it as a relation rather than an ultimate existence. The source of every space, that is to say realized space, lies in sensation, experience, mood, and action. This is the life experience that establishes space, not the other way round. The space of life is subjective, relativized, but primarily emotional, full of particular meanings and content (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 10-13). The hermeneutic perspective enables to treat space not only as a place or a territory. Analysing selected aspects of space, the importance of the perception of space, its determination, sense of social systems, relationships between individuals, communities and even civilizations in the negative literary utopias can be noticed. The vision of an alternate reality is also described as a spatial vision (expressed as a territory, a specific place for the possibility of (re)life that has boundaries and tangential places as well as an abstract area in respect to the possibility of action). When talking about literary utopias we treat them as those of literary texts that present decrease of the world, society; thus they are the opposite of a perfect, utopian vision—the opposite of positive utopia.

The Platonian legend about Atlantis should be claimed as a crucial text for creating and developing utopia—a new literary genre. It seems that positive literary utopias are related rather to this myth, and generally a picture of a perfect world. On the other hand, negative utopias show a loss of the god-like light (Juszczyk 2014: 15)<sup>1</sup>.

It is worth to instance Joanna Czaplińska who claims positive utopias present to a reader these spheres of a social life that need to be changed when we want to reach perfection. There can also be included a plan of an action which helps to reach goals. What is more, negative utopias are nothing more but extrapolation of an existing order, an obscure vision of a diminishing society which not only will not reach perfection, but also will become its opposition (Czaplińska 2001: 30-31). Negative utopias are perceived as their (i.e. positive utopias) extreme opposites, based on a completely dystopian concept of reality (Juszczyk 2014: 91). It should not be forgotten that there is such kind of dependency in every perception—this assumption is a base for the aforementioned analysis of the space category in the discussed literary texts. As it is emphasized by Krzysztof M. Maj, every utopia (no matter: negative or positive) is both a dialogical and critical genre (Maj 2014: 163).

Space, as one of the literary elements presented in negative utopias, plays a significant role in defining characters' ideas and values. The awareness of limits and the lack of this awareness, or the moment of coming to the realization that they exist situate utopian relatively to anti-utopian elements. The division also relates to a closed space of orders, bans, limitations of characters' liberties (these actions misinterpret the principles of utopia), as well as the space "beyond", so the space of "normality". However, it is important to remember that characters' ideas and values which are noticed by readers do not always relate to literary implementations which are, above all, associated with narrator's limited knowledge or psychic evolution of the main character. Not only is the element of space limited to the area of life, but it also includes the sphere of values, outlook, and habits. By forbidding, it is possible to influence people's behaviour, who adapting to new reality, will be stuck in not perfect world or will stand up to it and fight for their own utopia. This raises the question: to what extent the space of "my" utopia may be the space of the utopia of "someone else"? Thus the space is both the territory (distinguished by ideological distinctness, being an utopian and dystopian place) and the area of life (the area of enslavement

<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations from non-English texts are mine.

by totalitarianism, consumption, civilization, ideology, or technology). Moreover, space may also be a battlefield of symbolic power. According to Elżbieta Rybicka, space as a battlefield is not an immovable object but it exists as a dynamic part of the relation, expressed with forward planning in the processes of various strategies' collision conflict (Rybicka 2011: 203). Spatial creations in the novel are in opposition to each other to form constitute grounds of their being and serve indirect characterization of literary characters (Markiewicz 1996: 139). Consequently, Lyman Tower Sargent asserts, that "in our pride we commit utopia and violate the boundaries of our allotted sphere" (Sargent 1994: 27).

This chapter focuses on the element of space in three novels: *Miranda* by Antoni Lange, *Wyczerpać morze* [*To Drain the Sea*] by Jan Dobraczyński, and *Země Žen* [*World of Woman*] by Vladimír Páral. As Ivo Pospíšil states considering the issue of utopia—the positive and the negative ones, they relate to those social projects which existed in the past, i.e. feudalism, capitalism, fascism, nationalism, communism. On the one hand, it is possible to present the positive ideal (the adjective *positive* is significant in this context); on the other hand, the negative image that is rooted in criticism of an ideal can be shown, concerns which result from fulfilling utopian visions or an attempt to put them into effect (Pospíšil 2014: 14). Negative utopias are, therefore, the literary presentation of an ideal that is available "not for everyone."

## The Limits of Utopia in Antoni Lange's *Miranda*

*Miranda* by Antoni Lange<sup>2</sup> is a kind of review and literary journey at the same time. In this novel of 1924 the writer fates travelling Pole, caught up in the war. The story covers the years 1915-1919, Jan Podobłoczny, the main character, fascinated by the esoteric, has a chance to get to know the society considered utopian. Jan had met Miranda when he was still in Poland, before his essential journey started. This female character is the key to the whole work, as Miranda, Damajanti (living in a utopian island and representing a superman) and Lenora (spectrum materialized by Miranda) are three emanations of one character. Jan falls in love with Lenora and after leaving Poland his beloved appeared in a form of Damajanti. It is worth mentioning

<sup>2</sup> A Polish writer, a translator and a literary critic. He lived since 1862 to 1929. The greater part of his work is poetry but he is also considered a precursor of Polish science fiction.

that the author himself mentions about the three threats when he refers to his own literary work. The first one is the analysis of the opportunity for creating a perfect society—a utopia; the second threat applies to achieving excellence in human existence by dual transformation—one of the needs for such is the psychological transformation—the one that is ideal due to Nirwidium; the other need, which is the third threat in *Miranda* at the same time, is the technical transformation (Lange 1987: 6-7).

Lange's work is a literary journey to the land of happiness, which was able to become such, and it seemed to be such indeed as Tommaso Campanella describes. The traveller, Jan Podobłoczny, led by coincidence, reaches the place described in *The City of the Sun*—after thirty years of its publication. Jan learns the story which contradicts utopianism proposed in the seventeenth century. Thirty years after publishing *Civitas Solis*, the crisis began and the golden era of Sun residents ended. All ideas proposed in the famous utopia turned out to be illusion, which did not prevent the allegedly ideal system from collapse. The republic would have been the most fortunate in the whole world if it had not been for the degradation of human nature, as Wiśwamitra, one of the residents, claims.

Science fiction prose such as *Miranda* shows many utopias both positive and negative ones, related to stories about an unusual invention—according to Smuszkiewicz, fantastic technological inventions or extraordinary scientific discoveries appear in novels which are in fact the reflection of the reality. As a result, literary elements undergo metamorphosis (Smuszkiewicz 1987: 6). In *Miranda*, the invention was Nirwidium that is the punctum of material (Karel Čapek defined it as the absolute). Nirwidium becomes the base of the power of Sun, therefore, it is possible to solidify the astral and create a superhuman being. Overcoming the material form, it becomes possible to achieve utopia—Lange writes:

[...] only when the miserable human being material has been overcome [...] when he prevailed on our island spirit liberated from the flesh, only then an important realization of this world described by Campanella could begin (Lange 1987: 121).

In *Miranda* the utopian elements are represented through the city. The space beyond the city is anti-utopian, where people still wage wars, focus their life on possessing goods, becoming richer and more powerful. As Paweł Wojciechowski maintains, Lange affirms the image of integrated culture. The particular female characters are personifications of specific cultures: Keety (*Miranda*) corresponds to the European culture, Lenora embodies the Orient, whereas both, combined together, are

reflected by Damajanti. Whilst the city means peace, happiness, homeostasis, harmony and nirvana (the Orient), European culture stands for the threat of hell, guilt, punishment, and sin (Wojciechowski 2010: 200-201).

However, there are some elements in city which contradict the utopian image of the perfect society of its residents. It is possible to notice them from the perspective of a real human being since the problem lies in the fact that life of the person of Nirwidium is led by different values and this lifestyle requires numerous sacrifices from the non-Nirwidium people. The writer makes it clear that the freedom offered by the mythical society will not satisfy everyone. This is not only a matter of internal freedom traps, but above all the problem of lack of maturity to accept it (Wojciechowski, 2010: 211).

Not everyone is “mature” enough to be ready for rejecting their material body and existing as an astral body itself. Rebels propagate the idea of free will, which meets with incomprehension. They claim that the real free will is inseparably connected with the material body of a human being which allows to make an effort, take a risk, cater needs, or fighting for survival.

We are in complete bondage [...]—concludes Czerwaka—we lost the most precious things, namely the intensity of the spirit, effort, relentless sense of risk and struggle for existence, i.e. all of this that develops real freedom of the human will (Lange 1987: 90).

The residents, who are striving for perfection, cannot accept the rebels. Thus the rebels are sent into exile to live in Kalana on the fringe of City of the Sun and the boarder with Teluria. According to the residents of the city, Kalana is famous for pillage and banditry. Despite the attempts to provide them with the opportunity to make an honest living, Kalana’s residents did not want to obey law and order.

According to Buczyńska-Garewicz, experienced space surrounds people is related to their lifestyle, and is relative, not absolute. Although it is impossible to mark out its borders, experienced space ought not to be called definite for its open and continuously variable; its mobile horizon results from the subjective character of existence (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 20-21). The relativity of space indicates also that it is perceived as utopian or anti-utopian world. On the one hand, the rebels reject this kind of utopia; on the other hand, they choose freedom. Even though the change is not imposed on them, they must abandon the city, their previous living space, as they are considered to be the strangers. According to Jacek Zbigniew Górniewicz, the strangers may be perceived as an immigrant in a foreign country, who are trying

to enter the new world, which rejects them at the same time. In consequence, they begin to consider the world as gloomy and hostile place, and they become such themselves (Górnikiewicz 2014: 366-367). Nirwidium is the only way to achieve the ideal, therefore, it requires a sacrifice. However, one can question whether the ideal equals sacrifice or compulsion. The space of the city is closed, not only because of its geographical location as an island but also due to the fact that it is considered to be a mental space not allowing different choices. Therefore, assuming that not only does the existence of places depend on human beings but also human beings are dependent upon places, the places in which we live may determine to a certain extent who we are. The relationship between a man and its place appears to be peaceful coexistence, reciprocal, co-defining (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 36-37). Therefore, the rebels do not attempt to return to the city as they do not want the city to be their place. What they want is to shape space according to their own rules and principles.

### *Wyczerpać morze* and the Problem of the Responsibility for Place

In *Miranda*, space is a matter of choice. A different situation is presented in *Wyczerpać Morze* [*To Drain the Sea*] by Jan Dobraczyński, published in 1961. The novel shows the post-apocalyptic image of The Old Continent coming to an end. In the future, nuclear bomb explosions occur and nearly the entire territory of Europe becomes destroyed. Newly arrived Africans arrange temporary rescue camps so the survivors could save their lives. Human activity creates a particular place as easily as this place can be devastated or demolished, for the human place may become impoverished due to spiritual destruction, lack of former mythology and sense. The surroundings ought not to be material only but also spiritual. One must be responsible for a place and this responsibility is in the same time human self-responsibility. The place we stay in shows who we are (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 38-39). The catastrophe in Europe is not only the result of the bomb explosion, but all the actions leading to the lack of devotion to a place are at the root of the disaster. In the novel, the space of a small village is presented in the beginning. Then, the village transforms into workers' housing estate, into economic migrants' ghetto, into rescue camp for the European survivors. It seems as if the space had always been temporary, like the immediate attempt to solve problems, but nobody wanted to be responsible for that place as they did not believe it could have lasted for ever.

The space of camps for the Europeans is the space in which African workers lived previously. That area becomes adapted to the needs of survivors (there is a hospital, masses are celebrated, dancing parties are held, and even a theatre is going to come into being). However, this space is not at all temporary. It lacks perspectives for the future—the camp fulfils the function of a place of death. Beyond that space there is no other life but it itself does not guarantee surviving. African people do not try to rebuilt Europe or move European citizens to their territory. They stay with them until European people eventually die of the radiation sickness caused by combings. African people make use of this situation and conduct research on the effects of the bomb explosion in order to prepare for such a scenario in the future and be able to assure African citizens safety.

The notions of desire of revenge or recolonization would not be accurate to describe this phenomenon but repeatability of situations and behaviour draw reader's attention. The Africans do not want to dominate the Europeans but they do not attempt to help them either. According to Bauman, the consecutive cycles of heydays and crises leave behind immigrants trying to settle down in countries they have to live in now. These immigrants have no other choice but to become another ethnic minority. Native residents, however, must learn to live in the neighbourhood of diasporas. Both immigrants and natives are expected to adapt to these conditions. Tendencies to separate may be noticed on both sides and are followed by self-intensification of chain of behaviour (Bauman 2011: 57-58). The nature of Africans shows that such a chain is likely to be broken.

It is hard to expect that the space, which, for Africans, was of European domination, influence, continual appropriates and transformations, it has been somehow recovered and would become common again. As Ryszard Stefański maintains, European prosperity had been created through colonies exploitation and an attempt to keep them. Even though European modernity had its foundations of national and social class antagonisms, those antagonisms appeared to unitive at the same time: European nations were civilized enough to "enlighten savage and primitive humanity" but, despite the idea of equality propagated in Europe, equal treatment towards Asian or African organizations was almost impossible to imagine (Stefański 2014: 137-138). African space seems to be independent—the former colonies do not exist anymore, European domination has ended. However, Africa is still the part of other culture, which is much wider than African culture itself. African people, undergoing the process of colonization, who are strangers in both their land and Europe, have to

look for their own identity because, according to Bauman, the identity is not given to anyone once and for all but one has to own it, it needs to be taken into possession again and again, and every time one should choose from a different set of opportunities—which, as far as we know, is going to change but we do not know its direction (Bauman 2004: 30). Therefore, Zekić claims that a matter of individuality becomes not only a problem of an individual, but of the whole nation which, when asserting its cultural uniqueness, should also define its identity (Zekić 2008: 68). For the African, finding their own identity means complete separation from Europe. Therefore, their passive attitude—lack of response—appears to be a kind of an answer to European long-lasting domination, dictating terms, values, outlook, and lifestyle. However, it is worth considering how far Africa could function on its own and to what extent European values are strange. From European perspective, the lack of dialogue with the others appeared to be their end, as Bauman states: We accept a dialogue, reach an agreement how to control these totally dissolute and liberate interdependences, therefore, we sail together. Or we are like a shipwreck (Bauman 2005: 4).

For the Europeans the space of camps was introduced in an unnatural way—their inhabitants were referred to that space and they had to adapt to it. They were forced to live within its closed borders, there was no life for them beyond that space; living there did not provide them with the promise of surviving, but only gave them a shelter until their death.

### Artificial Divisions and Borders as the Source of Homelessness

In the Czech novel from 1987 *Země žen* [*World of Woman*] by Vladimír Páral<sup>3</sup>, spatial creations are also artificial places—material but not spiritual ones. Inhabiting means openness to different content which has not been acquired yet. The act of inhabiting does not narrow the world down but it expands it. However, cutting off from the broad horizon or closing oneself in borders may be regarded as homelessness and inability to live in their own house (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 40). The characters in the book live in space, but they also create space which is subordinate to ideology, space of division, separation, and diversity.

<sup>3</sup> A Czech writer born in 1932. His work is characterized by a description of social phenomena (motive for many of his novels known as little stabilization) often dominated by irony and sarcasm.



In the novel, Vladímir Páral presented the mechanism of falling into extremity, the mechanism of discrimination being rooted in the attempts to introduce equality of rights, and the mechanism of taking over the power and being subordinate to it. This negative utopia tells about the world which is created once again, however, this time by women who are in charge of organizing social life, hold office, and form the army in this brand new world. Men are temporarily isolated, as their role is limited to serving women. In the novel, the reader learns about the reality described by both men and women. What is important: descriptions are varied because the male protagonists are divided into two groups: men who do not like the present reality and those who have not adjusted to it but do not oppose the existing order. The same applies to women: there are those who fully accept the changes and those who want to bring back the past.

As a result of increasing frustration of women, who were feeling sexually discriminated, the reality, which was familiar to the reader, has changed. The development of technology led to changes in lifestyle, which seemed to be faster and easier, but not to women. In fact, women had to run the house, grow up children, and take care of their husbands. Men's activity did help make life easier but it was only men's life which became easy. The miraculous invention that brought men's world to an end was the MAXIM system, which helped to maximize and optimize user's life. After introducing data such as health condition, job, family, social life, dreams, or expectations, the system proposed solutions to make life better. This way, men began to use healthy diet, go jogging every night, and finally leave their homes to live in the other part of the city, called the city of joy. They spent there four days in men company only; they played football, drank beer and barbecued. Therefore, their family lives were thought to improve, since the separation from their families helped them avoid to be stuck in a rut. While men were staying in their men part of the city, women were living together; apart from the absence of their husbands their lives were just the same.

The situation changes when the foreign extraterrestrial civilization orders to introduce remedial programme under the threat of the Earth destruction. The programme involves destruction of weapons and technology aimed to spread domination and violence, transferring all the power to women, and reeducation of men. As soon as all the necessary changes are done, the new order and the new division between women and men is introduced. In place of the City of Joy there is a men's camp which residents are allowed to meet with their families only at the weekends,

provided they got a pass (if a man was not married, a bachelor, or a divorcee, a pass was given under extraordinary circumstances only). Men do only physical jobs, they are taught to do the housework and take care of children.

Seeking for better life, close to the ideal one, men created the space which in fact has become their prison. They are stuck in the camp, in the city sector for men whose presence there cannot be called residing. Every day is limited to physical jobs, exercising and resocialization—acquisition of women's outlook. Men are deprived of any space (their houses are subordinate to women's will, who are now in power; men cannot make themselves at their own homes, they are not even guests there, the only role they have is carrying out women's orders: cooking, cleaning, serving). As a result a kind of dehumanization of a man can be noticed—living is a typically human occurrence, it belongs and is significant only for a human condition (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 129). Men do not feel the closeness, intimacy of the place they stay in and, therefore, they are homeless. Homelessness means lack of an own place and lack of assimilated surrounding area (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 130). The camp is the place where men stay passively—like the Europeans in the idea of Dobraczyński.

In Páral's novel, the thesis about negative effects separating people, creating stereotypes, artificial borders, imposing roles is repeated several times: talking about the past city division into the City of Joy and the family city, one of the characters calls the past something fabulous, but the life in separation appears to be the tragic result of actions aiming to divide, not coexist: “—It was fantastic.—But it ended badly.—Yes, like everything that divides people. [...] But every division of people leads to disaster” (Páral 1999: 168). Although the bygone City of Joy was in the vicinity, so it was comprehended and inhabited by men (not women), the camp is something entirely foreign, and therefore it cannot be understood.

The life in the camp is in contradiction to men's life before the MAXIM system was introduced and after that, too. Even though they also stay in the men's part of the city, among almost only other men, they are enslaved by women—subordinate to their power and discipline. Men are surrounded by nothing that could bring them entertainment, or even necessities; food is limited to simple dishes which contain no meat—meat was considered to be the source of men's violence (women could still eat meat dishes). What is unusual, women who stay in the camp—holding military offices, government representatives—also adapt their lifestyles to the conditions dictated by that place. For instance, Renata Souhalová gets rid of her femininity, she perceives the relationship between a man and a woman merely as men's need for

copulation, where men are animals which are not able to love. She does not mind peculiar, severe living conditions in the camp, as she does not know any other world.

Taking over the power and reorganizing space, women do not abolish the division created by the MAXIM system, but instead they turn the poles of the situation the other way round. Michael Kimmel, who wrote about social structures of gender relations, describes the notion of exercising power. According to Kimmel, the quality of exercising power is not dependent on gender which may be proved by such women as Indira Ghandi or Margaret Thatcher. The particular position requires specific behaviour from the person who holds it, regardless of their gender (Kimmel 2015: 162). In order to fight for women's rights, restrain women discrimination, and social dissatisfaction, the new system, in fact, gave rise to violence, inequality, dictatorship, and stopped the progress. The image of women is changing in the novel from victims to persecutors. Limiting one's world by limiting space leads to walling it off from the others. The change, which was introduced after the threat of planet destruction, only intensified existing spatial and spiritual divisions, announcing revolution which might not have been stopped. However, if the revolution itself appears to be destructive, the world created by men and then "improved" by women at the end of the novel seems to disappear.

## Conclusion

Referring to subjective experiences, the notion of space appears to be highly relative and, therefore, it is necessary to introduce the notion of experience to the analysis of the element of space (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2006: 13). It is worth noticing that the vision of an alternative reality, or the reality at all, which appears in negative utopias, is also a spatial vision, comprehended in such categories as familiarity, strangeness, otherness, membership, freedom, captivity, or the opportunity to live or survive, or develop. According to Rybicka, literary narrative maps equally create and hack ideological maps; what is more, they build critical cartographies and counter maps (Rybicka 2014: 367). The analysis of the element of space as the established existence, not the absolute one, indicates that it is subjective and of relative character rooted in relationality. The negative utopias discussed in this chapter show the importance of the element of space in translating into spatial categories such themes as power struggle, domination, sense of security, chance of development, and experiences presented in the novels discussed above.

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*Libertarian Utopia and Racist Dystopia: Social  
Commentary in Robert Heinlein's "Farnham's Freehold"*

PIOTR STASIEWICZ

### Robert Heinlein's 1960s Novels

In her essay published in *Science Fiction Studies* Julia List argues that publication of several key science fiction novels in the 1960s, Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, marks the turning point in the history of the genre. She calls that decade "a period when the genre's focus shifted dramatically towards exploring the social ramifications of scientific developments rather than the intricacies of the technologies themselves" (List 2009). Heinlein's novel, published in 1961, seems to be the most important of these three because its controversial meaning resulted in strong feedback, both positive (Hugo award for the best novel) and negative (banning of the book from the public school libraries). The most important aspect of *Stranger in a Strange Land* was developing public awareness of the genre and the constantly growing, widespread notion that a science fiction novel may carry an important message on various aspects of contemporary world. The two remaining Robert Heinlein's novels, the 1964's *Farnham's Freehold* and the 1966's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, also tackle various social topics making them a form of social trilogy, in which the author tries to produce a sharp critique of the contemporary society.

The novels share one common strategy: although the plot of every one of them is set in the future, their true message deals with, more or less indirectly, the state

and intricacies of the modern society. For the first time in American science fiction literature a novel using the plot and setting of the typical science fiction narrative is used to tell a story that relates closely to the everyday reality of a potential reader. This strategy was used a decade earlier by Polish writer Stanislaw Lem, whose several early works, although appearing to be typical interstellar futuristic narratives, in fact contained readable allusions to the political and social reality of the communist Poland of 1950's (see Leś 1998). Lem's books, for example *Star Diaries* and *Eden*, are marked by heavy use of utopian and dystopian narrative strategies (see Fenrns 1999; Jameson 2011; Claeys 2013; Blaim 2013; Juszczuk 2014) in order to discuss topics that could not be addressed directly under the scrutiny of communist censorship. Heinlein uses a similar strategy and, although he is not restricted by direct censorship, from many author's statements one could learn that he was aware of a potential turmoil his novels could raise. Therefore, similarly to Lem, he uses science fiction disguise which allows him to produce a commentary on the contemporary society. The purpose of this paper is not to deliver a detailed interpretation of each of the mentioned novels, not only due to the limitations of this paper but mainly because such interpretations already exist (Patterson, Thornton 2001; Cusack 2001). Instead, I will concentrate on utopian/dystopian aspect of Heinlein's 1960s novels.

*Stranger in a Strange Land* is a unique science fiction novel for a number of reasons. Firstly, its science fiction setting is mostly a pretext: although it is set in the future when technological advancement allows interstellar travel, the society portrayed in the novel resembles the society of the early 1960s almost in every way. Secondly, the cross-cultural clash, typical of science fiction, is reversed: it is not the Earthlings who explore the outer worlds, it is the Earth that is being explored in the novel. Thirdly, a large part of the narrative is satirical in mood and form, and includes strong mentor statements voiced by Jubal Hershaw, which makes the novel a hybrid, as it is composed of a satirical novel and a social commentary. One element of the novel's poetics, however, should be strongly emphasized. Like many classical exploratory science fiction novels, *Stranger* has its roots in the Enlightenment narratives. Although its travel pattern is reversed, it still resembles one of the classical texts of the Enlightenment—*Persian Letters* by Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu. Montesquieu's epistolary novel was revolutionary because, instead of giving a typical exploratory narrative depicting faraway or imaginative lands, it portrayed the eighteen-century Europe. In *Persian Letters* it is the eponymous Persians



who come to Europe and observe it as a great curiosity. This strategy is used by Montesquieu in order to provide an acute satire on many crucial elements of the social life of his times: religion, the form of the government, law and culture. Heinlein, in his famous novel, reproduces the French philosopher's technique and does so in order to achieve the same goal—provide a sharp critical judgment of his times. Similarly to the Persian travelers in *Persian Letters*, the main protagonist of the novel, a Martian named Micheal Smith, being completely unfamiliar with the most elementary aspects of human and earthly life, and culture, observes it as the highest curiosity. Also as in *Persian Letters*, Heinlein uses in *Stranger in a Strange Land* the opportunity to provide a severe criticism of the crucial elements of the contemporary world—religion (see chapters XIV, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXXV), sex (numerous remarks throughout the book), the government (chapter XXXV), democracy, law, and culture (chapter XIII), and so on.

It is the question whether *Stranger in a Strange Land* delivers a coherent intellectual alternative for the criticized “way of the world”, thus making it a form of a utopian narrative. The central element of the plot, the creation of The Church of All Worlds, proved to be highly influential as *Strange in a Strange Land*, along with *The Lord of the Rings* and *Steppenwolf*, is well-known for being one of the beloved readings of the flower-power generation of the late 1960s. Although the novel resembles a utopian narrative in some aspects one must not forget that the crucial elements of the novel are numerous remarks of the second main character, Jubal Hershaw, who was highly critical of many of Smith's actions. Heinlein himself also stated that his novel was not conceived as a coherent proposition of how the world should be reorganized, it was merely an intellectual exercise inviting a potential reader to review his basic notions:

I was not giving answers. I was trying to shake the reader loose from some preconceptions and induce him to think for himself, along new and fresh lines. In consequence, each reader gets something different out of that book because he himself supplies the answers [...]. It is an invitation to think—not to believe (Nicholls 1990).

*The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* refers strongly to the utopian narrative strategy as well. The history of the Moon's penal colony's rise to independence intentionally bears resemblance to the actual historical events of the American Revolution of 1776. Similarly to previous novels, *The Moon is A Harsh Mistress* proposes clear social com-

mentary combined with a vision of a perfect society. Two sides of the political conflict that drive the plot of the novel also reflect the ideological dichotomy of *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*: a satirical view of the old, corrupted and bureaucratic Earth, and ideal utopian state of the Moon organized, or rather unorganized, according to libertarian beliefs (Feofanov 1995). Heinlein's vision of the ideal state is quite straightforward: any form of government that is truly trying to govern any human activities is redundant. People are capable of running their lives without the need of any form of surveillance. Typical aspects of an oppressive state such as army, police, income tax and institutionalized justice are easily replaceable with various forms of social agreement. This notion has its roots in the most fundamental belief of libertarianism, which was stated *expressis verbis* in the novel—every state is in fact a collection of individuals, and each and every one of these individuals takes responsibility for his or her own actions, lives, and decisions.

In terms of morals there is no such thing as a 'state'. Just men. Individuals. Each responsible for his own acts. I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them tolerable, I tolerate them; if I find them too obnoxious, I break them. I am free, because I know that I alone am morally responsible for everything that I do (Heinlein 1997: 216).

In creating his vision of an ideal libertarian state Heinlein refers strongly to the history of the United States, not only by making lunar revolutionists proclaim independence exactly three hundreds years after the American Declaration of Independence. The social life of the lunar colony is obviously shaped in the image of *modus vivendi* of the eighteen-century colonists and the nineteenth-century conquerors of the Wild West, with significant modifications made according to Heinlein's own beliefs. Justice is served by the members of the society without professional lawyers, the death penalty is carried out for violating the rules of a social agreement, the shortage of women gives them great power and social respect, and causes men to protect them at any cost, even if they are not „their” women. Respect is considered to be the greatest value of human life, as it is gained by actions that do not conflict with freedom and possessions of other individuals. The most basic form of social organization and, in fact, the only kind of social organization, is family, but family shaped in accordance with standards completely different from the Christian ones. Marriages are polygamous, with the smallest form of marriage consisting of two men and a woman. Larger families are built around the so-called „line marriages” consisting of several dozens of members, always with a woman as a head of the family. With

every citizen of lunar nation being a member of some family, no other form of social organization or state institution is virtually needed.

The ending of *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* is mixed. Although the lunar revolution finally prevails, the main characters and actual leaders of the revolution do not take part in the new government. Professor De La Paz dies, Mannie remains an outsider and MIKE, the computer which passes himself for the revolution's leader, Adam Selene, loses his ability to communicate with humans as artificial intelligence. Such an ending might be perceived as Heinlein's regret over "innocence lost", reflecting his own views regarding transition of the United States from the "home of the brave and land of the free" to the bureaucratic society of modern America.

### *Farnham's Freehold* and Its Controversies

*Farnham's Freehold* differs from the two aforementioned novels in many ways. It is divided into two separate parts: the first one is set in a realistic setting of the early 1960's Cold War, the second part is set two thousand years later in highly transformed (socially and geographically) Northern America. The realistic part serves as a starting point of the plot, explaining why and how the following fantastic events took place. But the early part of the novel serves also as an introduction of the main theme of the novel—freedom of the individual and racial aspects of social order. The eponymous character, along with his grown-up daughter, son and wife survives the nuclear attack on the United States and finds himself in the wilderness, not knowing where or when he is. Among the survivors are also a young female friend of the family and a black servant named Joe. The survivors believe themselves to be the only people left on Earth after the nuclear war, therefore, under the command of resourceful Hubert Farnham, they start to recreate the lost civilization. However, after a couple of months, it turns out that the survivors were somehow transferred to the future. Soon they learn that as a result of the nuclear war, the whole northern hemisphere was virtually depopulated making the white race a minority in the world. White people were blamed for bringing the humanity to the verge of extinction and, in consequence, turned into slaves. The survivors from 1964 try to accommodate to the new circumstances.

*Farnham's Freehold* is often described as one of the most controversial novels in the history of science fiction. The authors of Heinlein monographs were critical of

the novel (Franklin 1980; Gifford 1980). A British author, Charles Stross, while referring to *Farnham's Freehold* and *Sixth Column*, said: "Some of his work is deeply, irredeemably flawed and should probably be taken out back and shot" (Stross 2013). It is certainly not one of Heinlein's best in terms of the plot and character development, but on the other hand its significance in raising the difficult questions of the early 1960s cannot be overlooked. Heinlein's message is highly pessimistic and not as biased towards white privileged males as it is often accused of. Any kind of social organization is, one way or the other, based on inequality and domination—societies composed of free people simply do not exist. In the short period of a Robinson-like living outside of the human society, despite Farnham's efforts, the rest of the white survivors do not treat the Negro Joe as equal and almost all of them strongly despise Farnham's idea of interracial mating in order to broaden the gene pool of a potential reborn society. In the dystopian part of the novel, when Hubert Farnham is turned into a slave and his former servant climbs the steps of the social ladder, he does not return the favor and is eager to uphold the state of social inequality making Hugh his majordomo. Thus, after losing the imperfect reality of the 1960s, after failing in creating the new society from scratch, and after a short experience of living in a dystopian future—when given a choice—Hugh decides on a risky time travel. The ending of *Farnham's Freehold* is vague—his younger female partner and he return to the past, but it is unclear whether the former state of the society is restored. It is suggested, partially explaining the title of the novel, that he lives in a state bearing resemblance to the state of nature making his own family basis for the social living.

## Evolutionary Philosophy and the Question of Race

On the intellectual level *Farnham's Freehold* contrasts the evolutionary philosophy with various forms of organized society. Hugh Farnham, being clearly Heinlein's *porte-parole* in the novel, when asked about "humanity" of his black servant, replies:

Karen, you know that color does not matter to me. I want to know other things about a man. Is his word good? Does he meet his obligations? Does he do honest work? Is he brave? Will he stand up and be counted? Joe is very much a man by all standards that interest me (Heinlein 2006: 105).

In contrast to Hugh's views any kind of society suppresses these elementary human values in favor of skin-colour based superstitions. In the dystopian part of the

novel this notion is represented by the state-organized birth control, preventing the white minority from free breeding.

It is hard not to read Heinlein's novel in a clear context of racial disturbances of his era. When Hugh and Joe talk about their present relationship in the dystopian state of black superiors, soon their conversation turns into a quarrel and the demons of the past (which, in fact, is the present at the time of the novel's publication) return:

"I could resent that."

Hugh Farnham was angry and feeling reckless. "Go ahead and resent it! I can't stop you. You're a Chosen, I'm a servant. Can I fetch your white sheet for you, Massah? What time does the Klan meet?"  
"Shut up!"

Hugh Farnham shut up. Joe went on quietly, "I won't bandy words with you. I suppose it does look that way to you. If so, do you expect me to weep? The shoe is on the other foot, that's all—and high time. I used to be a servant, now I'm a respected businessman—with a good chance of becoming a nephew by marriage of some noble family. Do you think I would swap back, even if I could? For *Duke*? Not for anybody, I'm no hypocrite. I was a servant, now you are one. What are you beefing about?"

"Joe, you were a decently treated employee. You were not a slave."

The younger man's eyes suddenly became opaque and his features took on an ebony hardness Hugh had never seen in him before. "Hugh," he said softly, "have you ever made a bus trip through Alabama? As a 'nigger'?"

"No."

"Then shut up. You don't know what you are talking about" (Heinlein 2006: 236-237).

The question of race and racial segregation is a pivotal element of the novel's message. Farnham's views are obviously shaped in the image of Heinlein's own experiences which differ significantly from WASP-oriented white conservative way of thinking, as well as from the Negro-friendly leftists' ideas. In fact, both groups take supposed racial differences for granted and consider them to be scientific facts—these facts, however, are nothing but cultural prejudices:

This matter of racial differences—or the nonsense notion of "racial equality"—had never been examined scientifically; there was too much emotion on both sides. Nobody *wanted* honest data.

Hugh recalled an area of Pernambuco he had seen while in the Navy, a place where rich plantation owners, dignified, polished, educated in France, were black, while their servants and field hands—giggling, shuffling, shiftless knuckleheads "obviously" incapable of better things—were mostly white men. He had stopped telling this anecdote in the States; it was never really believed and it was almost always resented—even by whites who made a big thing of how anxious they were to "help the American Negro improve himself." Hugh had formed the opinion that almost all of those bleeding hearts wanted the Negro's lot improved until it was *almost* as high as their own—and no longer on their consciences—but the idea that the tables could ever be turned was one they rejected emotionally.

Hugh knew that the tables could indeed be turned. He had seen it once, now he was experiencing it (Heinlein 2006: 259-260).

The matter of race itself is, according to Farnham's views, falsely regarded. In terms of sheer science, Hugh claims that as the notion of a pure race simply does not exist—at least in reference to the “whites” populating Europe and their American descendants.

But Hugh knew that the situation was still more confused. Many Roman citizens had been “black as the ace of spades” and many slaves of Romans had been as blond as Hitler wanted to be—so any “white man” of European ancestry was certain to have a dash of Negro blood. Sometimes more than a dash. That southern Senator, what was his name?—the one who had built his career on “white supremacy.” Hugh had come across two sardonic facts: This old boy had died from cancer and had had many transfusions—and his blood type was such that the chances were two hundred to one that its owner had not just a touch of the tarbrush but practically the whole tar barrel. A navy surgeon had gleefully pointed this out to Hugh and had proved both points in medical literature.

Nevertheless, this confused matter of races would never be straightened out—because almost nobody wanted the truth. [...].

Well, he knew who wasn't equal here—despite his statistically certain drop of black blood. Hugh Farnham, namely. He found that he agreed with Joe: When things were unequal, it was much nicer to be on top! (Heinlein 2006: 260-261).

Therefore, social prejudices are based on a lie, however, to the protagonist's surprise, the new “improved” society of the future is based on the same lie as well. The only thing that has been altered is that “the tables have turned” and the whites are the suppressed and enslaved minority. The black rulers are only capable of creating pseudo-feudal society founded on yet another lie. As the white elite of the 20<sup>th</sup> century believed themselves to be superior for the reasons far from the actual anthropological knowledge, current black aristocracy is eager to believe in lies and pseudo-religious explanations of the social inequality—as whites did centuries ago. Furthermore, there comes a question of the deliberate forgery of classic texts of culture. Hugh Farnham is a well-read man, although his formal education is limited to skills useful in everyday life, he is a devoted reader and he regards books as a foundation for the civilization.

He felt sudden grief that abstract knowledge of deaths of millions had not given him. Somehow, the burning of millions of books felt more brutally obscene than the killing of people. All men must die, it was their single common heritage. But a book need never die and should not be killed; books were the immortal part of man. Book burners—to rape a defenceless friendly book (Heinlein 2006: 73-74).

Thus, it is clear that his nuclear shelter has an extensive library covering almost all aspects of human knowledge and culture. When transferred to the future, Farnham learns that books and knowledge are almost non-existent in the lives of his new contemporaries and the ones that are still in use, have been forged.

Either way, the Koran had been the only book officially exempt from the torch—and Hugh harbored a suspicion that the Koran had not been spared either. He had owned a translation of the Koran, had read it several times.

He wished now that he had put it into the shelter, for the Koran as he now read it in “Language” did not match his memory. For one thing, he had thought that Mahomet was a redheaded Arab; this “Koran” mentioned his skin color repeatedly, as black. And he was sure that the Koran was free of racism. This “improved” version was rabid with it.

Furthermore, this Koran had a new testament with a martyred Messiah. He had taught and had been hanged for it—religious scrolls were all marked with a gallows. Hugh did not object to a new testament; there had been time for a new revelation and religions had them as naturally as a cat has kittens. What he objected to was some revisionist working over the words of the Prophet, apparently to make them fit this new book. That wasn’t fair, that was cheating (Heinlein 2006: 189).

Soon he learns that the whole history of mankind has been deliberately rewritten in order to present black people as the saviours of humanity.

But how about the rest of it? It says here that the United States, at the time of the war, held its black population as slaves. Somebody had chopped out a century. On purpose? Or was it honest confusion and almost no records? There had been, he knew, a great book burning for two centuries during the Turmoil, and even after the Change.

Was it lost history, like Crete? Or did the priests like it better this way?

And since when were the Chinese classed as “white” and the Hindus as “black”? Yes, purely on skin color Chinese and Japanese were as light as the average “white” of his time, and Hindus were certainly as dark as most Africans—but it was not the accepted anthropological ordering of his day.

Of course, if all they meant was skin shade—and apparently that was what they did mean—he couldn’t argue. The story maintained that the whites, with their evil ways, destroyed each other almost to the last man [...] leaving the innocent, charitable, merciful dark race—beloved by Uncle the Mighty—to inherit the Earth.

The few white survivors, spared by Uncle’s mercy, had been succored and cherished as children and now again were waxing numerous under the benevolent guidance of the Chosen. So it read (Heinlein 2006: 188).

## Contemporary Times as Racist Dystopia

The conclusions which can be drawn from that forgery are fairly obvious and for, a number of reasons, critical to understanding the Heinlein’s version of dystopia. The most important difference between *Farnham’s Freehold* and the other two “social”

novels Heinlein wrote in the 1960s is *Farnham's Freehold* depicts two organized societies instead of one. *Stranger in a Strange Land* can be regarded as a satire bearing features of an Enlightenment work on modern society in the manner of works of de Montesquieu (*Persian Letters*) or Voltaire (*L'engénu*, *The Letters of Amabed*, *The Princess of Babylon*). *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, on the other hand, is rather a straightforward utopia presenting an image of an almost ideal libertarian state without a government. In *Farnham's Freehold*, however, Heinlein places his protagonist in two states: first in the realistic environment of a contemporary America, then in the dystopian future and does so in order to put an equality mark between those two. Despite the cultural differences between the 1960s America and the pseudo-feudal state of the future, both are based on the same lie: in consequence of putting one race above the other they are incapable of seeing the truth. This way Heinlein achieves roughly the same effect as he does in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, saying that the contemporary world, or at least the United States of the early 1960s, truly is a dystopia. As it has been said before, all these the novels prove, each in its own way, that Heinlein was highly sceptical of the possibility of creating a state that would provide freedom for all of its members. The way he portrays his protagonist is the key to novel's interpretation.

Heinlein depicts Hugh Farnham not only as an outspoken libertarian but also makes it clear that many of his actions and decisions are influenced by the evolutionary philosophy. Farnham is a survivor type and that term has to be taken literally. He is ready for the nuclear "end of the world as we know it", which of course does not make him special in the times of the Cold War paranoia (Farnham's shelter resembles Heinlein's own fallout shelter in Colorado Springs). More important is the way Hugh sees and treats his family. His vision of a family life has nothing in common with traditional Christian and bourgeois "family values". For him family is just meant for breeding and nursing children, which is crucial for survival of the human race. By putting Hugh Farnham and his companions in the face of a critical situation and extreme crisis, which might cause human extinction, Heinlein contrasts his protagonist's mindset with the attitude of his family members. Even in normal life, presented in the first chapters of the novel, Hugh's ideas and views are quite unconventional. However, when he together with the rest of the survivors find themselves in the state of nature believing themselves to be the only people left on Earth—desperate times call for desperate measures. Farnham immediately loses interest in his lawful wife and encourages free sexual intercourse between the rest of the survivors—his son, his daughter, the Negro Joe, and Karen. Hugh's idea and his open relationship



with much younger Barbara immediately lead to a conflict within the group. Hostile relations with his son, which include open death threats, are presented by Heinlein as a typical fight for dominance, which is to determine who will be the alpha male in the group. Nevertheless, Hugh Farnham is not given a chance to fulfil his plan of recreating the society as the whole group soon is to be captured by the new rulers of the world.

The laconic ending of the novel assumingly marks the return of the evolutionary theme presented earlier. Disappointed with social life and probably finding himself in the alternate reality, Hugh gives up the hope of reconstruction of the social order and decides on living only with his lover Barbara outside of any societies. This decision, being clearly the epitome of libertarian individualism, connotes the intellectual climate of the early 60s and the American literature of the previous decade. Joseph E. Brewer argues that beatnik antiheroes of *On the Road*, instead of changing the oppressive system, choose to “glory their own system” (Brewer 1967: 73); Hugh Farnham’s voluntary reclusion from society might be regarded him glorifying his own system.

But one should remark that once again the novel does not provide any constructive way of reorganizing the society in order to heal its imperfections. Just like *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Farnham’s Freehold* raises many questions but does not bring any answers, except for the typical libertarian belief in the power of the individual and the key role of the family in human life.

Heinlein’s novels are also proof of something that may be called “maturing” of science fiction in contrast to science fiction written before 1960, which may be simply regarded as a form of modernist literature depicting human life against a background of technological advancement. Thus Heinlein’s novels become some sort of a milestone for fantastic fiction broadening its topical horizons. Although differing significantly in terms of the plot, setting and visions of society, the famous three novels published by Robert Heinlein in the 1960s share some key elements making it possible to classify them a form of a social trilogy. The novels mark the beginning of a social trend in science fiction directing its attention not only towards visions of “probable” societies but also providing the judgment on the existing contemporary ones. The narrative strategies are used in rhetorical manner: in *The Stranger in a Strange Land* the introduction of an outside or “naive” observer allows to show the Earth’s reality as a form of dystopia, making it literally “a strange land”. *Farnham’s Freehold’s* grim vision of dystopian future is, in fact, a reflection of the contemporary

reality depicting human incapability of creating societies not founded on social inequality. In *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* utopian vision of a lunar society is used as an acute contrast with the satirical portrayal of Earth, reminding at the same time of glory of American past.

In each of these novels the key question of world-building and storytelling is race. Although being often labelled as right-wing military male WASP, Heinlein actually believed racial integration to be the natural and inevitable process, thus he strongly criticized any form of state-ruled racial segregation which is a recurring motive in all three novels. For example, in *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* almost every member of the lunar nation—in contrast to inhabitants of Earth—is of mixed race. Along with that comes Heinlein's utter disbelief in organized religion.

The key element of these three novels is the presence of a mentor-like figure that is eager to comment on almost every aspect of the story. Mentors are voiced by Jubal Hershaw, Hubert Farnham himself, and Professor De La Paz—all of these characters serve also as a *porte-parole* for Robert Heinlein expressing his libertarian views, giving explanation of many elements of the plot and providing a clear interpretation of the novels' themes.

Robert Heinlein's 1960s novels are not utopias or dystopias *per se*. In each of them a utopian or a dystopian setting is used in a paradoxical and rhetorical manner: the contemporary society on Earth is depicted as inferior. In *Stranger in a Strange Land* Heinlein uses various satirical strategies in his vision of the "future" America and in *Moon is a Harsh Mistress* an even sharper satire is used to show the earthly life in contrast to an ideal libertarian society. Therefore, a science fiction novel becomes a flexible and convenient tool for social criticism in the fantastic disguise.

*Farnham's Freehold* differs slightly from Heinlein's more famous novels and—for obvious reasons—is regarded as inferior. However, the clumsy plot, poorly developed characters and the background should not obscure the novel's importance. When put in the perspective of Heinlein's message conveyed by the other two novels *Farnham's Freehold* loses many of its supposed controversies and thus makes the author's concept clear. The novel is yet another praise of human individualism, freedom and, on the other hand, once again provides a severe criticism of societies controlled by any kind of state. Thereby Heinlein's libertarianism becomes a form of devoted humanism.

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*No Light Without Shadow: The Control of Language  
and Discourse in Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Fiction*

ANNA DE VAUL

## Introduction

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian author whose most recent dystopian novel, *The Heart Goes Last*, was published in 2015, nearly thirty years after her first book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, in 1986. Although these two novels were written decades apart and the circumstances leading to the formation of the dystopian societies within the novels differ, there are a number of common threads running throughout the stories and worlds. These common threads include environmental concerns, ideas about the commodification of sex, portrayals of the dangers of allowing personal belief to influence power, and a focus on the vulnerability of women. However, the most striking and significant common threads, to me, are her focus on the relationship between eutopia and dystopia and her emphasis on the control of discourse by each of the regimes.

## Eutopia vs. Dystopia

As with many dystopian worlds, each of Atwood's dystopian societies has its roots in an attempt to create a perfect society: a eutopia, meaning "a good place", as opposed to a utopia, meaning "no place" or a nonexistent world which can be either eutopian

or dystopian (Claeys and Sargent 1999: 1)<sup>1</sup>. Atwood refers to dystopia as the “evil twin” of (e-)utopia and states that both can be used to “explore proposed changes in social organisation in graphic ways, by showing what they might be like for those living under them” (Atwood 2004: 515). In Atwood’s vision, this equates to suffering, at least for some; her protagonists exist in dystopian worlds, though the societies were initially conceived of and presented as eutopian and do function as such for a portion of their residents. As Eugene Goodheart points out, the attempt to create a eutopia “[...] becomes problematic, even pernicious, when it enters the historical realm with ambitions to transform the political and social order according to an idea”, inevitably leading to dystopia, as is true in both of Atwood’s novels (Goodheart 1973: 103).

As Goodheart’s comments indicate, eutopia and dystopia are intrinsically related. What is intended to be eutopian may, in practice, turn out to be less than ideal for some or all of its members. This has been true throughout the history of utopian experiments and literature, including in Thomas More’s famous utopia: “[...] More offers not an ideal state but a type of an ideal state—an imagining of a society that is ideal by certain standards and criteria” (Houston 2007: 435). It is not surprising, then, that these criteria and the state they lead to “are shown to be unsatisfactory [...] rather than offering a solution to the ills of the world, *Utopia* is deliberately enigmatic, and sceptical about the possibility of an ideal human existence in this life” (Houston 2007: 435). More’s *De optimo reipublicæ* sets the stage for the destabilization of the idea of true eutopia being possible; if the society is ideal for only some of its members, it is inherently flawed. It follows, then, that if societies continue to seek and enforce a particular imagining of the ideal, some of the members of those societies will suffer. When this enforcement is taken to extremes, as in Atwood’s novels, a dystopian experience is born.

In *The Heart Goes Last* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*<sup>2</sup>, Atwood asserts that the distinction between eutopia and dystopia centres around discourse; in both novels language, speech, and literacy are tightly regulated in an effort to control how residents

<sup>1</sup> Claeys and Sargent define eutopia as a society “the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which they lived”, while a dystopian society is intended to be viewed as “considerably worse” (Claeys and Sargent 1999: 1-2).

<sup>2</sup> While the *MaddAddam* trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—and *The Blind Assassin* (2000) also contain dystopian elements, Atwood argued that the society in *Oryx and Crake* was not a classic dystopia, in part because it does not show the reader “an overview of the structure of the society” but rather is limited to individual experience (Atwood, 2004: 517). *The Blind Assassin* is likewise difficult to categorize; though the pulp-in-

discuss and perceive their society and themselves in relation to it, which in turn affects how each of these is discussed and perceived by outsiders. By exerting control over the discourse both within and about their societies, the regimes of Gilead and Consilience are able to effectively maintain the myth of eutopia.

In the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, a religious group has masterminded the takeover of the USA and installed a faith-based government run by men and reinforced by a strict and gendered class system. The narrator, referred to as Offred, is the eponymous handmaid. For the purposes of formalised, pleasureless procreation, she is assigned to a Commander, Fred, who is a member of the government's upper echelon. In a surveillance culture where free thought and the expression of opposing or unorthodox opinion usually results in death, the narrator must walk a careful line. Though the Republic of Gilead is a good place to be for the religious men who run it, it is not for her.

The Commander attempts to explain and justify the genesis of the Republic of Gilead in a series of illicit conversations with the narrator. "I'm interested in your opinion. You're intelligent enough, you must have an opinion," he says to her. "I try to empty my mind. I think about the sky, at night, when there's no moon. I have no opinion, I say" (Atwood 1986: locs. 2602-2605). The Commander's reply touches on one of the central ideas in Atwood's vision of dystopia:

You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, is what he says. We thought we could do better. Better? I say, in a small voice. How can he think this is better? Better never means better for everyone, he says. It always means worse, for some (Atwood 1986: locs. 2606-2608).

In *The Heart Goes Last* Atwood addresses this same idea, though much more directly. Stan and Charmaine, reduced to living in their car while trying to avoid violent gangs due to widespread economic collapse, are offered the chance to start a new life in Consilience, a walled community where jobs, houses, and peaceful neighbourhoods are guaranteed. There, residents spend half their time as citizens of Consilience and half as inmates in Positron prison, around which the town is centred. Both Stan and Charmaine accept the argument that this structure assures the availability of jobs and economic viability of the town; it is not until after they have been in

spired worlds of the novel-within-a-novel are undoubtedly dystopian, the framing narrative is not. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the novels that Atwood herself unambiguously identified as dystopian (*The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Heart Goes Last*), though it is worth noting that the commonalities discussed in these two are apparent in the others as well.

Consilience for some time, they discover that the success of the community also depends upon other factors such as the harvest and sale of organs and the commodification of women who have undergone a lobotomising procedure. Once the dark truth that lies behind the Positron project is revealed to the public, bloggers and pundits have a field day discussing the events that went on behind the black-glass walls of Consilience:

[...] others said that the twin city idea had been a good one at first; who could sneeze at full employment and a home for everyone? There were a few rotten apples, but without them it would've worked. In response, some said that these utopian schemes always went bad and turned into dictatorships, because human nature was what it was (Atwood 2015: loc. 4965).

In both cases, Atwood demonstrates that it is impossible to achieve true eutopia; the society will always, eventually, be dystopian for some, if not all, of its members. Eggs will be broken, apples will turn out to be rotten, and, human nature being what it is, those who have the least control over the society or authority within it will suffer most. In Atwood's vision, the distinction then is not whether the society is eutopian or dystopian but rather how dystopian it is, and for whom it is dystopian. As critic Dominick Grace argues, "while the opposition between alternate societal models in utopian fiction often serves to provide a simple binary between eutopian and dystopian possibilities, Atwood instead offers degrees of dystopia" (Grace 1998: 481) both within her fictional societies and between the different dystopian worlds she creates. Thus Stan and Charmaine and the other resident of Consilience are able and willing to look the other way when they encounter early indicators of the rotten apples in the town; it is still better than the world outside, at least at first. Similarly, the narrator and other women in *The Handmaid's Tale* may dislike their situations, but they mostly accept them because it is better than the alternatives. Complacency is shown to be a key factor in experiencing less extreme levels of dystopian suffering.

## Control of Discourse: Literacy, Vocabulary, and Memory

In both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Heart Goes Last*, the protagonists undeniably suffer despite living in societies that are, in name if not in reality, eutopian. And in both novels, the protagonists are kept from expressing their dissatisfaction, and



thereby from personally organising a successful resistance, by a rigid set of rules governing discourse, enforced through extensive surveillance and a violent and largely unaccountable police force.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, this is taken to the Orwellian extreme. All women aside from the elite group of quasi-military Aunts who train the Handmaids are forbidden to read, write, or even hold a pen: "I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say" (Atwood 1986: location 2325). As in many instances throughout history, the power of the written word is recognised as volatile, revolutionary. Even the Bible, the basis for the strict laws and mores of Gilead, is kept under lock and key. The narrator frequently thinks she notices additions or deletions to what she remembers of the text, but is not able to verify these. Like Winston Smith in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, she knows that to question this re-writing will result in punishment or death.

The attempt to limit the discourse of the inhabitants of Gilead is an attempt to control or at least restrict their thoughts. Access to the past, and to memories of it, is also denied to the inhabitants of Gilead, just as it is in Orwell's Oceania. After all, "language is the foundation for thoughts and those who can control the language can also restrict the thought" (Kouhestani 2013: 612). Memories are meant to fade away, and they do, through indoctrination, the passage of time, and the fear of reprisal. Discussing the past or negative impressions of the present is forbidden. Moreover, the language of the past has been replaced by Gilead's institution of its own form of Newspeak<sup>3</sup>. The regime's enforcement of its linguistic code is intended to make "all other modes of thought impossible [...]. Where meaning is singular and final, ambiguity of meaning and variety of experience are excluded" (Staels 1995: 230). Gormon L. Beauchamp, writing about what he called "the central dystopian criticism of utopia's effect on language"—the idea that it limits ideas and thought to only what is officially allowed—refers to Newspeak as "the linguistic result of utopian uniformism employed for life-denying ends" (Beauchamp 1974: 464, 468). As Finigan describes, by manipulating and destroying the past, the regimes hope to control the present

<sup>3</sup> Orwell described Newspeak, a variation of English created by the regime that controls the state of Oceania in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as "the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year" as ambiguous and 'unsavory' words and ideas are purged and vocabulary with new, regime-specific meaning is added (Orwell 1960: loc. 776). In this way Newspeak becomes "language purified of all heretical thought, in which thought-crime will be quite simply unthinkable" used as means of attempting to control the thoughts and perceptions, and through them the actions, of the populace (Courtine and Willett 1986: 69).

(Finigan 2011: 4480). When Atwood's narrator references the word Mayday, with its double connotations of fertility/non-Christian ritual and of a call for help, another handmaid replies, "»That isn't a term I remember. I'm surprised you do. You ought to make an effort...« She pauses. »To clear your mind of such...« She pauses again. »Echoes«" (Atwood 1986: loc. 3537). It is at this point that the narrator realizes she has become too free with language and that it may cost her life. Yet it is these echoes that sustain her—these echoes and her struggling attempts to reconstruct herself through language, albeit silently, in her head. By doing so, she seeks to revive "the capacity for individual spiritual and emotional life" (Staels 1995: 233). In Gilead this is a punishable form of resistance, one in which the narrator knowingly engages, though she is seemingly unaware of how insidious that Newspeak is, as she still, despite her efforts, thinks in its terms—"unwomen", "unbabies", fetuses as "it" until they are declared to not be "unbabies", and so on. Unlike her friend Moira, she has unknowingly internalised the discourse of the regime even as she recognises its indoctrinating power, so that her attempts at resistance are peppered with it or accomplished, as when she rewords the Lord's Prayer or the hymn *Amazing Grace*, within its confines. As Stillman and Johnson show (1994), ultimately this internalisation of the discourse of the regime leads to a reluctant acceptance of her place within it.

In Consilience, as in Oceania and in Gilead, the authorities attempt to control how the past is remembered by its inhabitants. In its most mild form, this is accomplished through the way the world outside the black-glass walls is described in Town Meetings, and through the use of devices such as the theme song played in the romantic restaurant Together, with its references to white-trash clothes and so on, meant to remind them of how much better life on the inside is. But, as in *The Handmaid's Tale*, there is also a specialised vocabulary; for instance, Charmaine does not execute prisoners, she performs "Special Procedures" in which they are "repurposed" (Atwood 2015: loc. 2364), and she thinks of the victims not as people but as "Procedures" themselves (Atwood 2015: loc. 1285). When she is forced to repurpose Stan, her husband, she is manipulated into a form of Orwellian Doublethink as a form of reality control and constantly reminded that he died while heroically saving his co-workers and a bunch of chickens from an electrical fire—until she starts to think in those terms (Orwell 1950: loc. 517):

Stan died to save his fellow workers. And to save the chickens. And he did save them: no chicken had perished... But why is she even thinking about Stan saving chickens? That fire was made up, it had not

in any way happened. Stop dithering, Charmaine, she tells herself. Get back to reality, whatever that turns out to be (Atwood 2015: loc. 3344).

By seeking to control how residents remember the past and speak of the present, the Gilead and Consilience regimes seek to control how they conceive of the present and the societies in which they live. This is accomplished through controlling not only how they speak and what forms of discourse are available to them but also through what information is available to be discussed.

### Control of Discourse: Information and Images of Society

As with the Bible, access to non-essential information is tightly controlled in Gilead. Aside from the Commanders and their Wives, few members of the society are allowed to watch or listen to the television and radio that now play nothing but the news and edited broadcasts of Prayvaganzas and Salvagings. It is widely, though silently, acknowledged that most of this news is fake, the clips of battles and arrests likely staged, but still the narrator is “ravenous for news, any kind of news; even if it's false news, it must mean something” (Atwood 1986: loc. 261). She tells her imagined audience, “I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light. There must be a resistance, or where do all the criminals come from, on the television?” (Atwood 1986: loc. 1278). The narrator, and much of the rest of the society, are reduced to depending on likely falsified official discourse and unreliable sources of rumour for information about the politics and conditions within the portions of Gilead to which they do not have direct access.

In its role as a basis for comfort or hope, information thus becomes something of value, something to be shared, exchanged, or bartered. Each class of women (Handmaids, Wives, and Marthas) functions as a discourse sub-community with its own interpersonal relay of information, wherein what the women know and share is limited by their social status and the circumstances of their daily lives. Sharing information between the sub-communities is relatively rare because it is dangerous; therefore, information gleaned in this way is treasured. In the absence of any significant knowledge of events inside or outside the country, something as trivial as the knowledge of the presence of oranges in the market becomes a valuable commodity that the narrator withholds from the household servants (Marthas) until it suits her to share it. It is to such trivialities that exchanges of information are mostly limited.

Nevertheless, such information or knowledge becomes for the women, just as it is for the men running Gilead, a form of power, valuable both in and of itself and also as a form of breaking the silence and isolation to which the women have been consigned (Johnson 1996: 42-43). In this way, the possession and dissemination of knowledge becomes a form of subversive resistance to the totalitarian regime and its all-encompassing ideology (Johnson 1996: 45), much as Winston perceives the sharing of the Goldstein text in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Similarly, in *The Heart Goes Last*, access to the world outside of Consilience is forbidden. The town has closed email and mobile phone networks, and visitors are not allowed. All links to the past must be severed when members sign onto the project. The televisions, which à la Orwell turn out to record as well as transmit videos, play only non-violent 1950's-era films and the propagandised Town Meetings, where the CEO, Ed, tells them that production rates on commodities like eggs and rabbits are up, just as the telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continually announce more pig iron or shoelace are being produced (Orwell 1950: loc. 43) (Atwood 2015: locs. 2347, 851, 1431-1432) (Orwell 1950: locs. 31, 4451). There is no independent news network or other media outlet to investigate events or act as a voice for the people. The residents of Consilience are only allowed to know about the world inside their town, and even that information is strictly controlled, and as Charmaine and Stan discover, falsified in much the same way as in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

By controlling the information available to residents, the regimes of Consilience and Gilead control how their residents are able to conceive of their societies and of their places within them. Faced with falsely binary accounts of others either settling in and living happily or being punished, usually via disappearance or death, residents are manipulated into thinking that they must fit within one or the other model. In such situations, the overwhelming majority, as we see in both novels, choose acceptance of their roles—acceptance of the lesser degree of dystopia rather than the dangerous unknown of the greater degree. With forms of discourse tightly controlled and limited, they have little opportunity to discover whether and how many others feel as they do, and so are pressured to accept the idea that they are the misfits keeping their societies from being truly eutopian. By controlling presentation of the society within the society, the regimes effectively control how the residents perceive and formulate their own dissatisfaction and dissent.

The images of Consilience and Gilead portrayed to the outside world are likewise carefully constructed. The shadowy “they” who run the Positron project can

choose what and who any outsiders see by virtue of the fact that they control access to the town. When journalist Lucinda Quant visits Positron Prison, Ed takes her on a tour and orchestrates her experience, ensuring that she sees what he wants her to see and hears what he wants her to hear, as when she meets the women working in the laundry:

'You've been happy here, haven't you?' he says. 'Since coming to the Project?' 'Oh yes,' says Charmaine. 'It's been so, it's been so...' How can she describe what it's been, considering everything, such as Max and Stan? Is she going to cry? 'Excellent,' Ed says. Lucinda Quant gives Charmaine a sharp glance from her beady, red-rimmed eyes. 'Cat got your tongue?' she says. 'It's only...I wish I could've been on your show.' And she does wish that, because then maybe people would've sent in money, and she and Stan would never have felt the need to sign on (Atwood 2015: loc. 2069).

This is an echo of a scene in *The Handmaid's Tale*, when the narrator and another handmaid encounter a group of Japanese tourists who are being escorted by an interpreter. This interpreter, a member of the Eyes (the Gileadan secret police), mediates the tourists' experience of Gilead. When asked if the tourists can take their picture, the women decline, knowing that to allow themselves to be photographed is to be symbolically violated, which is therefore forbidden. The interpreter passes it off as a quaint local custom, and then translates another question:

'He asks, are you happy,' says the interpreter [...] There is a silence. But sometimes it's as dangerous not to speak. 'Yes, we are very happy,' I murmur. I have to say something. What else can I say? (Atwood 1986: loc. 403).

The emphasis on happiness in both texts is telling; Consilience's Ed and his lackeys, like Gilead's Eyes and Commanders, are all working to show the rest of the world that their residents are content and willing participants in their societies. Exposing outsiders to common people who say that they are happy can only serve to support and strengthen the carefully-constructed eutopian façades both regimes seek to project. By controlling the presentation of their societies to the outside world, the rulers of Gilead and Consilience control perceptions of those societies. In the absence of audible dissenting voices, they are able to define and present their societies as successfully eutopian.

## Conclusion

In both Consilience and Gilead, the protagonists have no privacy, and thus have no means of writing down or preserving their memories of the past or their questions and thoughts about the present. In fact, we eventually learn that the handmaid's tale is an oral one, reconstructed and recorded on old cassette tapes as she hides at a stop on the Underground Femaleroad during her attempt to escape from Gilead. This lack of ability to accurately preserve the past, coupled with the lack of ability to question the present, leaves the protagonists with little ability to question or attempt to change their societies, or even the ways in which they view them. Their voicelessness is further exacerbated by the necessity of communicating within the confines of the specialised discourse of their communities, wherein the language necessary for protest, and their access to it, is being eroded. By controlling the discourse of and surrounding their residents, the authorities running Gilead and Consilience essentially control how their residents interact with their societies and, to a certain extent, conceive of their experiences within those societies; they are continually reminded that they live in a eutopia, just as they are continually reminded that perceiving it, and most certainly that speaking of it, as a dystopia will have immediate and disastrous consequences. Exerting this level of control also enables the Gilead and Consilience regimes to more easily control how their societies are viewed and judged by the rest of the world. In this way, the boundary between eutopia and dystopia becomes, then, primarily linguistic or discursal. That is to say, it depends on who is telling the story and, more importantly, who controls the discourse through which it is told and interpreted.

We must question, then, Atwood's intent in presenting these "good places" gone wrong, wherein the despotism and dystopian visions she presents are "the same as all real ones and most imagined ones" (Atwood 2004: 516). As critic David Ketterer points out, "It is usually assumed that the author of a dystopia is concerned with describing the horrors of life if present trends continue, *If This Goes On*". However, the cyclical nature of *The Handmaid's Tale*, with its closing "Historical Notes", depicting a deeply flawed and perhaps wilfully blind future society commenting on their assumed superiority to Gilead, calls into question the idea that dystopias are meant to or are able to act as dire warnings to save us from ourselves (Ketterer 1989: 212). Likewise, *The Heart Goes Last* offers little hope, either for Stan and Charmaine's future or for our own; while the couple have a new house and moderate economic

success at the end of the novel, it is implied that the darker Positron activities are being continued and replicated elsewhere, just as it is implied that the events of the novel have already begun in the real world. In both novels, as in her other dystopian works, Atwood presents eutopia and dystopia as two sides of the same coin, a cycle in which the proportions of “darkness and light” may be inverted temporarily, but one which we must, like Atwood, rather fatalistically accept all the same (Ketterer 1989: 214). The only hope she offers to counteract the darkness about which she writes is “ordinary human decency” (Atwood 2004: 517); having argued that eutopia can exist only in name, she concludes that kindness and compassion, along with the free flow of discourse and information, are the keys to understanding and limiting the degrees of dystopia present in our own world.

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*Senescence in Young Adult Dystopias*

ANNA BUGAJSKA

## Introduction

When five hundred years ago More was describing a perfect state, he laid a special importance on equality. And yet, there was a repetitive pattern, ensuring the privileged place in the society for those senior in age and experience: “Each household, as I said, comes under the authority of the oldest male. Wives are subordinate to their husbands, children to their parents, and younger people generally to their elders” (More 1970: 80). The reverence for the elderly clearly reflected medieval notions of an old man as a supreme manager. As Paul Johnson (2013) relates, especially in aristocratic and church hierarchy, those more advanced in age would be seen as more qualified to lead others, their white hair and wrinkles becoming a symbol of wisdom and gravity. This social organization would also protect the interests of those who could not fight for their rights with their own strength. More’s utopian vision of people as one extended family relies on the optimal utilization of the abilities of all its members, no matter what their physical fitness.

Although, as can be seen, the traditional model of utopian world reserves a special place for the old, the fact is mentioned only *en passant*, and the tendency to neglect the question of the elderly in the society has remained strong in painting the pictures of a perfect world. Granted, the imaginations of paradise would not often be associated with all the difficulties of senescence, i.e. pain, weakness, disease, mental incapacity, etc., as those signal the presence of death and transience. Contemporary

utopias, observable in, e.g. advertising, consistently promote the image of senior fitness, whereas dystopias underscore non-typical problems that concern only a percentage of older citizens (Johnson 2005; Nawrocka 2013; Ylänné 2012). Generally, though, few utopian writers would devote space for the discussion of the question of the social place of the old people (see Roemer 2010). It is also a reflection of a broader social phenomenon, called the invisibility of the old people (Victor 1994), which will be discussed in more depth in the following parts of this chapter.

The invisibility is particularly well noticeable in the programmes and literature targeted at children. Old men and women, if present, are marginalized, fulfilling supportive roles (Johnson 2003; Victor 1994). Especially in the contemporary world, which attempts to realize the vision of paradise through the technological and medical advancements, aiming even at immortality (Immortality Institute 2004), the images associated with death and decay are discouraged. It is no wonder, then, that the popular genre of young adult dystopia would also remove old people to the outskirts of the narrative. If they are present as central characters, they usually fulfil the roles of villains (e.g. Coriolanus Snow in *The Hunger Games*, Richard Pincen in the Declaration series), reinforcing the idea of old age as inconvenient or even threatening in a utopian world. Since dystopias are intended as social criticism, the tendency also shows a dangerous neglect of the problem of senescence by the biopolitics of the ageing Western society, and is supportive of transhumanist philosophy.

In the following parts of the chapter I am going to discuss the problem of senescence in young adult dystopias, drawing examples from two acclaimed series. Nancy Farmer's Matteo Alacrán novels (2002, 2013), set in a futuristic border state between the USA and Mexico, concentrate on the downfall of the tyranny of sempiternal drug lords, thus utilizing a trope familiar from generic dystopias, where the aged characters are metonymic of dysfunctional system. The role of the elders is underscored and Farmer renders a very complex picture of ageing, questioning the accepted old age threshold (sixty years of age) and provoking the readers to redefine their thinking about ageing. Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005-07), on the other hand, presents the tyranny of the enhanced humans, arrested in "optimal youth", with their elderly—"crumbles"—practically non-existent in the narrative, treated with ridicule and contempt, as socially unproductive. I intend to compare and contrast the two dystopian visions to uncover inherent stereotyping of senescence, gerontophobic attitudes within the criticized social models, as well as to reflect upon the possible solutions for the problem of the role of the elderly in the present-day society.

## Invisibility of the Old

While considering the “invisibility” of old people, one obviously has to start with their visibility, i.e. how their presence manifests itself in the studied narratives. In the case of Farmer’s *The House of the Scorpion* (2002) and *The Lord of Opium* (2013) the dominance of the drug lords is obvious. The supposed utopia, Opium, founded by El Patrón in his youth, transformed into the narco-navel of the world, allowing the drug lord to hoard massive riches, which enabled him to secure for himself the most recent medical inventions. Thanks to his clone farm, he can prolong his life indefinitely, exchanging a liver or a heart when the old one wears out. Not accessible to everyone, he nevertheless holds sway not only over his own country, but also the neighbouring, as well as overseas states. In his 140s, though, he does not retain the youthful appearance: an ancient, decrepit man in a wheelchair, he has to rely on his microchipped slaves for everyday maintenance. A formidable, albeit a little bit pathetic figure, he forms the nexus of the narrative: all characters relate to him in some way, trying to imitate him or to fight him.

In Westerfeld’s eugenic tetralogy the social utopia is constructed to the exclusion of the old and ugly. All people at the age 16 are subject to a plastic surgery, turning them into “pretties”, extremely attractive and fit. The fitness may be further enhanced by a Special operation, reserved for law enforcement services. The books revolve around the struggle of Tally Youngblood to renounce the temptation of the leisurely life of a pretty and to remove the controlling lesions from people’s brains (a result of the operation). Old people in the series are few and far between. The aged pretties are called “crumbliies” and are absent from the social space, save for periodical life-extension treatments. The most memorable personages Tally meets are The Boss—a librarian of rebellious uglies—and an old man in charge of the ancient armoury, both of them making fleeting appearances and unable to protect what was entrusted to them. They are redundant to the point that Tally thinks that the crumbly in the armoury is not really calm and wise, and that “she could knock him cold without regret if she had to” (Westerfeld 2011c: 105).

While discussing longevity trope in fiction, Frederic Jameson asks an essential question, definitely relevant to the discussed aspect of dystopian senescence: “At what point can longevity become visible in the narrative itself?” (2005: 331). When it comes to Farmer’s novels, although the country is tyrannized by an old man, the

realization comes after a long exposition, only when Matt, a clone of El Patrón brought up in his mansion, reaches his Middle Age (7-11).

“Come closer, boy,” said an old, old voice.

Rosa gasped. Her hand dropped from Matt’s shoulder. “El Patrón,” she whispered.

Matt saw that what he’d taken for an empty armchair actually contained a man. He was extremely thin, with shoulder-length white hair neatly combed beside a face so seamed and wrinkled, it hardly seemed real. He was wearing a dressing gown, and his knees were covered by a blanket. It was the blanket that had fooled Matt into thinking the old man was part of the chair (Farmer 2002, 57).

The above quotation shows how, quite paradoxically, the ancient ruler is so instrumentalized as to be perceived as part of surrounding him objects. The same is true for the later representations (the Mushroom Master and Dabengwa in *The Lord of Opium*). El Patrón comes to Matt as a real “patron”, providing him with protection and education. These functions of the old are foregrounded, whereas the disturbing aspects of unenhanced senility are brought to light only as instrument of control over the family and justification of organ harvesting (El Patrón’s comments on El Viejo’s state during the birthday party). Farmer bares the rhetorics of threat, present in contemporary mass media, not so much glorifying youth as thriving on the fear of the loss of control over one’s faculties and resulting social dependence (Nowacka 2013, Yläne 2002).

In the case of Westerfeld’s dystopia, the situation is quite different: old age does not equal longevity and has no desirable qualities. The meeting of Tally with The Boss and later with a nameless “crumbly” in the armoury allows to justify an already ingrained disgust with everything imperfect and deprived of superpowers that for Special people are an obvious and indispensable part of their identity. Both episodes finish with complete destruction of the environment the old were living in: the Smoke community and the Rusty weapons collection are engulfed by the special forces and the nanobots. It paints an extremely powerful picture of an unstoppable replacement of one culture with another: futuristic and technicized. Further developments in the tetralogy portray the passage from authoritarian eugenics, the foundation of the Pretty time, to liberal eugenics, wherein everybody is allowed to choose their own enhancements, heedless of consequences: Diego city in *Specials*, Japan in *Extras* (Habermas 2003). For Westerfeld the chief value seems to be freedom, with ageing and weakness as something that is inflicted as punishment (Dr Cable’s downfall in *Specials*), thence, eugenic liberalism is what looms from behind Tally Youngblood’s story. Although the books began as a polemic with aesthetic medicine business

(Westerfeld 2013), the message they convey is entirely one of the youth cult culture, thus inscribing them into transhumanist discourse.

Talking about the invisibility of the old people in the society, Paul Johnson describes the elderly as “silent”, deprived of voice (2003), and Christina R. Victor underlines that by accepting the social marginalization as part of growing old, the elderly resign from the possibility of fighting for their rights, whether for better medical treatment or for financial support (1994). Apart from the world of politics, their voice is unheard in the public sphere, especially not reaching the younger part of the society (Victor 1994).

The alteration of the physical quality of voice is part of ageing. This is particularly well-visible in Farmer’s *The House of the Scorpion*. The book is divided into the phases of the protagonist’s life. When Matt reaches the appropriate age to be a donor (12-14), he is said to enter the “old age”, which precedes his death. It is recognizable by the change in the quality of his voice—it becomes more raspy and uneven. Besides being a faithful rendition of the natural process, the mutation betrays Matt’s vulnerability and defencelessness. Johnson points out that one of the distinguishing features of the elderly is their “tremulous” voice, provoking the patronizing or indifferent attitude from the environment (Johnson 2003; Victor 1994). In this light, the voices of the old in the discussed dystopias portray varying trends. Farmer consistently reinforces the image of the powerful ancients: El Patrón’s voice is not loud, rather whispery, however, it has commanding quality and raises fear in his subjects (Farmer 2002). The voice of the crumbles is “rattling”, “craggy” and “harsh”, disturbing the mellifluous sounds of the pretty world (Westerfeld 2011a). Both of these—one challenging and the other conforming to the ageist stereotypes—are seen as undesirable. Matt tries to rid himself of the persistent whispering in his head, which is seen as possession (Farmer 2013), and Tally feels unnerved by the Boss’s “rusty razor blade” of a voice (Westerfeld 2011a).

When it comes to expressing themselves in the public media, both dystopias present the elderly as shunning from such an activity, or as being suppressed. The Mushroom Master, who appears in *The Lord of Opium*, although revered for his knowledge, suffers from agoraphobia and prefers to be left in peace. In *Extras*, the fourth part of *Uglies*, a group of crumbles make it to the news, suing the city for denying them the access to immortality technology (Westerfeld 2011d). However, their popularity is short-lived and they are ridiculed by media-users. Those that refused to be freed from mind-control are called “non-people” (Westerfeld 2011d). Westerfeld’s

frequent stigmatizing the aged as “fashion-missing”, irrational and backward (a.o. they want to go back to being controlled, Westerfeld 2011d), contributes to building the stereotype facilitating the exclusion of the voice of the aged from the public space.

## The Spaces of the Old

Another important point to raise in the investigation of the place of the elderly in the society is the actual space they occupy. As Johnson (2003) relates, the patterns of dependence/independence can be established by looking into the land inheritance and ownership or into the structuring of a household. It may be worthwhile, by extension, to reflect if there is any ghettoization of the old people, fencing them off from the bulk of the population, and what are the reasons behind it.

In Matteo Alacrán books, the aged live in a sequestered space, specially designed for them to either meet the demands of their failing bodies or to separate them from young/healthy/functional population. The descriptions of El Patrón’s gloomy private wing in the white mansion betray the social anxieties as far as imagining the old age. Clattered with heavy furniture and ancient works of art, it builds up the atmosphere of depression and loneliness, whereas the dent in the mattress and handholds in the bathroom are telling of physical disability. The mirrors are removed, underlining the essential “ugliness” of the old (Farmer 2013). The hacienda has also a special apartment for El Viejo, El Patrón’s grandson, who is suffering from dementia and must be shielded off from others to muffle his screams (Farmer 2002).

Westerfeld’s dystopia fits the aged citizens into an institutionalized enclosure. They live in the suburbs, called Crumblyville, with the smallest children, who cannot yet go to school. Few enjoy solitary posts, like the nameless man guarding the armoury, and they are obviously restricted to the assigned spaces. Worryingly, the rebellious uglies repeat the same pattern: the Boss, barely forty, but still considered an elderly person, is similarly limited to running the dusty and old-fashioned library, which gives the man a fake feeling of power (Westerfeld 2011a). The crumbly doctors, escaped from Pretty Town, live far from the rebel society, in a “half-buried” house (Westerfeld 2011a). Even after the reversal of the mind-control, the tendency is to equate the aged with small children and the uglies (Westerfeld 2011d), assigning them the same social status and the same space (parklands).



As can be seen, both texts reinforce the idea of the separation or even imprisonment of the aged in specially designed spaces. This is reflective of ageist stereotypes, which make us perceive older people as essentially dependent, useless, backward and ugly. These features strike fear into the hearts of a population that bows down to transhumanist visions of a perfect, enhanced body of “optimal youth” (Freitas 2004), obsessed with efficiency and individual freedom. These preconceptions are so deeply-rooted that even though the evidence from social studies belies these death- and illness-related images (Victor 1994), they seemingly self-replicate in the works of culture, remaining contrary to facts. As Victor notices, the empirical deviations from the culturally-imposed norm are seen as exceptions, silently confirming the rule.

The adoption of a prejudiced standpoint may result in making the old age a “master status trait” (Victor 1994)—perceiving people not as being of certain age, but as “old people”, thus altering and dehumanizing their personhood. Both Farmer and Westerfeld make this social stigma clear—the Old is situated as the Other: impossible to understand or barely fitting in the boundaries of the contemporary world, covering with dust together with the useless old magazines and weapons. This exclusivist attitude is fundamentally an expression of the fear of death and its preceding decay.

It is important to notice here the repetitive pattern appearing in the choice of the spaces the authors make for the old: they are all places connected with memory, tradition-keeping and history. As Jameson (2005) notices, the tension in the longevity narratives comes among others from their metaphorical portrayal of a fundamental conflict between Past and Future, but also from the attitudes to History that are made evident by the stories about the senescent. I have already remarked on the marginalization of the problem of the old in the *Uglies* cycle, and their being positively swallowed by the novel technologies. The optimistic belief in technical progress is quite clear, as is devaluation of history as such. It is worth mentioning the case of Andrew Simpson Smith, a member of a primitive tribe, who discovers that his family was being cheated and used by the enhanced humans, and abandons the traditions of his people, as irrelevant for the age of biotechnology (Westerfeld 2001b). The past is portrayed as full of ignorance, ugliness, scandals, irrationality, wars and eco-threat. Such past, certainly, is not worth retaining. Demonization of the past and rejection of history serve as support for building the mythology of the new, better age.

Similarly in Farmer: “most things in *Opium* were a hundred years in the past, but El Patrón’s private wing was even older. He had brought back entire sections of

Iberian castles. He had plundered El Prado, the finest art museum in Spain, for paintings and tapestries” (Farmer 2013: 12-13). El Patrón’s wing, filled with works of art, remains unappreciated by his successor, Matt. For him they are representations of the abuses the authoritarian rule of monarchs and religious organizations were guilty of. It is representative of yet another dimension of old vs. young motif Jameson (2005) talks about: the class struggle. El Patrón’s constant reminiscences of his deprived childhood betray the reasons for his hoarding the wealth: in the end, he becomes just like the *ranchero* he had to beg for food (Farmer 2002). Matt refuses to subscribe to the totalitarian organization of the state and sides with the *paisanos* turned *eejits*, trying to liberate and educate them.

The historical dimension acquires particular resonance in the context of Mexican identity struggle. What Matt—at least, apparently—rejects is Spanish colonial past, the contemporary drug cartels’ culture, but also the philosophies of coming back to the Aztlán roots, propagated by Mexican leftist movements. His deep desire for utopia pushes him to cut himself off from the past—but also some forms of future: his biopolitics, unlike El Patrón’s, is not geared towards enhancing the human body, but towards healing the damaged Earth. He becomes the “patron” of the senile Mushroom Man, a male version of Gaia archetype. The narrative seems to promise that the new times will construct a better world, restored to its natural greatness. The reader, though, is left with a disturbing afterthought: are not the new times (Matt) a clone of the old (El Patrón)?

## Metaphorizing Old Age

All of the aspects discussed in the previous parts of this chapter are played up by metaphorization and mythicization of old people. The elderly are homologised with the images of buildings, trees and beasts, each of which reveals some aspect of how the aged fit into the society. The building metaphor is particularly well visible in *Uglies*: the ancient bridge between Uglyville and Pretty Town, and the Valentino Mansion are “dumb” and silent. Although they are attractive and “quietly knowing” (Westerfeld 2011a; Westerfeld 2011b), they only provide a prop for the young rebels to hide their contraband and climb. It also underlines the constructivist perspective on the body, perceived in terms of its being damage-proof: the variations of the word “to crumble” are used in the tetralogy mostly in reference to buildings, cities and

bridges. Its adjectival form is borrowed to equate the old age with deformed, monstrous, inefficient body, evoking fear (the Rusty Ruins; Westerfeld 2011a) and disgust, especially in comparison with dainty, pleasure-oriented houses of the Pretties, enhanced with smart technology.

When it comes to the conceptualization of man as a tree, it is worth recalling the parallel elaborated upon by Jacques Bertillon, a nineteenth-century French demographer, which seems especially apt for the image of the old appearing in juvenile dystopias:

A human society might even be compared to a forest of a given surface. After the lumberman has made clearings, seedlings spontaneously burgeon anew and the forest is restored without there having been any need to replant it. If it were otherwise, it would imply the presence of some defect, some harmful germ that was impeding nature's salutary effect. In that case, the forester would have to find the sterility's cause and destroy it. He would have to get rid of the ruinous goats' teeth and other damaging animals who destroy the forest's young plants. But what can be said of someone whose only recourse against such misfortune would be to exclude the lumberman's axe and preserve the trees indefinitely? He would succeed only in uselessly *ageing* his plantation and, in the end, would be defeated in his struggle against death, because the law of living societies, forests as well as nations, is the perpetual replenishment of beings. The impossible task attempted by this ignorant forester is none other than what overconfident doctors are now advising (Bertillon 1895: 433).

Bertillon metaphorizes the society in general as a forest, but it is clear that within this forest there is a distinction between the new seedlings and the ancient trees. He sees the unimpeded growth of the existing plants as detrimental to the necessary rejuvenation of the population. He speaks harshly about the attempts of those who aim at immortality: the supposed sterile health is seen as "defect" and a "harmful germ", whereas striving at eternal life is called ignorance. Placing man within the perspective of natural sciences and emphasizing the basic role of the circle of life, the author propagates the vision in which the intervention of the doctor-lumberman serves the design of a utopian society. It is, quite visibly, oriented towards the young.

The identification of old people with trees appears in both cycles. On the surface, the authors seem to follow the logic of natural law, propagated by Bertillon, in that they are clearly alarmist as to the immortality technologies. In Westerfeld the ancient forest, which provides a line of resistance to the monoculture of white orchids, is being fell down and burnt by the Ugly rebels, who explain that they plant new trees. It raises horror in the modified Pretties, devoted to the protection of the environment (Westerfeld 2011a). Their quarrel is over what both groups perceive as "natural": the cycle of life and rebirth versus immortality. While for the first group

the forest embodies values like freedom and tolerance, the second group's identification with Nature is much stronger. The Pretties seem to wholly embrace the conceptual metaphor "tree is a person", and in this light they can be seen as fighting for the protection of the actual long-lived people. The rebels, pressing for the succession of generations, seem less humane, and their making maximum use of the fallen trees reminds one of Nazi "utilization" of the dead bodies. However, as consistent with the previously mentioned instances of the Boss and the armoury caretaker, Westerfeld's alarmist only as far as the use of the biotechnologies for the limitation of individual freedom. As long as they do not imperil the natural environment and personal agency, there is no need to revert to the Rusty times.

The tree metaphor in *The House of the Scorpion* and *The Lord of Opium* is explicitly used to present the deformity of body and mind in old people. While describing Glass-Eye Dabengwa, Farmer compares his body to a tree with deformed roots: "His legs were like tree trunks covered in gray bark, and his toes, with their gnarled and discolored nails spread out like the talons of a bird of prey" (Farmer 2013: 354). The connotations of decomposition and monstrosity are coupled with the idea of Dabengwa's immobility, caused by some sort of an illness. The African is not like a strong, solid tree: rather like a diseased one, unable to escape imminent death.

As far as El Patrón, the author implies that his long life resulted in madness, instead of wisdom: "He grew large and green until he shadowed over the whole forest, but most of his branches are twisted" (Farmer 2002: 70). The impression that the old age must equal mental problems is strengthened by El Viejo's dementia. Worth noting, the figure of a giant tree used by Nancy Farmer bears close resemblance to the vision of Nebuchadnezzar in the Bible (Daniel 4, 1-24), thus acquiring the status of a parable, conjoining the old age with absolute power. The result of this fusion is an unavoidable negative picture of the elderly, as evil kings bound to be punished by God.

In both cases the motif of the aged serves to talk about the global political tensions. El Patrón, overshadowing the vicinity with his branches, represents the United States' imperialistic fantasies. He lives in a great white mansion, served by slaves, and all other drug lords are dependent on his supply of opium. When he dies, chaos ensues, provoking Dabengwa to attempt to take over El Patrón's empire. As can be inferred from the above description, though, Farmer sees the African political organism as essentially corrupted and unable to claim dominance on the global scene. Still, the American hegemony is also questioned, as the author points out its deficiencies.

Like many other juvenile dystopias, Matteo Alacrán books call for rethinking of the functioning of the current system, rather than overthrowing it. Farmer, though, seems sceptical as to the feasibility of a possible remake.

Finally—and perhaps most noticeably—old people are dehumanized by pointing out their resemblance to beasts and demons, which is present mostly in Farmer's dystopia. El Patrón is often called an “old vampire” (Farmer 2002; Farmer 2013), which underlines the extreme stereotyping of the senescent as “receivers” (Victor 1994), who thrive on the blood of the young, and suggests that long life must be *contra naturam*. The elderly do not have faces, but “beaks”, no hands, but “talons”, and they resemble predators, like crocodile or scorpion (Farmer 2002; Farmer 2013). Whereas vampirism implies that old age is supreme Evil, the animal metaphors put the elderly lower in the hierarchy of creation, questioning their intellect and control over impulses. Lastly, the necessary cyborgization of the failing body (the robot “glass eyes” of Dabengwa, Farmer 2013) adds to the unacceptable Otherness of the elderly.

## Conclusion

To sum up, although senescence is not foregrounded in young adult dystopias, the problem is nevertheless powerfully present in the background. The portrayal of the aged largely conforms to social stereotypes and ideologies promoting the cult of the body and inexhaustible efficiency. The ageing process is seen as evil—to that, an unnecessary evil. Although old bridges, buildings, and trees may exude the aura of wisdom, the decay of the body is not essential. Especially equalling people with architectural structures reflects the constructivist vision of the body, divorced from the soul and individual identity. Johnson (2003) writes about the concept of *puer senex* which shows that the wisdom is not age-dependent and the decaying body may not contribute much as far as spiritual growth. This ancient idea is resuscitated in Matteo Alacrán series: although the reader witnesses the first fourteen years of Matt's life, the boy claims to be one hundred and forty seven (Farmer 2013)—he was made from the cells of El Patrón and his body seems to hold some of the memories and identity of the sempiternal drug lord. He acts above his age (Farmer 2002) and soon becomes Don Sombra—another leader of Opium (Farmer 2013).

Westerfeld offers an explanation for the absence of the old people from the public space. He claims in *Extras* (Westerfeld 2011d) that in the past the elderly were

the centre of social life because of tales of past experiences they stored in their memories and shared by the campfire with other members of the community. However, nowadays this spiritual leadership is performed by celebrities: “Humans needed big faces around for comfort and familiarity, even an ego-kicker like Nana Love just talking about what she’d had for breakfast” (Westerfeld 2011d:37). Thence, Wise Old Men, if present, do not fulfil their functions as mentors: they cannot adjust fast enough to the changing everyday life, and are usually replaced by adult males. Wise Old Women, like Celia, Consuela or *abuelita* in Farmer, are left to child-rearing, cooking and religious rituals (Farmer 2002). Where these social functions are defunct, like in the post-scarcity Pretty World, the portrayal of women reveals the “double standard” of ageing: doctors Cable and Maddy are “typified as worn-out, menopausal, neurotic and unproductive” (Victor 1994: 82).

Whatever the explanations, the patterns revealed by the ironic presentation of dysfunctional societies make one reconsider one’s attitude to ageing in the face of technologies promising longevity and even immortality. Such reflection is much needed in the contemporary ageing society. As Lemke (2011) writes, one of the chief questions that need to be answered in the face of the development of biotechnology is which category of citizens still fulfils the demands of the current “regime of truth”. The dystopias call for the redefinition of the place of the old people in the contemporary world, so as to avoid unjust bias either towards the old or towards the young. They are centred around the idea that the biopolitical discourse written from the point of view of any of these protects the interests of one group only, instead of aiming at the common good, so often put forward as the argument for human enhancement (Habermas 2003). The current discussion about human nature and genetic identity necessarily extends to the notion of youth and old age. In the perspective of the lack or the shift of old age characteristics, More’s *Utopia* needs to be reimagined for the present times to provide the shape of the future that we are going to build.

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## XVII

# *Modern Wastelands: The Psychogeographical Dystopia of J.G. Ballard's "High-Rise"*

MARCIN TERESZEWSKI

## Introduction

Urban environments have frequently served as a setting for both utopian and dystopian narratives, representing both our progressive dreams as well as our nightmares; however, following the rapid urbanization of England during the nineteenth century, literature has most often cast urban living in a dystopian light. And with the end of World War II, when more emphasis was placed on urban planning as a means of ensuring social harmony, the line separating fiction and urban planning became increasingly blurred. After all, urban spaces, as David Harvey remarked, are “somewhere where fact and imagination simply have to fuse” (Harvey 1990: 5) and architecture has come to play a significant role in how we conceptualize our relation to the environment. It is, therefore, fitting that urban architecture, utilized as an ideologically charged instrument to assuage the inherent dangers of urban life, has frequently become the focus of literature and social criticism. As Jonathan Charley notes: “In fact it is a feature of most dystopian and utopian literature that it uses technology and architecture as a narrative device to reinforce the political critique of social progress that all such novels share” (Charley 2012: 13)—and it is with this very thought that I would like to approach James Graham Ballard’s *High-Rise* in relation to modernist architecture with the aim to identify not only the psychological effects

resulting from such specifically designed architectural space but also the ideological function of architecture in representing a dystopian development of modern urban society.

One of the most important themes running through much of Ballard's work is the psychogeographical concern of how the built environment affects the individual, a concern that can be found almost a hundred years earlier in Georg Simmel's *Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903) and later in Guy Debord's *Spectacle of Society* (1967). Ballard's work incorporates similar considerations of overpopulation and media-saturated consumerist society, and applies a microscope to the psychological effects these architectural structures and landscapes exert on us. So important is this psychogeographical element in Ballard's fiction that it found its way to the *Collins English Dictionary* definition of the adjective "Ballardian" as "resembling or suggestive of the conditions described in Ballard's novels and stories, especially dystopian modernity, bleak manmade landscapes and the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments" (CollinsDictionary.com 2016).

The inclusion of Ballard's name into the *Collins English Dictionary* is certainly an acknowledgment of his importance and unique vision, but is also, on the other hand, as Roger Luckhurst observes (1997), a highly ambivalent gesture. In his seminal study of Ballard, *The Angle Between Two Walls*, he argues that this institutionalized definition might deprive Ballard's work of its subversive power, neutralizing a poetics which relied greatly on instability for its effect. There is a "visible discomfort" that Ballard's work produces which may be assuaged to the detriment of the work, as it would remove it from the "margins to the center" (Luckhurst 1997: xiii). Yet, what will still preserve this discomfort is the inherent moral and intellectual ambiguity that characterizes his work.

## Modernist Architecture and Literature

Before approaching J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise*, I would like to make a few preliminary remarks about the relationship between modernist architecture and literature, especially since it is within the context of this relationship that the themes in the novel become particularly poignant. *High-Rise* was published in 1975, at the height of public dissatisfaction with urban council estates and tower blocks built on the foundations of socialist ideology along the aesthetic lines of modernist architecture, at a time

when modernist tendencies in architecture saw a challenge mounted by postmodernism. Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, outlines this challenge in architectural terms by drawing attention to the populist aspirations of postmodernist architecture, which went at odds with high-modernism architecture's elitist separation from the surrounding environment. This is demonstrated by how Le Corbusier's buildings are raised on pillars "whose gesture radically separates the new Utopian space of the modern from the degraded and fallen city fabric which it thereby explicitly repudiates" (Jameson 1991: 41). Andrzej Gasiorek, on the other hand, in his study of Ballard's fiction outlines the historical context behind the emergence of block towers, indicating that what at first promised rational solutions to the postwar housing crisis, quickly gained a reputation for blandness and disrepair resulting from both shoddy workmanship and high maintenance costs (Gasiorek 2004: 120-123). Whatever the final results were of this project, the impulse that brought it to fruition was utopian.

Modernist architecture is a response to the conditions of modernity. It is precisely this response in which we see a manifestation of a wider biopolitical project that is now associated with modernist architecture. Rapid population growth, new technologies, increased pace put a premium on innovative architectural solutions that would not only meet the demands of modern lifestyles but would also relieve the various ills and pathologies produced by rapid urbanization. More austere, angular and rigid aesthetics of these new buildings corresponded to the emphasis placed on rationality, transparency and efficiency promoted by a rather technocratic oriented ideology. Modernist architecture was not only an esthetics but an ideologically charged response to what the Swiss architect, Le Corbusier, termed the "social unrest" caused by architecture (Le Corbusier 1985: 169). And it is with Le Corbusier that we find a utopian architectural project, where there is not only a deliberate acknowledgement of architecture's influence on the social and psychological lives of people but a clear call for the betterment of social cohesion by architectural means. This betterment could come about as a result of rational and ordered architecture offsetting the chaotic and disordered state of contemporary society. Le Corbusier states explicitly in *Towards a New Architecture* that:

If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, [...] we shall arrive at the "House-Machine", the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments that accompany our existence are beautiful (Le Corbusier 1985: 6-7).

Faith in the socially stabilizing effects of machine-based efficiency inspired his aesthetics of asceticism and unity, it also inspired his ideas of standardization and rationalism, themselves being reflections of the natural (biological) world Le Corbusier strove to embody in his architecture. Though it is, as Coleman rightly observes, “difficult to ascertain when modern architecture was first characterized as utopian” (Coleman 2014: 2), these principles, which extended from the smallest element of interior decoration, furniture, to urban planning, should be considered utopian, as they established a project that looked to the future in an effort to improve social relations by means of modifying the environment, in other words, architectural social engineering or biopolitics.

Apart from focusing on rationality and transparency, this new architecture was also predicated on severing itself from historical influences. Modernist architecture looked to the possibilities made possible by technological advancement in an effort to elevate living conditions from those associated with the Victorian era, i.e. squalor, overcrowded streets, urban moral decay. In its detachment from the inheritance of past styles, this architecture rejected ornamentation in favor of clean lines. By contrast, dystopias often return to the past as a means of transgressing the dystopian present. This is certainly the case in Zamyatin’s *We*, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, where the respective protagonists subvert the dominant ideology partly by recourse to the forbidden past.

Le Corbusier’s uncompromising stance towards the implementation of his architectural designs is a commonplace example for the dictatorial tone found in this architecture, something that has alienated future generations of architects. Diane Morgan draws a comparison to Howard Roark, the architect protagonist in Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead* (1947), who claims, “I set my own standards. I inherit nothing. I stand at the end of no tradition. I may, perhaps, stand at the beginning of one” (Rand 1971: 16). This declaration is, on the one hand, a clear manifestation of modernist’s break with the oppressive baggage of history, a brave call to cultural autonomy; however, this same impulse, undertaken in the name of purity and transparency, can be seen as assuming the form of an authoritarian dictate, wholly unresponsive to the tastes and opinions of the populace. Such was the case with the almost medicinal aspect of modernist architecture, which was advocated by its architects as a hygienic and cleansing alternative to the squalor of Victorian housing. There is a clearly dictatorial strain that can be heard in these pronouncements running counter

to the egalitarian ideals they promoted, and perhaps this undemocratic aspect of modernist architecture remains its most visible flaw, one that Fredric Jameson notes, when remarking that “the prophetic elitism and authoritarianism of the modern movement are remorselessly identified in the imperious gesture of the charismatic Master” (Jameson 1991: 2).

Modernist architecture, with its emphasis on sanitary, rational and ahistorical modes of habitation was, however, not met with universal acceptance, giving rise to an anti-urban discourse, skeptical of the consequences of modernist architecture as promoted by the International Congress of Modern Architecture. Anthony Vidler develops an account of this resistance, citing such critics as Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, Martin Heidegger, Max Horkheimer and Andre Breton being particularly antipathetic to modernist architecture. There was, in short, a general criticism of what appeared to be an anti-humanist aspect of these biopolitical designs and doubt whether such constructed environments were fit for human habitation. But it is to the notion of dwelling that we must turn, as this point was especially emphasized by Martin Heidegger in his 1951 essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*, written in response to the dwelling question, Wohnungsfrage, of war-torn postwar Germany. As if referring to Le Corbusier, Heidegger asks: “today’s houses may even be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but—do the houses themselves hold any guarantee that dwelling occurs in them?” (Heidegger 2001: 144). Heidegger’s analysis of the housing condition hinges on his understanding of dwelling, a term that he develops throughout the essay, tracing its etymology to the word *bauen* (The Old English and High German word for “building”) and *baun* which means “to dwell”, “to remain”, or “to stay in place”. However, one of the roots of *bauen* comes from the Gothic *wunian* which distinctly tells us what dwelling consists in being at peace. This is why “not every building is a dwelling” (Heidegger 2001: 146), a thesis substantiated by the fact that modernist glass and steel high-rises were first built to accommodate executive office space, not living space and certainly not dwelling which is predicated on integration with the surroundings. David Spurr in *Architecture and Literature* states that dwelling is “that idealized conception of space that promises rootedness, permanence, and a womblike removal from the experience of modernity” (Spurr 2012: 52-53). Modernist architecture based on the ideology of efficiency and rationality was antithetical to this conception of dwelling, in fact Heidegger’s concept of dwelling stands in opposition to architecture understood as the production of art objects.

## The Modernist Project in Ballard's *High-Rise*

The echoes of this debate can be heard in Ballard's novels and short stories, whose one salient feature is their focus on place, landscape, and architecture. Even a cursory glance at the types of architectural structures encountered in Ballard's fiction reveals how ostensibly mundane and familiar these places are, entirely innocuous at first sight—corporate office parks, suburban shopping malls, traffic island and, of course, urban high-rise—but this familiarity is shown to reveal a more insidious element, or as Christopher Hitchens aptly describes it in an eloquent piece for *The Atlantic*, an “insistence on apocalypse in familiar surroundings” (Hitchens 2010: par. 11). Behind the gleaming veneer of modernity, a sense of decay and pathology haunts each building or town, which in effect become agents in their own right, while the characters inhabiting these spaces degenerate psychologically to a level of savagery or meld into their environment in a gesture of total affirmation. It is in the relation between the physical environment and the individual psyche that Ballard's narratives are at their most prescient. These environments are presented as almost literally overwhelming their inhabitants, as is the case in *The Enormous Space*, where the protagonist isolates himself in his suburban home to gradually have the rooms expand and engulf him, or in *Billionium* and *Concentration City*, which represent neo-Malthusian nightmares of overpopulation, where any hope of personal breathing space is drowned out by the swarms of people moving about the city. In all these cases both claustrophobia and agoraphobia are exploited as means of depicting the passive nature of the mind in its response to the spatial environment.

However, no other building is more representative of the coexistence between twentieth century architecture and capitalism than the titular high-rise of Ballard's 1975 novel. The high-rise as an architectural edifice is not only the setting but it also serves as the main subject. So deeply is the building incorporated into the narrative that it becomes a character in its own right, not only reflecting the human psyche but also merging with it. Rather than seeing this high-rise as simply a metaphor for the failure of the utopian project and overall decay of modern society based on capitalist principles, I would like to explore one of the underlying reasons for this failure, which is imposed stability.

The eponymous “high-rise” is a high-end forty-story London building occupied by the professional classes. What was meant to be a microcosm of utopian social engineering quickly degenerates into dystopian barbarism, as the residents begin to

gradually turn on themselves, first over petty annoyances, like noise, trash, broken elevators; later these petty squabbles escalate into clan warfare, transforming the whole building into a veritable war-zone. Though, as Peter Briggs observes, this progression from seemingly ordinary events to surrealistic extremes is rendered in such a way “so that the reader is drawn along by the possibility that the escalation is logical and inevitable” (Briggs 1985: 70). It is little wonder why the first reviews of this novels drew comparisons with William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, though instead of a deserted island overpowering the moral compasses of proper public schools English boys, it is an artificial island in the form of the high-rise that succeeds in laying bear the amorality of natural instincts.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that Ballard’s titular high-rise is a clear reference to Le Corbusier’s utopian project of the “vertical village”, or Cite Radieuse in Marseille, a point that has already been highlighted by most critics (Groes 2012: 134, Spurr 2012: 226, Gasiorek 2004: 120). Equipped with restaurants, a swimming pool, gym, shops, the high-rise represents the epitome of Corbusierian aesthetics and planning—it is a self-sustaining structure, catering to all the expensive whims of its residents and as a result establishing itself as a utopian enclave, severed from the outside world. Indeed, there is no reason to leave its walls, which is made evident in how little attention is given to life outside of the high-rise. In other words, the building can be construed as a kind of island, completely separated from the London seen only from the balconies, and offering its tenants a closed environment, engineered in accordance with the highest possible standards of social cohabitation. The ambiguity makes itself known when we ask the question to what degree this self-isolation is self-imposed. Throughout the book the high-rise is compared to a zoo and a prison, which further stresses the carceral aspect of utopian enclaves which rarely overtly manifests itself. The illusion of choice is carefully maintained, allowing the residents to willingly decide to imprison themselves in a building which is falling apart in line with the disintegration of social structure within the building.

In their isolation from the outer world and despite the egalitarian ideological thrust of the architectural projects, the residents of this high-rise replicate the standard social divisions, as the less affluent residents are relegated to the bottom floors, while the upper crust of society occupies the top floors. Groes makes an interesting point in reference to this division: “one cannot translate the egalitarian impulses of the post-war period into practice by using vertical structures that (unconsciously)

remind an already class-conscious people of the social hierarchies that are embedded within their national past” (Groes 2012: 136). The architectural structure of the building itself provokes class divisions and creates the battlefield that is later played out during the course of events, which further reinforces a Marxist reading, since the revolutionary uprising spreads upwards from the lower classes below. Bill Wilder, one of the three protagonists of the story, at one point makes a desperate attempt to ascend the high-rise in the midst of this warfare, as if acting out the futility of upward mobility. Putting a spin on the Marxist adage, one could claim that it is not so much social but architectural conditions which determine consciousness.

The environment is exuding an influence that overturns societal norms, as the residents voluntarily succumb to the emerging clan-like social structures and rituals, sacrificing their jobs and mundane habits in the process. Such a revolt against established civilizational norms could be seen as fueled by anti-capitalist romantic anarchism reminiscent of Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*, but what is conspicuously missing from behind this nihilism is any kind of ideological motivation; there are no anti-capitalist manifestoes and revolutionary sentiments declared by any of the characters, nothing that would incline the reader to suspect ideological agency at work. Nonetheless it would seem that the source of this regression is attributable to the particular environment created by the building which itself is thoroughly ideological. We are told that “At first Laing found something alienating about the concrete landscape of the project—an architecture designed for war, on the unconscious level if no other” (Ballard 2012: 16). This quote raises an important point, because unlike modernist architecture, Ballard’s architectural settings are allowed to act on their accord, divorced from any intent or purpose of an architect, in this case Anthony Royal, who occupies the top penthouse of the high-rise.

There is an echo of Heidegger’s denunciation of modernist architecture in the narrator’s observation that “Part of its appeal lay all too clearly in the fact that this was an environment built, not for man, but for man’s absence” (Ballard 2012: 34). In other words, we can say that this is a building, but not a dwelling, not a home affording its inhabitants security, stability and peace, but instead a cold container which only emphasizes the absence of humanity, thus attracting a type of resident whose psychological makeup is a reflection of this environment. In the high-rise:

A new social type was being created by the apartment building, a cool, unemotional personality impervious to the psychological pressures of high-rise life, with minimal needs for privacy, who thrived like an advanced species of machine in the neutral atmosphere (Ballard 2012: 46).



This is exactly the type of person that is attracted to this type of environment, the cool, emotionally detached resident here represented by Dr. Laing, who is emotionally recovering from a divorce. It should also be pointed out that there is a hint of irony in this description of the residents as “an advanced species of machine” as the building is so often presented in a language that lends it anthropomorphic characteristics:

There was something in this feeling—the elevators pumping up and down the long shafts resembled pistons in the chamber of a heart. The residents moving along the corridors were the cells in a network of arteries, the lights in their apartments neurons of a brain (Ballard 2012: 51).

The building is depicted in more human terms than the people inhabiting it.

Emotional detachment that is both provoked and encouraged by this architecture is seen to trigger repressed impulses which are given free rein, as if the almost totalitarian order and rationalization of the high-rise environment have created optimal conditions for subversive amoral behavior. Though in this case it is not the external organization of society or totalitarian dictatorships that give rise to dystopian reality, but the psychopathological reactions to the streamlined rationality and almost lulling comfort of high-rise life. The stability that is imposed on the residents seems to generate the opposite effect.

This subversive reaction to imposed rationality is highly reminiscent of Gothic literature. Gregory Claeys locates the first turn of dystopian fiction in the eighteenth century, a period that coincides with the origin of the Gothic novel (Claeys 2010: 110). The Enlightenment, itself an age where rationality was viewed as a savior of humanity from the pull of superstition and savagery, was paradoxically also the age that gave rise to an adverse tendency that ran counter to the dominant ideological sway of Enlightenment politics. This tradition of “rationally planned existence [...] harbors the gothic nightmare” (Gasiorek 2004: 124) with its emphasis on mystery and darkness (instead of clarity and transparency), on superstition and irrationality (instead of reason and science), on labyrinthine underground passages (instead of open vistas). The Gothic is the illegitimate child of the Enlightenment, an example of a literary genre that took shape from within a dominant culture that by definition suppressed its defining characteristics. As Harvey states, there is a suspicion that “the Enlightenment project was doomed to turn against itself and transform the quest for human emancipation into a system of universal oppression in the name of human liberation” (1990: 13). The argument could be made that in *High-Rise*, the “renaissant

barbarism” (Ballard 2012: 79) is also a result of the repressive insistence on order and stability giving rise to a subversive reaction to the culturally institutionalized emphasis on rationality and stability. Taking this Gothic analogy further, the high-rise itself can be viewed as a modern manifestation of the haunted house trope, a failed utopian project that has turned against its master. David Ian Paddy makes the point that the high-rise is: “not a gloomy Gothic mansion, though it shares its shadows and moral depravity. Its frightful dimension comes not from chthonic darkness and decay but from its opposite: an immaculate cleanliness, order and modernity” (Paddy 2015: 146-147).

Like a haunted house, the high-rise is itself animated, given a consciousness and agency in relation to the tenants. The high-rise looks “as if it were some kind of huge animate presence, brooding over them and keeping a magisterial eye on the events taking place” (Ballard 2012: 40). It is an all-seeing spatial structure, resembling Foucault’s thought of the panopticon, its relation to the Gothic, and its implementation in eighteenth century prisons, (Foucault 1980: 153-154) a reference which fits well into the already established carceral aspects of *High-Rise*.

## Conclusion

Modernist architecture provides Ballard with the spatial equivalent of Enlightenment philosophy, allowing him to conceptualize the outcomes of placing humans in what in theory are utopian settings—hygienic, rational, well-planned environments that are meant to promote analogous effects in the psyche. However, following Heidegger, we can say there is no guarantee that dwelling occurs in such spaces; instead, what emerges is a rather pessimistic diagnosis of the human condition, favoring regression instead of evolution as a reaction to social engineering. Understandably, this would present a rather reactionary attitude towards utopian planning and would place Ballard in the surrealist camp of artists who denounced modernist architecture as being antithetical to habitation. Postmodernism, as a cultural movement inextricably bound to post-capitalist modes of production, stressing a more globalized, multinational capitalism as described by Jameson, presents itself as a more pluralistic and open approach, but there is little to even hint of such a development in *High-Rise*. Rather than presenting romantic anarchism as a desperate response to the commodification and urbanization of modern society or suggesting escape from

the attendant hyperreality of spectacle, described by both Jean Baudrillard, in *Simulacra and Simulation*, and Guy Debord, in *Society of Spectacle*, as the product of image-driven capitalism, through relativism and metanarrative play, Ballard's fiction resides in the liminal zone precariously poised between affirmation and rejection. This is where ambiguity becomes a defining feature of Ballard's poetics. This is also where we find Ballard's interstitial space that is by definition a space of resistance, which is why defining the term "Ballardian," institutionalizing it within the boundaries of intellectual discourse, will always be saying too much and not enough.

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## XVIII

# *The Use of Multimodal Narrative Techniques in Creating Dystopian Undertones Permeating David Foster Wallace's Short Fiction*

MAJA WOJDYŁO

## Introduction

Set in the Organization of North American Nations, in a near future when the passing years are no longer denoted with numbers, but are given corporate-sponsored names instead, *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace's most widely known novel is an unquestionable generic and thematic dystopia. When it comes to his short fiction, except for *Datum Centurio*, the pieces do not involve storyworlds considerably divergent from the popular image of the Western world at the turn of the century. Still, if we follow Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of "utopianism as social dreaming—the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives" and keep in mind his remark that even though such dreams "usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live [...] not all are radical", the vast majority of David Foster Wallace's short stories turns out to be more or less markedly dystopian (Sargent 1994: 3). Just like some of the characters populating the author's fictional universe, his readers receive "*an intuition of the askew*", a sense of deep wrongness underlying the supposedly commonplace plots, settings, and characters which are depicted there (Wallace: 2011). The following chap-

ter will demonstrate how such an effect is achieved, focusing on the role of multimodal narrative techniques in the process. Beginning with a brief overview of multimodal narratology, based on Grzegorz Maziarczyk's *Toward Multimodal Narratology* and *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English*, it moves on to examining the applicability of this relatively new perspective to literature studies on the example of Wallace's short stories. Further, focusing on *Little Expressionless Animals*, *Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR*, and *Datum Centurio*, the article discusses the ways in which multiple semiotic resources participate in creating a dystopian tinge on the ideological plane of the narratives.

## Multimodal Narratology

Multimodal narratology derives its basic theoretical assumptions and analytical tools from social semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis. The term "multimodality" is borrowed from social semiotics, where it stands for "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2011: 20). Still, the very concept of mode has been applied to denote various phenomena and often confused with the notion of medium, which is why it needs to be clarified that whenever the term is to be employed here, it will be meant in the limited sense of "a sign system employed in a given narrative" (Maziarczyk 2013: 23). As to the basic premise of multimodal narratology, Maziarczyk describes it as "not simply to identify various modes operating on the level of narrative discourse, but to analyse how they contribute to the representation of the storyworld" with special emphasis put on the "the question of the representational potential of different modes" (Maziarczyk 2011: 117). Here, he concurs with Wolfgang Hallet, who notes that "a narratological approach [towards multimodality] is most interested in the narrative functions of non-narrative and non-verbal elements in and through the multimodal novel" (Hallet 2009: 141).

Even though numerous earlier studies—notably those conducted by Wolfgang Hallet, Alison Gibbons, and Marie-Laure Ryan—have already thoroughly addressed the subject of multimodal narratives, Grzegorz Maziarczyk's 2013 *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English* is one of the first work to offer a synthesis of earlier studies in the field. Although the authors of the previous publications on multimodality agree as to the existence of a group of narratives where multiple modes participate in meaning creation, their studies are limited in the scope



of their analyses and focus on singular examples rather than try to establish a universally applicable poetics of such texts. The terminology they employ turns out to be another problematic area in the pioneering studies in the field, for some of such works tend to discuss similar phenomena under different labels while other mix various concepts, for instance, the mode and medium<sup>1</sup>. Most of the aforementioned theorists provide lists of properties exhibited by multimodal novels without trying to draw any generalising conclusions. *The Novel as Book* is an exception to the rule, apart from providing a comprehensive review of current research in the field, it also resolves some terminological problems and offers a broad theoretical framework applicable to all multimodal narratives.

Maziarczyk's framework includes a basic division of narrative modes into verbal and visual. "The former would include verbal narrative discourse, formal language and documents which are incorporated into the verbal narrative discourse by way of quotation. The latter would comprise graphics, pseudo-facsimiles of documents, typography, and photographs, including photographs of works of art and physical objects" (Maziarczyk 2011: 117). The division draws, among others, on Hallet's list of possible multimodal elements, a narrative may incorporate, included in *The Multimodal Novel: The Integration of Modes and Media in Novelistic Narration*. Adopting a perspective advocated by John A. Bateman, consisting in construing a page "as a visual entity" rather than "a text-centred structure", he further focuses on multiple possible modes operating on three levels of textual materiality: typeface, layout, and the book as physical object (Maziarczyk 2011: 115). Within this distinction the level of typography would deal with the "manipulation of typeface", layout with the "spatial arrangement of graphemes" and the level of book as a physical object with "the physical organisation of the text in the book" (Maziarczyk 2013: 12). Following Hallet and Gibbons, Maziarczyk notes that the broad category of images constitutes a separate mode in its own right, for they "do not belong to the realm of textual materiality as they are not elements of material representation of verbal text" (Maziarczyk 2013: 47). However, some illustrations can be considered multimodal narrative devices if they are "presented in some way by a character, and commented on or referenced within the verbal text" (Gibbons: 2012, 426). Just as all pages are multimodal, all of them include

<sup>1</sup> An extensive discussion of the terminological conundrum, involving the use of the terms medium and mode, is to be found in Marie Laure-Ryan's article entitled *Story/Worlds/Media. Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology*, published in *Storyworlds Across Media*.

the previously mentioned levels of textual materiality, which “endow a given text with multimodal characteristics only when they are foregrounded by a deviation from some well-established convention” (Maziarczyk 2013: 47). Similarly, all multimodal narrative techniques gain their semiotic potential in the interplay between various narrative planes, and thus they need to be examined in a broader discussion of a given text.

Adopting a multimodal approach in narratological research entails profound implications for our understanding of narratives. For one thing, the narrator becomes “a narrator-presenter, who not only delivers a verbal story but also »presents« to the reader images, facsimiles of documents, etc.” (Maziarczyk 2013: 45). The reader, in turn, becomes “engaged in constructing a mental model of the textual world in which he/she incorporates data from different semiotic sources and modes”, which offers an interesting perspective for cognitive research (Hallet 2009: 150). Here, I would like to note that although nearly all of the researchers dealing with the subject of multiple semiotic modes operating in a given narrative write about multimodal novels, their remarks are by extension applicable to other narrative forms, as exemplified in the following discussion of short stories written by David Foster Wallace. The ensuing analysis employs the theoretical framework “combining the concepts derived from narratology, multimodal discourse analysis, semiotics and literary-theoretical accounts of the signifying potential of the printed codex” along with the differentiation of the “three basic levels of textual materiality—typeface, layout and book as physical object” proposed in *The Novel as Book* (Maziarczyk 2013: 12).

### *Little Expressionless Animals*

A short story *Little Expressionless Animals* opens the first collection published by David Foster Wallace in 1989, *Girl with Curious Hair*. For most part, the story is set in the world of *Jeopardy!*, a televised game show being the nexus between all the characters and branching plot strands of the story. Here, a transworld identity of Alex Trebek hosts over 700 episodes of the show won by a young, purely fictional contestant named Julie, who is finally dethroned after a few characters working behind *Jeopardy!* scenes execute a plan of supplanting her with her autistic brother—Lunt—as the new champion. The story is composed of a mosaic of scenes and digressions, requiring high participation in reconfiguring the seemingly unconnected parts into a coherent

storyline and engaging various semiotic modes. Some of the scenes are accompanied by headlines, article excerpts, and images resembling drawings made with a straight-edge and pencil. The units vary in length and are separated with blank verses, yet this particular modification of layout seems to be too subtle to assume semiotic potential, contrary to the inclusion of headlines and excerpts. All of them pertain to the last event in the plot—the episode of *Jeopardy!* when Julie loses to her own brother, as in the following examples.

„JEOPARDY!« QUEEN DETHRONED AFTER THREE-YEAR REIGN

- Headline, *Variety*, 13 March 1988” (Wallace 2010: 9).

“Dethroning Ms. Smith after 700-plus victories last night was one ‘Mr. Lunt’ of Arizona, a young man whose habit of hiding his head under his arm at crucial moments detracted not at all from the virtuosity with which he worked a buzzer and board that had, for years, been the champion’s own.

- Article, *Variety*, 13 March 1988” (Wallace 2010: 29).

“WHAT NEXT FOR SMITH?

- Headline, *Variety*, 14 March 1988” (Wallace 2010: 29)<sup>2</sup>.

The headlines and magazine excerpts are distinguished with a different typeface and separated from the bulk of the text with spaces. Subtle as it may seem, this modification transforms them into a device operating within the visual semiotic mode. The fact that their appearance is never even alluded to in the text, together with the typographical distinction and the fact that they are not “incorporated into the verbal narrative discourse by way of quotation” make it possible to treat them as “pseudo-facsimiles of documents” (Maziarczyk 2011: 117). Thus, in the case of headlines and excerpts inserted into *Little Expressionless Animals* the reader is confronted not only with an alien discourse (headlinese) but also an “alien”, non-verbal mode of signification. The typeface and layout manipulation visible in this example participates in different semiotic processes taking place in the story. Together with the images included in the text, they add another level to the fragmentary character of the narrative’s discourse by making it resemble a patchwork of semiotic modes. Arguably, the intention behind construing the story in this manner is to make the reader’s engagement with the text resemble that required from a TV-audience. This, to meet the agenda put forward for a kind of prose which David Foster Wallace proposes to call

<sup>2</sup> I use original formatting in all the quotes from multimodal fiction.

image-fiction and discusses in detail in his seminal 1993 essay *E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction*. On the thematic level, the headlines and magazine excerpts may be treated as an additive device, for by standing in sharp contrast with utterances made by the same characters in informal or work-related situations, they emphasise the discrepancy between their actual treatment of Julie and her brother and their description thereof in the mediated territory of a magazine. Let us now consider one of the headlines juxtaposed with a fragment of a discussion taking place among *Jeopardy's* producers:

"We loved her like a daughter," said »JEOPARDY!« public relations coordinator Muffy deMott. "We'll be sorry to see her go. Nobody's ever influenced a game show like Ms. Smith influenced »JEOPARDY!«"  
—Article, *Variety*, 13 March 1988 (Wallace 2010: 12).

"Can't let her go. Too good. Too hot. She's become the whole show. Look at these figures." [...] "Rules, though," says the director. "Five slots, retire undefeated, comeback for Champion's Tourney in April. Annual event. Tradition. Art Flemming. Fairness to whole contestant pool. An ethics type of thing". Griffin whispers into his shiny man's ear. Again the man rises. "Balls," the shiny man says to the director. "The girl's magic. Figures do not lie. The Triscuit people have offered to double the price on thirty-second spots, long as she stays" [...]. "See that window?" he says. "That's where the rules go. Out the window" (Wallace 2010: 24-25).

Even though at first sight the headlines and article fragments do not seem dystopian at all, combined with meaning transmitted by the verbal mode they participate in the creation of a dystopian tinting on the ideological plane of the narrative. The tension arising between their content and the characters' behaviour exemplifies the relativity and fragility of rules supposedly governing the world of a televised game show. It also reminds the readers that television is inherently money-oriented. In order to make a profit, television has to appeal to the greatest numbers of viewers possible and that is why it shows them what they want to watch. In this particular case, the audience seems to want to watch Julie, so the producers decide to get rid of the winnings limit in order to give the audience what they want. All this to boost the ratings and increase the show's profitability. However, what if the audience eventually get tired of the brilliant contestant? At another point in the story readers learn that Julie "lost to her own brother, after Janet and Merv's exec snuck the damaged little bastard in with a rigged five audition and a board just crawling with animal

questions” (Wallace 2010: 19)<sup>3</sup>. What makes the plan of supplanting the former winner with her autistic brother particularly repulsive are the few mentions of his behaviour before the recording of the show, made by Muffy deMott, the show’s PR coordinator, the same character whose declarations of love towards Julie are contained in the previously presented excerpts. She describes him as “a boy who’s half catatonic with terror and general neurosis” and continues to explain that when she last saw him “he was fetal on the floor outside Makeup” (Wallace 2010: 5). Thus, the headlines and magazine excerpts incorporated in the narrative, considered in connection with its story level echo a remark made by Pierre Bourdieu and further explained by Jean Baudrillard, “»[t]he essence of every relation of force is to dissimulate itself as such and to acquire all its force only because it dissimulates itself as such,« understood as follows: capital, immoral and without scruples, can only function behind a moral superstructure, and whoever revives this public morality (through indignation, denunciation, etc.) works spontaneously for the order of capital” (Baudrillard 1995: 11-12). This way, the inclusion of headlines and excerpts allows the reader to get a glimpse of the moral superstructure masking the ruthless exploitation of the autistic boy and his sister. At the same time, juxtaposing these multimodal elements with the verbal mode of the narrative creates a fissure in the aforementioned superstructure, allowing to see the dystopian horizon behind it, embodied by the immoral and ruthless capital manifesting itself, i.e. in the previously discussed treatment of *Jeopardy!* contestants.

Apart from the magazine headlines and extracts, *Little Expressionless Animals* features another multimodal narrative technique rendering the ideological plane of the narrative dystopian—images of lines drawn with a straightedge and pencil. As in the case of headlines and excerpts, the drawings’ dystopian semiotic potential is dependent on the story level, even though the pictures do not seem to be directly connected to the textual units they precede or follow. Interestingly, the drawings’ function seems to change as the reader progresses through the text. The first picture, depicting a sharply rising and then falling line, precedes all verbal presentation in the narrative, and thus it seems to be devoid of semiotic potential in the first reading. Still, it may achieve a defamiliarizing effect through disrupting the readers’ expectations

<sup>3</sup> Julie was unable to respond to any kind of questions involving animals.

of the layout of a typical short story and serve as an indication that the text is not going to progress in a typical, linear manner.

The semiotisation of images included in *Little Expressionless Animals* takes place in connection with a scene where two of the characters—Faye Goddard, *Jeopardy!* question researcher and Julie Smith, her lover and the show's unequalled champion, sit on a beach outside Los Angeles, watching the sunrise. There, Julie relates the story of her troubled childhood:

Men would just appear, one after the other. I felt so sorry for my mother. These blank, silent men, and she'd hook up with one after the other, and they'd move in. And not one single one could love my brother [...] Sometimes things would be ugly. I remember her leading a really ugly life. But she'd lock us in rooms when things got bad, to get us out of the way of it [...] At first sometimes I remember she'd give me a straightedge and a pencil. To amuse myself. I could amuse myself with a straightedge for hours [...] It makes worlds. I could make worlds out of lines. A sort of jagged magic. I'd spend all day. My brother watched (Wallace 2010: 10).

The above excerpt and the fact that the images appear between other, distinct scenes, without any apparent connection to their content allow the lines to be viewed as scenes in their own right. In the light of Julie's account of her childhood, every instance of inserting drawings which look as if they were made with a straightedge and pencil may be interpreted as a flashback sending the reader to numerous situations "when things got bad" and Julie's mother locked her and her brother up (Wallace 2010: 10). Interestingly, such a strategy appears to render these non-verbally represented scenes more poignant than they would be if explicitly written about. Here, the reader has to do the work of imagining what disturbing things must have happened each time when Julie created one of the drawings. If we follow such a reading, even the frequency of the drawings' appearance shows considerable semiotic potential, suggesting how very bad the characters' childhood had to be for Julie to have created so many different pictures. The device employed here bears strong resemblance to a verbal narrative technique, the "Klein bottle", which is a figure where "the inside and outside are indistinguishable" (McHale 1999: 14). As McHale explains, such a structure involves the text's "secondary or embedded representations [...] becoming the outside world, its world in turn collapsing back into a secondary representation (a world within a world), which is thus embedded in itself" (McHale 1999: 14). Here we seem to be dealing with a multimodal counterpart of the Klein bottle, where the level of narrative discourse, where the drawings are exhibited, collapses back into the storyworld, and the other way round—the story level becomes "the

outside world”, that is the level of narrative discourse. Such a modelling renders the storyworld (*sensu* Ryan and Thon) a claustrophobic, inescapable trap. Together with portraying all human relations as disturbed and devoid of nourishing powers they create a powerful dystopian tinting on the ideological plane of the narrative.

### *Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR*

Another instance of introducing non-verbal modes of signification to be discussed here is included in the second piece from Wallace’s 1989 collection *Girl with Curious Hair*—*Luckily the Account Representative Knew CPR*. The story’s plot is very simple and progresses in a lineal order: two executives finish work late in the evening and descend to the Executives’ Garage. There, one of them suffers a heart attack and the other one tries to revive him by administering CPR. Contrary to the previous examples, the device employed here appears only once throughout the few-pages-long story and depends on a rather subtle typographic modification—italicizing an excerpt of the exposition. Here, “the italicized graphic form of the [four] word[s] iconically enact[s] [their] meaning” (Maziarczyk 2013: 210), foreshadows the future development of action and participates in creating a dystopian image of the storyworld. Let us consider the following excerpt from the beginning of the story:

Each received, to the varying degrees their respective pains allowed, an *intuition of the askew* as, in the neatly stacked slices of lit space between the executive and the distant lament of a custodian’s vacuum, the Building’s very silence took on expression: they sensed, almost spinally, the slow release of great breath, a spatial sigh, a slight sly movement of huge lids cracked in wakened affinity with the emptiness that was, after all, the reasonable executive realizes, half the Building’s total day. Realizes that the Building not only took up but organized space; contained the executive and not vice versa. That the Building was not, after all, comprised of or by executives. Or staff (Wallace 2010: 45).

The typographic modification of the “*intuition of the askew*”, similarly to the previously discussed drawings, complicates the structure of narrative levels in the text. On the story level, the characters are those who receive such an impalpable intuition, but on the level of narrative discourse the actual reader receives a signal of there being something different, “askew”, with the text at the same point in the story as the characters inside. As all multimodal narrative techniques, this instance of italicization is able to participate in creating dystopic undertones in the narrative only together with the other narrative planes. In this case, the leading role in the process is played by the plane of spatio-temporal characteristics and its phraseological rendering.

The “large Building”, where the action is set, stretches itself in both directions (Wallace 2010: 45). The Executives’ offices are located somewhere on its top floors, reflecting the high position they occupy both in the company and the social structure. Thus, the office high-rise becomes a reflection of dreams about social advancement. Still, “the utopia of the glass structure”, functioning as the setting of this story, in this case turns out to embody a transparent, but inescapable cage making the characters unable to form any kind of meaningful connection neither with each other nor the outside world, forcing them to become simulacra of some previously determined and manufactured social roles instead of human beings (Bloch 1996: 737). It is signalled from the very beginning, when both of the characters finish work well past ten p.m. and begin to move towards the Executives’ Garage located “below the Staff Garage below the Building’s basement maintenance level” (Wallace 2010: 46).

There were between these last two executives to leave the Building the sorts of similarities enjoyed by parallel lines. Each man, leaving, balanced his weight against that of a heavily slender briefcase. Monograms and company logos flanked handles of leathered metal, which each man held. Each man, on his separate empty floor, moved down white-lit halls over whispering and mealy and monochromatic carpet toward elevators that each sat open-mouthed and mute in its shaft along one of the large Building’s two accessible sides. Each man, passing through his department’s hall, felt the special subsonic disquiet the overtime executive in topcoat and unfresh suit and loosened tie feels as he moves in nighttime through areas meant to be experienced in, and as, daytime (Wallace 2010: 45).

A closer look on the phraseological plane of the narrative reveals that the disquieting atmosphere filling the Building is first signalled by writing its name with a capital letter. This impression is further strengthened by describing the seemingly inanimate Building with organic terms. The “whispering and mealy and monochromatic carpet”, the “elevators that each sat open-mouthed and mute”, the “neatly stacked slices of lit spaces”, “the distant lament of a custodian’s vacuum” culminating in “the slow release of great breath, a spatial sigh, a slight movement of huge lids” endow the glass office high-rise with a mysterious sort of presence (Wallace 2010: 45). The portrayal of the Building becomes even more interesting when juxtaposed with the rendering of characters, who are shown to be very similar on the outside, both harbouring an undisclosed pain inside, working in the same manner, and even walking in the same manner, “parallel lines” (Wallace 2010: 45). Such a modelling reflects Mario Perniola’s remark that “[h]umans are becoming more similar to things, and equally, the inorganic world, thanks to electronic technology, seems to be taking over the human role in the perception of events” (Perniola 1995: viii). Note that the



characters are not given any proper names, they are not portrayed as individuals, they are the Account Representative and the Vice President in Charge of Overseas Production, which illustrates Bloch's remarks on the progressing universalisation of "glass utopias", where he notices that "the real people in these houses and towns become standardized termites or, within a »housing machine«, foreign bodies, still all too organic ones" (Bloch 1996: 736). This manner of rendering the phraseological plane of the narrative is continued in its subsequent parts and might be considered one of the trademarks of Wallace's writing, for it is also present in a number of other texts written by the author.

The last scene of the story puts forward a few interesting processes occurring at the same time. Once "the elevator disgorged the Vice President in Charge of Overseas Production, who moved stiffly, flushed, into the open, low yellowed space of the Executive Garage", the two characters shared a limit-experience-state that seems to offer a possibility of wrenching the characters out of their termite-state. The Vice President suffered a heart attack and the other man tried to revive him. Consider the following excerpt:

"Help" the working Account Representative called, feeling the stir of a tinily remembered humid wind and pausing, again, to look behind him [...] at the Ramp that spiraled up out of sight toward a street, empty and bright, before the Building, empty and bright, dispossessed, autonomous and autonomic. Bent to what two lives required, below everything, he called for help again and again (Wallace 2010: 51-52).

Whether this experience would transform them both, or at least one of them, remains a matter open to speculation. Regardless of the outcome, this limit-experience is not the most prominent element of the story's final scene. Here again the setting has the lead. The Building's predatory, claustrophobic character is foregrounded, allowing for this simple plot to be transformed into a commentary on the "constitutive features of the postmodern" which Fredric Jameson believes to be "a new depthlessness [...] a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum [...] and the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic system" (Jameson 1991: 5). The Building, representing the postindustrial socio-economic system, not only swallows, digests and disgorges people. It imprisons them, and makes it utterly impossible for the Account Representative's cries for help to be heard. The Ramp, spiralling out of site, suggests an infinite regress, a total separation from the outside world, which is not much different from the rapacious Building itself, anyway. The usage of the word

“dispossessed” in connection with the office high-rise is also notable here—it further strengthens the vision of the two characters being in possession of the Building embodying Jameson’s postmodern Other—“that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labour stored up in our machinery—an alienated power [...] which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis” (Jameson 1991: 34). Thus, the previously discussed typographic distinguishing of the “*intuition of the askew*” analysed in connection with the story’s thematic level, reveals the seemingly unremarkable italicization as an extremely capacious semiotic resource serving as a beacon for a whole array of notions visible on the ideological plane of the narrative.

### *Datum Centurio*

One of the most straightforwardly dystopian texts written by Wallace is *Datum Centurio*—a piece from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, his second short story collection first published in 1999. It makes use of multiple semiotic modes in a presumably most easily discernible manner, for it is designed to resemble “pages” of:

*Leckie & Webster’s Connotationally Gender-Specific Lexicon of Contemporary Usage*, a 600gb DVD<sub>8</sub> Product with 1.6 gb of Hyperavailable Hot Text Keyed to 11.2 gb of Contextual, Etymological, Historical, Usage and Gender-Specific Connotational Notes, Available Also with Lavish Illustrative Support in All 5 Major Sense Media\*, ©2096 by R. Leckie DataFest Unltd (NYPHDC/US/4Grid).

\* (*compatible hardware required*) (Wallace 2011: 106).

Although the short story functions as an autonomous piece, it is thematically linked with a cycle of stories by the same title as the collection, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. As the title suggest, the cycle is designed to resemble clinical interviews, typically with men responsible for inflicting various kinds of violence on their intimate partners. Viewing them and *Datum Centurio* in terms of a cause and effect relationship gives rise to additional meanings. However, they only become visible after a previous reconstruction of the dystopian world from the snippets of information included in the dictionary entry. Once this is done, the similarities between *Datum Centurio* and *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* turn out to include, for instance, the development of violence-related aspects of intergender relationships such as objectification of the partner, the woman’s passive attitude and the tendency of “getting rid of the pain without addressing the deeper cause” (McCaffery: 2005). Actually, in

Wallace's 2096, relationship came to denote a liaison between two persons only in historical usage. Here, the word "date" stands for:

Consequent to the successful application for a License to Parent (KEY at PROCREATIVITY; at BREED/(v.); ...) the process of voluntarily submitting one's nucleotide configurations and other Procreativity Designators to an agency empowered by law to identify an optimal female neurogenetic complement for the purposes of Procreative Genital Interface (Wallace 2011: 106).

The cold, scientific language, and the high level of institutional control over the citizens' private lives, although absolutely devoid of violent elements at first sight, connote a total objectification of the woman, who became reduced to the role of "an optimal [...] neurogenetic complement" used by men to achieve "the gratification associated with having one's Procreativity Designators affirmed by both culture and complement as neurogenetically desirable" (Wallace 2011: 106, 110). Still, this is only one of the meanings of the word date contained in this entry. The other one, related to the evolution of entertainment—one of the subjects of particular importance for David Foster Wallace—denotes "[t]he creation and/or use of a Virtual Female Sensory Array [...] for the purposes of Simulated Genital Interface" (Wallace 2011: 107). A further historical usage note sheds some light as to the reasons why in Wallace's 2096 dates no longer involve a meeting between two living human beings, but are simulated machine-aided intercourses instead. According to the historical usage note provided, "the result of an estimated 86.5% of 20C dates was a state of severe emotional dissonance between the date's participants, a dissonance attributed by most sources to basic psychosemantic miscodings" (Wallace 2011: 108). While 20C women understood the word date almost exclusively as "the mutual exploration of possibilities for long-term neurogenetic compatibility [...] leading to legally codified intergender union [...] and soft offspring", a "fraudulent interest" in this connotation of the word date was supposedly "often employed by 20C males for purposes related exclusively to connotation (B)" which denoted "the unilateral pursuit of an immediate, vigorous, and uncoded episode of genital interface without regard to neurogenetic compatibility or soft offspring or even a telephone call the next day" (Wallace 2011: 108). With a characteristic mixture of seriousness and humoristic tone, Wallace brings up the previously mentioned predatory, objectifying attitude of males towards females. Then, he seems to point to their inclination towards viewing themselves as victims, as in the following fragment: in order to "palliate the 86.5% semioemotional conflict

that attended genuine interpersonal dating” “wholly depersonalized simulacra of genital interface” were made available to “U.S. male consumers” (Wallace 2011: 109).

Wallace’s vision of intergender relationships one hundred years from now, although devoid of violence, entails eliminating relationships altogether and supplanting them with their technosexual simulacrum. Thus, paradoxically, eliminating intimate partner violence gives rise to a dystopian future where governmental agencies and technology exert total control over the choice of partners, where one needs to obtain a “License to Parent” to have kids, and the purpose of meeting with a genuine human being of the opposite sex is reduced to procreation only (Wallace 2011: 106). Similarly to the previously discussed stories, multiple modes of signification actively participate in the creation of a dystopian storyworld in *Datum Centurio*. Beginning with typographical and layout modifications, the text is construed to resemble the view of a window of a computer dictionary. The interplay between the piece’s thematic content and its codification in the form of a dictionary entry strengthens the dystopian undertones present on the story level. The fact that the previously mentioned characteristics of intergender relationships in Wallace’s 2096 are recorded in a lexicon, means that they enjoy the status of a social norm. This, in turn, leaves the reader wondering what other norms must be accepted in this society, if it has given up the most intimate spheres of human life to be managed by governmental agencies with help of technology and surveillance.

Thus, it turns out, that even though the multimodal narrative techniques included in the discussed stories are subtle, they play an important, in some cases even crucial, part in the creation of the dystopian undertones in Wallace’s fiction. Still, the functions they perform are dependent on meaning generated by the verbal mode of signification and, thus, they gain their semiotic potential in the interplay between the various modes. In some cases, as exemplified by *Datum Centurio*, the meaning-generating process may take place also on a higher level, not only in the interplay of various modes, but also in the interplay of various modes and thematic levels of multiple stories included in one collection. Apart from this, the analysed stories prove that even notions as vague as a sense of wrongness arising while reading a text, although never directly referred to in its verbal presentation, can be pinpointed to the workings of multimodal narrative techniques. The discussed texts also suggest that even the most subtle modifications operating within the non-verbal modes of signification should not be overlooked, as they exhibit considerable semiotic potential.

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## XIX

### *A Utopian, a Martyr or a Fool: Fictional Portrayals of Sir Thomas More in “A Man for All Seasons” and “Wolf Hall”*

BARBARA KLONOWSKA

#### Introduction

The figure of Sir Thomas More, the founding father of utopian thought, a scholar and a saint, has attracted the attention of numerous writers and playwrights who made him a protagonist of their works. His biography, abounding in dramatic changes of fortune, first from an average lawyer to the Lord Chancellor of England, through the impoverishment and disfavour following his refusal to support king Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn, and finally to the dramatic circumstances of his imprisonment in the Tower of London, the trial for high treason and the ensuing beheading—all of these events are a tempting and almost ready-made material for all possible kinds of dramatic or novelistic plots. Most of the recent ones draw upon the material and facts presented in the ground-breaking biography of Thomas More published by Raymond Wilson Chambers in 1935. This chapter analyses two of such works, Robert Bolt's and Fred Zinnemann's 1966 film *A Man for All Seasons* and the more recent novel *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel, published in 2009, both of which come back to the Renaissance utopian, More's personality, dramatic life story and the historical events of his times. Characteristically, both works discussed here present the fictional character modelled on the historical Thomas More along entirely contrastive lines. For Robert Bolt, Thomas More is first and foremost a martyr and a paragon of all virtues; the film consistently creates his character as a noble and tragic

figure. In contrast, for Hilary Mantel and her main protagonist, Thomas Cromwell, More is primarily an impractical fool and a hypocrite. Interestingly, none of the works dwells extensively—if at all—on More's *Utopia*, which, from the point of view of intellectual history, is probably one of his major contributions to the development of European thought and, from a biographical perspective, perhaps an important moment in the protagonist's life. Yet, neither the film nor the novel present the ideas or the impact of this work and *Utopia* constitutes an eloquently absent hole in the centre of both texts. Still, this omission—however challenging—seems understandable and well motivated by the two works' themes and goals. Firstly, their plots focus on the events much later than the year 1516, visibly more dramatic and picturesque than the somewhat static and less cinematographically attractive intellectual history. Secondly, because they are clearly character-driven, both the film and the novel are interested in More—the man—rather than in his work. Thus, because of the audience and theme-oriented reasons, they decide to eliminate More's book and his utopian ideas from the various subplots forming the canvas of their works. Though directly unrepresented, *Utopia* does, however, constitute a major subtext for both *A Man for All Seasons* and *Wolf Hall*, providing an underlying context for the plot and motivations of the character, explaining the background of disputes and choices, and introducing a further political dimension to both works. This chapter discusses the two texts to show how the unrepresented text exerts a strong, though paradoxical, narrative and intellectual influence on the two fictional portrayals of the author of *Utopia*.

## The Drama of the Martyr

Fred Zinnemann's film *A Man for All Seasons*, released in 1966, is based on the extremely successful earlier play by Robert Bolt, who then wrote the screenplay for the film adaptation. Starring Paul Scofield as More, Wendy Hiller as his wife Alice, Orson Welles as Cardinal Wolsey and the young John Hurt as the particularly unworthy Richard Rich, the film won four Academy Awards in 1966 (for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Adapted Screenplay) and has enjoyed an unceasing acclaim ever since. The film focuses on the last seven years in the life of Thomas More, following his lack of support for King Henry VIII's divorce and new marriage, his resignation from the office of Lord Chancellor, the refusal to take the oath recognising the king of England as the head of the Church of England, and his ensuing im-



prisonment, trial and execution. All of these events, exceedingly dramatic in themselves, abounding in turns of fortune and gravity, would suffice to make a dynamic plot of any text. In Bolt's and Zinnemann's film, however, they are subordinated to the character of Sir Thomas More who is an intellectual and emotional centre of the narrative.

In a succession of scenes and intelligent, witty dialogues—which are a particularly strong element of the film and one of the hallmarks of Bolt's plays in general—there emerges a portrait of the main protagonist who is consciously stylised as a noble hero of a grand tragedy. The figure of Thomas More is first installed as that of a good lawyer and an honest clerk: his knowledge of the law is impressive and his competence unquestionable; moreover—in a sharp contrast to the majority of his colleagues—he does not accept bribes, nor does he profit financially from the offices he holds. The first attempt to discredit him undertaken by Thomas Cromwell and involving the alleged bribery case falls miserably precisely because it is so manifestly ill-founded. He is a principled rather than opportunistic lawyer: in the often quoted scene of the argument with his son-in-law, William Roper, he declares that he would give the devil the benefit of the law as it is the law and law only that can defend an innocent—even if it happens to be the devil (Zinnemann 1966). In one of the film's cruel ironies, this knowledge of and hope invested in law is cruelly abused by his own trial where he is first accused of standing against the king (when in fact he merely refused to support his act of supremacy), and then sentenced due to the false testimony. Thus, his competence and principles are drastically violated and have to give in to sheer power unafraid to exercise itself in order to have its way.

Apart from his professional high standards the character of Thomas More is shown in the film as a warm and affectionate man: his relationship with his wife Alice and daughter Margaret is close and warm; and even when his political decisions result in the impoverishment of the family and the loss of their status, he is able to explain his motivation and make them accept it. Family life and the simple pleasure of sharing time with the loved ones seem to be an important part of the character of Thomas More: though not interested in food, he enjoys common meals, and though not caring particularly about dress, he appreciates its importance for the female members of the household. Likewise, his figure is constructed as a good and loyal friend, ending his friendship with Lord Norfolk in order not to test or abuse the latter's loyalty to the King and choosing the loss of a friend rather than putting him in an uncomfortable position. Ironically, his personal loyalty and fair conduct are, too,

like his belief in law, severely abused: during the trial it is Richard Rich, the man he helped and knew from his youth, that provides false testimony and, like the Biblical Saint Peter, betrays him three times.

Finally, Sir Thomas More is represented in Zinnemann's film as a staunch defender of religion and a man of profound faith, unafraid to stand for it even if it takes displeasing the king and risking his own life. Unable to support the king's divorce, he resigns from the office of the chancellor; unable to take the oath, he refuses to do it and keeps silent about his motives. He is not happy to lose his life and part with its simple pleasures, but resigned to do so to be consistent with his own principles. In the last conversation with his wife staged in the film, while already in the Tower, he explains that what he believes in is a part of himself, a part of his soul, and he cannot simply discard it (Zinneman 1966). Again, this spiritual consistency ironically leads him into the scaffold, as what the king and the state require is exactly the opposite.

All the thus constructed and shown in the film character features of the figure of Thomas More make him not merely a noble but essentially a tragic hero. His competence, honesty, loyalty and perseverance collide dramatically with the ignorance, dishonesty, manipulation and egoism of those who surround him, starting with King Henry himself. The authority and respect he commands turn against him once the latter features become advisable and he comes into a violent conflict with the less than noble standards of his time. Thus, the film constructs its major conflict along the lines of classical drama: as an insolvable conflict of two opposing ideas with one of them inevitably losing and the death of the noble hero being a dramatisation of the impossibility of a compromise. Presented by Max Scheler as the crucial characteristics of the tragedy, the tragic conflict changes it from a literary genre into an existential concept (Scheler 1996: 70-71). The conflict does not arise out of blunder or frailty but is a result of the tragic knot of values which clash despite the protagonist's will (Scheler 1996: 72). As in his other screenplays, e.g. in *The Mission*, Robert Bolt is interested in tragic heroes and in the drama of the martyr who falls prey to the powers over which he has no control, and who yet tries to preserve his integrity and dignity. Portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons*, Sir Thomas More is another example of Bolt's characters of high principle that stand for values and virtues explicitly unwelcome by their contemporaries and who are killed precisely for these principles. And yet, in keeping with Bolt's sympathy for tragic characters and noble values, despite their tragic end, these are precisely these noble figures that triumph morally over those who use brutal power only.

## The Shrewdness of the Clerk

This portrayal may be sharply contrasted with the representation of Sir Thomas More included in the recent Booker Prize-winning novel by Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (2009), in which the Renaissance scholar and Lord Chancellor features as one of the background characters. The novel's plot is set between the years 1527-1535, and so covers almost exactly the same period as Zinnemann's film; it focuses, however, on the figure of Thomas Cromwell, first on his service as a lawyer and an assistant employed by Cardinal Wolsey, and then, after the Cardinal's fall, on his rise to the highest positions and influence at the court of King Henry VIII. The novel, though ostensibly employing the third-person narration, reflects chiefly Cromwell's point of view and represents his opinions and ideas. As a consequence, it constructs the character of Sir Thomas More as not merely marginal to the narrative—in contrast to Zinnemann's film where it is central—since the novel's focus lies somewhere else; more importantly, the character of More and his views emerge as considerably less positive and overall more difficult to sympathise with than it was the case with the film.

Mantelian Cromwell, though seemingly unprejudiced, perceives Thomas More as an altogether obstinate and limited man and as a misanthrope unable to enjoy life. In one of the early passages in the novel he notices that “under his clothes, it is well known, Thomas More wears a jerkin of horsehair [and] beats himself with a small scourge, of the type used by some religious orders” (Mantel 2009: 87). For Cromwell, such practices are nonsensical and he has no understanding for them: as he comments, “we don't have to invite pain in [...]. It's waiting for us, sooner rather than later” (Mantel 2009: 87). Far from being a hedonist himself, Cromwell sees such practices as a profound hypocrisy: unnecessary and conspicuous. Similarly, he notices the shabbiness of Lord Chancellor (whom he describes as “genial, shabby [...] his shirt collar is grubby”; Mantel 2009: 121) and likewise considers it to be merely a pose. His implied opinion about the future saint is quite critical: he clearly sees his actions as inflated and exaggerated, resembling behaviour of the Biblical Pharisees rather than genuine simplicity and humility.

Though a religious man himself, knowing by heart the whole Bible and reading it avidly, Cromwell has no time for religious orthodoxy and lack of tolerance; he clearly disapproves of Sir More for his persecution of heretics, tortures and burnings. The terrifying description of the burning of one of the “heretics”, ordered by More,

is a clear accusation of the chancellor of not merely narrow-mindedness but primarily of the lack of humanity. Just as in Zinnemann's film, Mantelian More is also a man of principle but this time this principle is much more negative: he does not hesitate to burn a man alive for the views that do not conform to the principles he holds dear. Thus, in *Wolf Hall*, both the very principle and its consequences are seriously questioned and presented as sheer cruelty rather than Christian faith. Also as a scholar, Sir More writes prolifically about heresy, not limiting himself to academic arguments only; as Cromwell observes, "More, in his pamphlets against Luther, calls the German shit. He says that his mouth is like the world's anus. You would not think that such words would proceed from Thomas More, but they do. No one has rendered the Latin tongue more obscene" (Mantel 2009: 121). A much more flexible character himself, Cromwell finds such extremity alarming, both in form and in consequences; so fixed an attitude clearly seems to him excessive and wrong. The fictional Cromwell prefers compromise; even till the very end of More's trial he hopes the chancellor will bend his unswerving views, give in a bit and save his life. He openly declares, "I want him to have every opportunity to live to rethink his position, show loyalty to our king and go home" (Mantel 2009: 594). A shrewd lawyer, Cromwell believes in negotiations, which he says are always cheaper than an open conflict; sees no ill in compromise and change and has little understanding of More's hard-line views, which for him are a nonsensical obstinacy.

Primarily, however, he is suspicious of Sir Thomas More's public appearance: he seems to believe that a lot of More's features are simply a show designed to create the image of authority, where at the bottom, a much less dignified motivations may lie. In an angry speech delivered at the dinner to which both he and More are invited, Cromwell asks openly if ironically:

Let's have this straight. Thomas More here will tell you, I would have been a simple monk, but my father put me to the law. I would spend my life in church, if I had the choice. I am, as you know, indifferent to wealth. I am devoted to things of the spirit. The world's esteem is nothing to me. [...]. So how did he become Lord Chancellor? Was it an accident? (Mantel 2009: 191)

Cromwell clearly implies that the pose of humility and spirituality that Thomas More creates and impresses the world with is merely a pose and underneath, he is a man as greedy and vain as anyone else, not necessarily in an excessive but in a purely human way. For him, More chiefly pretends to be a saint-like figure and his adher-

ence to religious principles he interprets as a way of keeping up at all costs the appearance of one. For pragmatic Cromwell it is not merely an impractical obstinacy; more damagingly, for him it is sheer hypocrisy.

Though politically an opponent, Cromwell shows some understanding towards Thomas More. Like him, More is a good lawyer; he is a sharp scholar, which Cromwell admires; he is a religious man, which Cromwell himself is too; finally, like himself, More has a brilliant daughter whom he teaches just as he does his own one. This common ground makes these two characters similar and could, in theory, secure their understanding. Ironically, however, their similarities set them apart and it is the difference in their attitudes towards challenges that makes them mortal enemies. Cromwell the pragmatic has no patience for More the idealist, not because he himself has no ideals, but because he believes his ideals are in the end insignificant when the king's will is concerned. More believes in the moral victory of a principle, Cromwell—in the effectiveness of a strategy; Cromwell is ready to adapt and negotiate, More categorically refuses to do so.

In the end, then, when perceived and described through the eyes of his political and ideological opponent, the fictional figure of Thomas More emerges as the one of a principled fool: a hypocrite ready to sacrifice his life for his public appearance of a saint. Such a presentation is obviously distorted by the narrative perspective adopted and follows logically from the lack of sympathy and understanding on the part of Cromwell, whose character is the narrative focaliser in the novel. Though unfavourable and subjective, it seems, however, quite a plausible portrayal, far removed from the heroic and noble rendering of the same character done earlier by Robert Bolt.

## The Importance of Utopia

Interestingly, in none of the analysed works does Thomas More's *Utopia* feature prominently—if at all. In Zinnemann's film there is only one scene in which a gathering of people in the inn are merrily talking and the characters laugh that they are talking about utopia (*A Man for All Seasons*); likewise, in Mantel's much longer and detailed novel there are only one or two side remarks mentioning the word "utopia" with no further narrative consequences. One reason accounting for this interesting omission may be the setting of the action more than ten years after the publishing of More's work and in a different political climate. Both the film and the novel are focused on

the events surrounding the Act of Supremacy, taking into account politics much more than intellectual history and clearly more interested in the turbulent historical events than in ideological disputes. Another reason explaining the absence of *Utopia* may be connected with the narrative focus of both works: both the film and the novel are character-driven, their centre are the characters, More and Cromwell respectively, set against the background of their times with the politics—as they both were prominent public figures—coming to the fore. *Utopia* does not seem, under the circumstances, a necessary context to show and understand the characters; faced with political and moral dilemmas, they have little time and opportunity to discuss it.

And yet, though unrepresented in the two narratives, Thomas More's *Utopia* may be argued to provide an important context for both works and explain to some extent the drastic differences in the way they construct the fictional character of its author. Zinnemann's and Bolt's More is a man of principle and integrity, ready to face death for his principles if necessary. His principles, however, are not those of the Roman Catholic Church only. Behind them lies a vision of a state which is a state of law and harmony; a structure in which every man has a place and in which order and plan rule rather than chaos and impulsive whimsical decisions. Law is an important part of the description of More's utopian society; Utopians have few laws but these laws are observed and provide a basis for all the relations within the society (More 1901: Book Two). The utopian laws are simple and clear—there is no need for a complicated and obscure system which would serve only lawyers themselves; it is also incorruptible—bribes and wrong decisions have no place in the Utopian society. More's *Utopia* describes a society which is simple and—precisely due to the simplicity and rationality of its organisation—immensely attractive; he describes a social organisation based on the ideal of stability and predictability, with a clear notion of which virtues are rewarded and which vices punished. Thus, organised state provides its inhabitants with the much desired safety that is not threatened by whimsical or unpredictable changes of fortune. Perhaps that is why More—though seemingly approving of divorces in his book—does oppose the actual divorce of King Henry VIII, seeing it not so much as a sacrilege or religious trespassing, but as a wanton breach of the law which should be observed. His moral immutability, then, is based on the clear idea of what a state should be like—predictable, stable and safe for its inhabitants—and his firm refusal to accept any departures from this model. It is quite clear that the society presented in More's *Utopia* is constructed in many cases as an antithesis and criticism of the English society of his times (Ostrowski 2001: 51). Thus, the

insistence of Thomas More on clear laws and their observance, so emphatically presented in *Utopia*, may be interpreted as a veiled criticism of the whimsical and random treatment of the law by the ruling Tudors.

Similarly, the simplicity of lifestyle led by the fictional Thomas More reflects perhaps the descriptions found in the real-life More's *Utopia*. The lifestyle of Utopians is depicted there as busy but comfortable, deprived of luxury and conspicuous wealth, yet aimed at development and pleasure. Learning and reading are an essential part of life, and are encouraged both for men and women. The fictional Thomas More in both *A Man for All Seasons* and *Wolf Hall* lives by these principles, too, even though they are ironically exaggerated and treated with suspicion by the character of Cromwell, who draws attention to More's shabbiness and sham rather than mere simplicity. Yet, the education of Thomas More's daughter and the stress put on the usefulness of all the members of the family reflect perhaps the model of social relations proposed by the historical More in *Utopia*. The fictional figure of Sir Thomas More, then, seen either as a martyr (as in *A Man for All Seasons*), or criticised as a hypocrite (in *Wolf Hall*), in both cases seems heavily modelled by the ideas of the society expressed in More's *Utopia*. Perhaps it is the vision of a harmonious social organism regulated by rational laws, stable, predictable and fair, that lies behind the characters consistency—or obstinacy, according to Cromwell—and makes him reject the reckless and capricious behaviour of King Henry VIII. What the fictional Sir Thomas More seems to abhor most is the state and its inhabitants treated as a ruler's property and exploited according to his passing whims. This is the crux of his conflict with Cromwell: while the latter seems ready to compromise any ideas of the state he might have for the sake of the king's whim, More adheres strictly to his vision of the state as it should be in principle rather than as it is in the reality of his times. His refusal to serve, then, and to support the king may be seen as both religion- and conscience-driven, and as an expression of his rejection of a certain model of the state with which he deeply disagrees.

Thomas More's golden book, then, with its description of an imaginary society, although seemingly absent from the two narratives, may yet provide an interesting insight as to the motivations and ideas of the otherwise quite unfathomable and paradoxical fictional character of Sir Thomas More. Represented either as a hero (as in *A Man for All Seasons*) or as a fool (as in *Wolf Hall*), in both works he seems to be a larger-than-life character, whose motivations are either unusually noble or impractically naïve. Yet, however contrastively presented, the protagonist's character traits

and deeds might be interpreted not only as resulting from the features of his fictional personality but also as a consequence of his theories and ideas which can be traced back to the earlier published book, and which may be variously—either positively or negatively—viewed. More's *Utopia*, then, although unrepresented, inevitably provides a natural and indispensable intertext to interpret the fictional representations of Sir Thomas More, both in the two works analysed above, and in other artistic representations of his figure.



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*The Pelagian Roots of Utopia—The Problem  
of Good and Evil in the Novels “Pronalazak Athanatika”  
by Vladan Desnica and “Koraljna vrata” by Pavao Pavličić*

ANNA BOGUSKA

## Introduction

Fátima Vieira who engaged in a reflection about the notion of utopia—which, according to her, is anamnestic in nature<sup>1</sup>—emphasises that utopia itself is (in a paradoxical manner) an attribute of the modern way of thinking and one of its discernible consequences (Vieira 2010: 6). To corroborate the statement, she indicates the utopia’s facility to assume new meanings or forms, to “disperse” in various directions and to absorb the more and more fields of human activity which results in blurring its identity, thus being defined in many ways (she herself indicates four different concepts of the understanding of the notion). However, it seems that the “modernity”<sup>2</sup> of utopia would be above all a consequence of the fact that, according to Thomas More, a literary fiction (and this point is mentioned by Vieira herself) became a field

<sup>1</sup> The anamnesticity of the utopia results from the fact that, according to the author, its name is referred to a *sui generis* prehistory of the concept, i.e. the tradition of utopian thinking before 1516, therefore the one that was present even before the occurrence of the word *utopia* itself (*inter alia* the ancient myth of the Golden Age or the anonymous 13th-century poem *The Land of Cockayne* are expressions of this tradition) (Vieira 2010: 5).

<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to state unequivocally how Vieira defines the concept of modernity. Some of the fragments of her text suggest that modernity is understood in that text as the modern age.

of debate over the world and various options of life which were different from the ones that reigned at that time; therefore, in the context of the debate the concept of the influence of the individual upon his or her fate was propounded, instead of its “polyphony” and “multifunctionality”. In reference to these statements, it seems worthwhile to consider the idea of the extension of the circle of the precursors of utopian thinking and to place also Pelagius next to Plato, who as Vieira emphasises, limited himself to a description of the best organisation of the country in *The Republic*, and next to Saint Augustine, who in the *Civitas Dei* expounded the ideal of life, but life after death, thus making not so much a utopia but an allotopia<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, it seems that it is his way of life, especially the conviction (which was revolutionary in the eyes of his contemporaries and which was rejected by, *inter alios*, Saint Augustine) that the freedom of human will and the ability to influence one’s own fate is peculiar to the mental basis on which modernity i.e. the Renaissance, and with the course of time also the Enlightenment, and most surely the modern utopia, is based on. The reflection on the selected examples of the latter kind of utopia will enable us to investigate the validity of this thesis.

Improving the existing world exclusively on the basis of human abilities is the object of *inter alia* two modern Croatian novels—*Koraljna vrata* (*Coral gate*) by Pavao Pavličić, published in 1993, and *Pronalazak Athanatika* (*The Discovery of Athanatik*) by Vladan Desnica, published in 1957. It is difficult to consider these novels as classical examples of the utopian genre, but without doubt both of them can be perceived as utopias, using Fátima Vieira’s definition of utopia: “the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards society one lives in (utopia is then seen as a matter of attitude)” (Vieira 2010: 6)<sup>4</sup>. However, a broader understanding of utopia,

<sup>3</sup> The notion of allotopia, which means “another place”, was introduced to literary research by Umberto Eco in the mid-1980s. According to the interpretation of the great Italian philosopher, allotopia is one of the ways of transfiguring reality, whose result is the creation of an alternative world and making this alternative world more real than the real world itself. It seems that these aspects (the otherness of the ideal world after death as compared to the terrestrial world and its “greater reality”) could have made Fátima Vieira consider Saint Augustine’s *Civitas Dei* an allotopia instead of a utopia. An interesting context is introduced by Krzysztof M. Maj’s book entitled *Allotopie. Topografia światów fikcyjnych [Allotopias. Towards the Topography of Fictional Storyworlds]*, in which the author re-assesses Eco’s definition. In his interpretation of the definition of allotopia of the Italian philosopher, *inter alia* from the perspective of xenotopography as propounded by Bernhard Waldenfels, Maj claims that allotopia would not only be “ontologically” closer to reality but it would also be epistemologically more remote from fantasy conceived of as a contradiction of reality. The upsetting of the opposition of what is known and what is unknown, of something which is one’s own and something which belongs to a stranger, the natural and the supernatural, the likely and the unlikely, and eventually the empirical and the counter-empirical—which follows from Maj’s redefinition of the notion—in my opinion appears to be legitimate, especially in reference to Augustine’s text and his concept of the earthly state and *Civitas Dei* (Maj 2015a: 33-76, 255-261).

<sup>4</sup> Apart from the definition that is indicated, Fátima Vieira also mentions the interpretations of utopia as: (1) a particular project of the organisation of the society, (2) a literary genre, (3) the role/function of utopia (the point is about such influence of utopia upon the reader which would prompt action on his or her part; as this case is associated only with a

which is not limited to a literary term, does not preclude the study of opinions of the researchers of utopia in the context of its genre-related determinants and the establishment of those determinants which occur in the novels that are here analysed. Furthermore, I share Fatima Vieira's conviction that utopia, seen as a literary genre, is one of the possible manifestations of utopian thinking. In a sense, a demonstration of its distinctive features in the aforementioned novels will contribute to the introduction and development of the reflection on this subject also on a meta-level.

## The Determinants of Utopianism

Vieira perceives the fundamental features of a utopia in a poem appended at the end of *Utopia* which was written by Anemolius, the nephew of Hythloday: (1) the isolation of the place which is referred to as the Utopia, (2) its competitive potential in reference to *The Republic* of Plato, which was merely a project, whereas in *De optimo reipublicæ* its complete realisation was expounded, and (3) the perfection of the inhabitants of the Utopia and the laws that were binding in their world which became the basis for calling this place an *eutopia* (Vieira 2010: 5). The theme of the isolation of the place in which the plot unfolds is present in both works. In Pavličić's work, the plot is set in the Lastovo island, one of the most remote island from the mainland—this ensures the isolation of space. Maria Maślanka-Soro, in her analysis of the Greek literary output, notes that utopian thinking directs itself in a somewhat natural manner towards a piece of land surrounded by water, when a human individual notices the rift between the world that surrounds him or herself and the world that could be, the world that is "thinkable" (Maślanka-Soro 2007: 11-12). Meanwhile, the editor of the volume *Archipelagi wyobraźni. Z dziejów toposu wyspy w kręgu literatur romańskich* [*Archipelagos of Imagination. From the History of the Topos of the Island in Romanesque Literatures*] refers to the island as "a natural reserve of unspoilt states" and it is used to justify the proclivity of Men of Letters to present the idea of utopia in a paradisiacal version (Łukaszuk 2007: 7). It seems that these premises, i.e. the association of the isolation of the

political utopia, the researcher suggests to reject this definition altogether). As noted by Andrzej Juszczuk, in Polish scholarly literature there are also various trends of reflection on utopia, although there is a dominance of the perception of utopia as a specific mode of thinking, and therefore the point is about referring to utopia with a term belonging to the field of ideology and the history of political and social thought (Juszczuk 2014: 17-18).

place with its perfection (as far as the particular aspects are concerned) may be considered as appropriate ones also in the context of the novel *Koraljna vrata*, in which the theme of isolation from the “normal” world has not only a real, physical dimension but also a mental one, especially, for the protagonist of the novel, Krsto Brodnjak, who undertakes a journey from Zagreb to an island which is completely unknown to him and seeks refuge from the hardships of a day-to-day existence and responsibility for his wife, who is still young but very sick. However, the reality of the novel by Desnica has to deal with an unnamed totalitarian state which is not particularly developed and which is ruled by Maman-Mamona. This state also has its own separate peculiar language and organisation which already indicate the level of isolation of the land. An additional element which somehow intensifies this state of isolation is a complete fictionality of the place—the relation about him is a story of an unreliable narrator, a toothless chatterbox. In Pavličić’s work the plot develops somewhat “directly before the eyes of the reader”, however, as far as Desnica’s work is concerned, the plot is quite limited, incessantly interrupted by anecdotes and essayistic interpolations about universals and, similarly as in the case of the first realisation of the genre that is commented upon, it is also presented in the novel. This in some respects approximates Desnica’s text to both More’s and Plato’s work. The dialogue between the toothless harum-scarum, who is presented in a caricatural way, and the narrator of the novel, is devoted to a great extent to the history of an imaginary country. Nevertheless, reflections of the former about, for instance, the modern novel and the challenges which are set to it, aesthetics as such, freedom, truth, humanity, the question of making people happy, religion and its relation with the organisation of the state, revolution. As stated in Witwicki’s description of the *Republic* (Witwicki 2003: 8), *Pronalazak Athanatika*, analogically as Plato’s text:

[...] is a book of an immensely rich content. It dazzles the reader with both its content and form, for once it has the form of a theatrical sketch with a distinctively drawn description of the people who appear on the stage, on a different occasion it has the appearance of a rambling discussion and at a yet different stage, of prophetic vision. Sometimes the dialogue flows like a song, and in a different place it is chopped up like a conversation held on the stage of a comedic play<sup>5</sup>.

However, it is difficult to claim that the novel attempts to compete in any way with the previous representations of utopia. Moreover, Desnica’s ambition is not to

<sup>5</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Croatian and Polish are mine.

provide a complete description of the state that he presents; he concentrates, basically, on the selected aspects of its function and the optimisation of human happiness by inventing a cure for cancer—Athanatik cure's eponymous—which is not an “elixir of immortality”, as he emphasises, but a cure which is discovered as a result of thorough research. In his description of the properties of the cure, he does not use the word “immortality” which has metaphysical connotations, but such terms as “eternal regeneration” or “unlimited existence”. In this way, an ironic commentary is provided about the Enlightenment rationalism, the idea of the primacy of experimental sciences in all spheres of life and the assumption by physics of concepts such as immortality and permanence from the field of religion and mythology. Therefore, the postulated perfection does not concern all spheres of life of the inhabitants of the state and themselves; the optimisation of human happiness concerns one sphere, the question of health and life, and these spheres provide a basis for the establishment of a utopia. A parallel model may be found in Pavličić's novel. Although in contradistinction to *Pronalazak Athanatika*, the novel in question is distant in terms of structure from Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* (Pavličić is a master of intricately woven fiction with an admixture of crime themes), it does introduce the theme of the transformation of a “normal” society into a society which is obsessed with a vision of permanent health (an analogous theme is found in Desnica's work)<sup>6</sup>; however, the transformation is not a result of research which is conducted but is a result of a swindling means—healing linden dust, discovered by Krsto Brodnjak in a chest of old books, and to be more precise, in a manuscript of *Osman* by Ivan Gundulić—a perfect copy

<sup>6</sup> The questions of longevity and immortality are engaged *inter alios* by Frederic Jameson in the book entitled *Archaeologies of the Future*. In his comment about *Back to Methuselah* (1921) by George Bernard Shaw, the author points out that the previously mentioned themes are almost always “a figure and a disguise for something quite different” and that basically all stories about longevity or immortality refer to class struggle (Jameson 2005: 328-344). If we were to consider the themes of fear and group envy, the struggle for a salutary or life-sustaining formula, a certain type of collective mobilisation and attempts at introducing radical changes in local communities which appear in both Croatian novels which are discussed, then Jameson's remark would also refer to the novels of Desnica and Pavličić. However, the former novel—*Pronalazak Athanatika*—would also be a lampoon against the realia of the life in (Tito's) communist country, against the functioning of privileged groups in this country and against the faith in progress—as we have already emphasised—especially the faith in the progress of science. It seems that the personal theme i.e. the author's obsession concerning the subject of death (which is expressed *inter alia* by Desnica's final novel *Proljeća Ivana Galeba* published in 1967, devoted mainly to this theme) would be significant as well. Reflection about longevity would contain a more important problem i.e. internal rejection of death. In Pavličić work, apart from criticism of the communist state, one could also perceive criticism of utopia as such. The discrediting of the idea of immortality equal to the perfection of the world could be also considered the rejection of illusions about “paradisiacal oases”, delusive islands. Therefore the novel would have the nature of a metatext.

which contains the complete set of the songs of the work<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the validity of Fátima Vieira's claim is confirmed: "although the idea of utopia should not be confused with the idea of perfection, one of its most recognizable traits is its speculative discourse on a non-existent social organization which is better than the real society" (Vieira 2010: 7)<sup>8</sup>.

According to Artur Blaim, the fundamental feature of utopia would be its dialogic nature (Blaim 1984: 63). There is no doubt that if one considers the form itself, Pavličić's work is not a dialogue; one may perceive it rather as a convention of a testimony. Moreover, if we considered Jean-François Vallée's insight about the three pairs of oppositions peculiar to the utopia—theory and fiction, theticity and antitheticity, monologue and dialogue—it is indeed only the third opposition which will not refer to Pavličić's novel<sup>9</sup>. The case of Desnica's work would be different—it would realise the whole "instruction". As far as the type of dialogue applied in Desnica's work is concerned, it is certainly not a combination of two ways of perceiving one subject (*syncrisis*), and it is only partially the second subtype indicated by Blaim—*anacrisis*, i.e. provoking the interlocutor in order to express a different opinion. In Desnica's work dialogue appears to be a debate between two figures—the unnamed narrator, who is "reluctant" in the formulation of his opinions and most certainly the *alter ego* of the author, whereas his co-interlocutor is the rake, who is described in a

<sup>7</sup> *Osman* by Ivan Gundulić, a Baroque writer from Dubrovnik, written most probably in the years 1622-1638 is a Tasso-type epic poem, which describes the Polish victory at the battle of Chocim in 1621 and the heroism of the future king of Poland, Prince Władysław IV Vasa. Although he did not participate in the battle (he was bedridden in a camp and appeared in the field after the battle only to maintain high morale of the soldiers which were commanded by Jan Karol Chodkiewicz at that time), he became the main positive protagonist in the work, a counter-protagonist for Osman. The work consists of twenty songs, but two middle-songs, i.e. song 14 and song 15 are missing. The latter songs became an object of the pursuit of researchers and numerous considerations associated with their existence and content. Pavličić's novel problematizes the question of the perfection of the complete text found on the Lastova island and the question of its influence on both the novel-related reality in general and the Croatian literary tradition (as noted by Joanna Rapacka, *Osman* is the first work which was considered by the national revival movement as the basis of the national canon, and (see Rapacka 1997:122-124).

<sup>8</sup> In the article *The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell* Gregory Claeys claims that contrary to the fact that utopianism is directed at perfection, the majority of texts do not postulate perfection, stipulating at the most a norm which is higher than the existing one (for further information consult Claeys 2010: 108). Whereas in *Three Variants on the Concept of Dystopia* he notes that perfection is basically a theological concept associated with a millenarian impulse and it is not an appropriate instrument to describe human beings and societies (Claeys 2013: 16-17). Although both novels in question provoke a reflection on perfection, neither of them mention complete embodiment of perfection. This problem is evoked rather by bringing a certain sphere to an optimum variant which is unknown in the real world.

<sup>9</sup> The observation that Pavličić's novel is a peculiar combination of literary fiction and a theoretical dissertation not only on morality, the problem of good and evil but also on the poetics of postmodernism, appears in Dubravka Oraić Tolić's work (Oraić Tolić 1998: 197-207). The problem of theticity, i.e. in this case the establishment of a model of a new type of society or reality is, similarly as in the case of Desnica, interwoven with a tendency to negate the plausibility of realising such an idea. Here, theticity and antitheticity are engaged in an interplay between utopia and dystopia. The latter theme—the possibility of perceiving Desnica's novel as both a positive and a negative utopia—is engaged by Krešimir Nemec (Nemec 2006: 81-94).



satirical and derisive way and is the one whom one hardly believes due to the status that was imparted to him<sup>10</sup>. The role of the former figure is admittedly to prompt the Gap-Toothed Harum-Scarum to speak (and making attempts at establishing a thematic rigour), nevertheless, one does not perceive here a need to present a different opinion. Although in a way it will be expressed, it will be so as a general conclusion that may be inferred from the entire conversation, as the main sense which is reached by the storyteller himself. Therefore, as we can agree with Andrzej Juszczuk that the dialogue in the utopia may perform the function of a literary technique, convention makes it possible to surprise the reader ; however, the fact that the author distances himself in the reference to the story that is presented (Juszczuk 2014: 21), in the context of Desnica's work, resulted in providing the following insight which is not valid:

[...] in contradistinction to the Socratic dialogues the point is not about the presentation of the process of reaching the truth or the representation of a philosophical discussion but the point is about the most expressive presentation of the image of the world (Juszczuk 2014:23).

In Desnica's work the situation is even opposite. This point is supported at least by the fourth part of his novel (the total number of chapters is ten)—an essayistic, non-fictional part which is not related directly to the story about Athanatik, but it is devoted exclusively to the problem of the truth which the storyteller presents in a manner that we are familiar with, owing to Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations*, i.e. by informing the co-interlocutor about the constant deviation from the subject, indulging in numerous digressions but which, in spite of that, emphasises the fact that the discussion pursues the right direction—the direction of the truth:

<sup>10</sup> Andrzej Juszczuk points out that in *De optimo reipublicae* the figure of the boy appears not only as the face of Hytlodeus (who "believes in castles in the air") but also as the narrator and the author himself, whose name in Greek and Latin signifies exactly a fool. Therefore, the dialogue is conducted between equally compromised entities (Juszczuk 2014: 22). In Desnica's work an analogous role is played by the Gap-Toothed Harum-Scarum, in the case of whom the very nickname compromises him. It is difficult to establish unambiguously the position from which the narrator voices his opinions, but in the majority of cases he is the one who naïvely and repeatedly asks questions, enabling the co-interlocutor to "reveal the truth". The introduction of the figure of the moron/lunatic doubtlessly increases the satirical potential of the text, which is revealed also, for instance, by the names of other protagonists of the novel. And thus, for example, the ruler of the state in question is Maman-Mamona, which alludes to the figure of the lesser god of money, mentioned in the Gospel, according to Saint Luke. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost* Mammon figures as the one who taught humanity to "riffl[e] the bowels of [...] earth / For treasures better hid". In an analogous way, one could perceive the role of the ruler of the state in Desnica, who introduced the "salvific" Athanatik into circulation. The work also features a brilliant inventor—Robel (which sounds almost like Nobel)—who with the course of time establishes a foundation for young scholars, subsidising their development with money. The examples that were provided do not exhaust the whole satirical potential of the text; the novel features many more similar examples. Thus, in Desnica's work the validity of Ana Cláudia Ribeiro Romano is confirmed: "Both utopia and dystopia are the heirs of satire. We may therefore rephrase our initial statement and operate a generalisation by stating that all utopias contain dystopia and satire" (Ribeiro Romano 2013: 64).

YOU ARE AFRAID THAT we will lose the thread, are you not? [...] But we will not lose the “main thread”, fear you not. The point is that it will not lose us. Rest assured, it does not let its victim away from its clutches, until the very death! [...] We know that the truth is born permanently, in an uninterrupted process, that it arises by means of a constant, enduring re-elaboration and supraconstruction (Desnica 2006: 30; 32)<sup>11</sup>.

Therefore, in the end, the light and jocose multiaspectual ramblings of the narrator of the novel and of Harum-Scarum carry a degree of sense; they bring the interlocutors closer to each other on the road of intellectual speculation to Heidegger’s “aletheic” reading of the truth, i.e. the one which is construed as the divinely provenanced unconcealment of existence which reveals itself to man in a fragmentary manner<sup>12</sup>. The moment of deliberation, debate, and theoretical elaboration of new possibilities appears in reference to both texts as one of the means to get closer to the truth. And they do not miss the mark. They realise it by establishing a new order in the “non-places” and its final deconstruction, which is brought about by rational verification and analysis of various aspects of the model that is suggested.

## The Eternal Interplay Between Utopia and Dystopia

The identification of the relation which remains between the “no-place” and the “place”, postulated by Krzysztof M. Maj as the final stage of the three-stage process of the description of a literary utopia—when referring to the etymology of the word *utopia* [no-place], Maj indicates that it requires the following course of action: the identification of the location of the “no-place”, the identification of its point of reference i.e. place and, finally, the decipherment of the mystery whether the former negates the latter (Maj 2015b: 153-154)—is justifiable also in this case, for it will bring us to the “truth” that the authors propose. Therefore, one should note that both novels present

<sup>11</sup> „STRAHUJETE DA ne izgubimo nit, jelte? [...] Ali »glavnu nit« nećemo izgubiti, ne bojte se. Stvar je u tome što ona ne gubi nas. Budite spokojni, ne ispušta ona tako lako iz pandža svoju žrtvu, sve do groba! [...] Mi znamo da se istina rada neprestano, u besprekidnom procesu, da ona nastaje stalnim, neumornim nadograđivanjem i nadograđivanjem”.

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, as explained by Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, refers to the ancient idea of the truth as unconcealment, which is associated with bringing something to light, the revelation of a nature which heretofore remained unknown. Therefore, the truth is sometimes compared to a robbery. Moreover, the philosopher does not link it to the question of judgement but to the existence itself, and this represents his position of an opponent of subjectivism and the nihilism of the truth (Buczyńska-Garewicz 2008: 155-204). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: “Truth (discoveredness) must always first be wrested from beings. Beings are torn from concealment. The actual factual discoveredness is, so to speak, always a kind of *robbery*. Is it a matter of chance that the Greeks express themselves about the essence of truth with a *privative* expression (*a-lētheia*)?” (Heidegger 1996: 204).

a vision of ideal societies (as far as a certain aspect is concerned), i.e. ones in which there are no diseases or death (a novelistic “no-place”), and which are compared to the reality which is familiar to us, i.e. one that is marked by the presence of all kinds of diseases (the novelistic “place”). Thus, in a broader perspective, one may ask a question about the justifiability of the functioning of the world in which there would be only good and all elements of evil would be eradicated. In Pavličić’s novel, this theme is alluded explicitly to the protagonist, Krsto Brodnjak, in the situation when the local community is about to learn about the effect of the cure that he has found and is about to indulge in its greedy application:

They want to [these will be the philologist’s words about the inhabitants of the island] drive away disease from this island. They want to abolish all evil. And if there is no evil [...]

—Good things are also not there [as remarked by his interlocutor—A.B.].

— Such health is not derived from God, I have been saying this all along (Pavličić 1998: 182)<sup>13</sup>.

This idea confirms the paradox of perfection which was expressed by Władysław Tatarkiewicz, i.e. the fact that “the world is perfect through its imperfection (*perfectus propter imperfectionem*)” (Tatarkiewicz 1992: 18). Analogous conclusions were reached by a German philosopher, Odo Marquard, the author of a book which was significantly titled *Glück im Unglück* [*Fortune in Misfortune*]. However, one should note that he considers such a state of affairs to be quite unsatisfactory. He claims that the question about happiness remains abstract until it is asked in abstraction from the question about unhappiness: “People do not know undisturbed happiness” (Marquard 2001: 5). Manifestations of such a situation, i.e. a temporal absolutisation of the world which (absolutisation) is brought about by the blurring of the border between the elements of good and evil, when happiness becomes a stated fact, not derived from salvation but a manifestation of people’s belief in their own strength, may be found in both novels<sup>14</sup>. A further perspective of the existence of such a world brings

<sup>13</sup> — Oni hoće [these will be the philologist’s words about the inhabitants of the island] da odavde protjeraju bolest, s ovoga otoka. Da ukinu svako zlo. A ako nema zla.../—Nema ni dobra [such will be the remark of his interlocutor, who adds:] Ovakvo zdravlje nije od Boga, ja to od početka govorim” (Pavličić 1998: 182).

<sup>14</sup> In Pavličić’s work the protagonist, Krsto Brodnjak, repeatedly comes close to the sin of *hybris*, perceiving himself as the future saviour of humanity. The recognition of the effect of the linden dust which pours from the pages of *Osman*, engenders a feeling of an awareness that he has become the master of human fate: *Tim prahom*—claims Brodnjak—*možemo izliječiti koga god hoćemo, a možemo ga i ne izliječiti... Mi smo gospodari života i smrti* (Pavličić 1998: 86: “With this powder we may cure whoever we want to cure, and we may not want to cure him [at all—A.B.]... We are the lords of life and death”). In Desnica’s work, even though the idea itself is equally brilliant, the strategy of the description, i.e. the satirical character of the text and its polyphony, shatters the pathos of the idea and at least questions it, if not even challenges it.

about a danger which would consist in the constant abolition of the opposition and what follows—a gradual loss of the idea of the value of any good things. The maintenance of both elements, suggested in *Theodicië* by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz<sup>15</sup>, according to Marquard, seems to be even more controversial as it is associated with approval to the existence of evil in the name of positive values:

For if there is no »*malum*« there is also no »*optimum*«; it must »admit« evil (*Übel*) as a condition of a world which is the best of all possible worlds: optimum happiness as an end justifies unhappiness as a means (Marquard 2001: 11).

This statement, which is in a sense repeated after Leibniz by the modern philosophy of history, is a manifestation, as noted by the contemporary German philosopher, of the relativisation of unhappiness through its teleologisation and is based on a popular thesis—the end justifies the means. The principle which was supposed to confirm God's goodness prompts us not to believe in it. Otto Marquard indicates the attempts to neutralise the problem of unhappiness (which at every instance must be accompanied also by neutralisation of happiness) and balance the former with the latter, as a means to overcome this impasse. The theme of positioning the question of unhappiness and its opposite—the philosopher continues his argument—is engaged by Kant in his critique of eudaimonism (Marquard 2001: 22) by supporting a neutral attitude to both phenomena and, as a matter of fact, supporting a displacement of these things from philosophical reflection. However, wherever this theme is maintained, the ideas of compensation are introduced; so, it is possible to come to conclusion that all mishaps are associated with compensation in the form of happiness. Therefore, the paradox of the situation would consist in the fact that it always remains insoluble, which both Croatian authors seem to eventually repeat—the protagonist of Pavličić's novel, Krsto Brodnjak, decides to burn the perfect work of Gundulić and to cut humanity off from the possibility of using the "beneficial" medication once and for all; for Desnica, who similarly as Pavličić describes the dire effects of the new world order that appeared after the invention of the cure, i.e. the struggle for the access to this cure, the corruption and manipulations associated with it and

<sup>15</sup> "Now this supreme wisdom [according to the philosopher], united to a goodness that is no less infinite, cannot but have chosen the best. For as a lesser evil is a kind of good, even so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good; [...] As in mathematics, when there is no maximum nor minimum, in short nothing distinguished, everything is done equally, or when that is not possible nothing at all is done: so it may be said likewise in respect of perfect wisdom, which is no less orderly than mathematics, that if there were not the best ("optimum") among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any" (Leibniz 2005).

the dangers resulting also from the inability to feed many generations of people living at the same time, the conclusion is analogous. The citizens of the country eventually demand to return to the original state; significant words are uttered “GIVE US BACK OUR CANCER! GIVE US BACK OUR DEATH!” [“VRATITE NAM NAŠ RAK! VRATITE NAM NAŠU SMRT!”] (Desnica 2006: 78) and the opposite conclusion appears:

—If we want to be at least a little bit optimistic, there is nothing else left for us to do than to force the supra-state body to destroy Athanatik!... [...]

—Please do so! No sacrifice dares to be too hard for mankind. Even the sacrifice of immortality! (Vladan Desnica, 80)<sup>16</sup>.

The model of the argument in both novels is, therefore, the same—originally the more attractive “no-place”—the Lastovo island and the country in which Athanatik was invented—seem(s) to constitute a tempting alternative to the “place”, however, with the course of time its potential is reduced until the possibility of realisation is completely negated. An eutopia is transformed into a dystopia, and both works confirm the validity of the insight of numerous researchers (e.g. Sargent 2013: 11, Juszczuk 2014: 28) about the apparent difference between them, or they even prove Gregory Claeys’s statement about the dystopia as the essence of a (e)utopia:

[...] there are problems even with the idea of dystopia as the negative of “ideal” societies. Clearly just as one person’s freedom fighter is another’s terrorist, one person’s utopia is another’s dystopia. Dystopia, in other words, rather than being the negation of utopia, paradoxically may be its essence (Claeys 2013: 15).

## Augustine and Pelagius

One could risk asking, firstly, whether or not all these things question the sense of weaving a utopia and, secondly, what the above-mentioned insights referring to the Croatian texts give us in the broader, not necessarily genre-related, perspective. Lyman Tower Sargent, discussing the first question, surely would say that it is not so—the negation of the sense of maintaining a utopia does not come about, for the researcher explicitly emphasises a greater interest in good places instead of bad ones, perceiving the former ones as a presage of a desired change instead of as an escape

<sup>16</sup> “— Ako hoćemo da budemo bar mrvicu optimisti, ne preostaje nam drugo nego da natjeramo naddržavno tijelo da uništi Athanatik! [...]—Učinite tako! Za čovječanstvo nikakva nam žrtva ne smije biti teška. Čak ni žrtva besmrtnosti!”.

from reality which is most frequently a dystopian reality (Sargent 2013:10). Stanisław Brzozowski would supposedly be less optimistic, about whom Urszula Kowalczyk, the author of a commentary to his *Pamiętnik* [*Diary*] writes that he belittled the value of the constructs of the intellect and imagination, setting above them the act of participation or a profound experience, whereas he perceived utopian thinking as a derivative of the substantial tendencies of modern culture in which: “theorising endangers experience, knowledge endangers will, conceptualisation endangers activity” (Kowalczyk 2007: 98). One must note, in a way contrary to this point and *en passant* responding to the second of the questions that were put forward that the value which is carried by both novels has the dimension of a theoretical elaboration of substantial content. They reiterate the philosophical debates which were conducted among the aforementioned thinkers of the last several hundred years who constitute their fictionalised concretisation.

However, the return to the now-familiar themes explicitly reveals (and this is without doubt one of its strongest points) the ideological basis from which utopian thinking grows and which Leszek Kołakowski links with Pelagian mentality in the following way:

It was pointed out many times that the entire history of European millenarian and utopian thinking, starting from the 16th century and perhaps from the Middle Ages, was associated—consciously or otherwise—with Pelagian mentality, with the refusal to admit that human efforts cannot eradicate evil and that we are incurably tainted with radical evil of which only God may purify us, if He pleases. According to this idea, our modernity is Pelagian at its roots, which also contains a Promethean hope of building a perfect human State which would be free from evil. This is equivalent to a belief in man’s self-redemption [emphasis—A.B.]” (Kołakowski 2001: 242).

Therefore, he directly formulates a conviction about the liberating role of Pelagius’s thought in the mental history of Europe, the cultivation of curiosity as a desirable thing that the thinker cultivated and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. He also reveals that through the agency of this trend the belief in human freedom which consists in the capacity of making a choice between good and evil as well as the sense of the feasibility of belief in one’s own strength and in one’s chances of improving one’s existence, which is peculiar also to utopian projects, was promoted. All of these themes recur in both novels; they constitute the ideological background of these novels in the sense that their obviousness lies at the foundation of the considerations that are made. Therefore, if we consider the themes that were indicated, the Pelagian model lies at the opposite pole of the model which is suggested by Saint Augustine,

whom the vast majority of researchers perceive as one of the precursors of utopia, and who, let one remind the reader, dismissed the question of temporality to the background by setting eternal life above it. Augustine also made salvation dependent from Divine grace, and thus he negated the individual's possibility of influencing his or her fate. Nevertheless, an unambiguous conclusion of both authors, not so much about the impossibility of removing evil but about the groundlessness of making such a step, approximates them (from the point of view of the effect and not of the course of thinking that they made) to Augustine. In this sense, their attitude is ideologically hybrid although it requires that also Pelagius is to be put next to Saint Augustine as one of the precursors of utopian thinking.

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*The Elementary Particles: “Brave New World”  
According to Michel Houellebecq*

MICHAŁ PALMOWSKI

## Introduction

The five-hundredth anniversary of Thomas More’s *Utopia* may be an opportunity to re-examine other foundational texts of the utopian studies. Huxley’s 1932 novel *Brave New World* is definitely one of them. It is commonly described as a “negative utopia” (sensu: Baker 1990, Körtner 1995, Higdon 2013, Samaan 2013) a vicious satire on the technocratic society, in which most human beings lead emotionally and spiritually barren lives, being reduced, by means of brainwashing and genetic engineering, to utter stupidity. It is argued that Huxley warns us against “scientific utopianism” responsible for this nightmarish future, in which there is no room for such values, central to each liberal thinker and humanist, as freedom, love, or human dignity.

It seems that such re-examination is currently underway. The traditional reading of Huxley’s classic is challenged in Michel Houellebecq’s 1998 novel *The Elementary Particles*, an interesting mixture of a realistic novel and a utopia. Bruno, a frustrated intellectual, one of the two protagonists, somewhat provocatively announces, “Everyone says *Brave New World* is supposed to be a totalitarian nightmare, a vicious indictment of society, but that’s hypocritical bullshit. *Brave New World* is our idea of

heaven: genetic manipulation, sexual liberation, the war against aging, the leisure society. This is precisely the world that we have tried—and so far failed—to create” (Houellebecq 2001: 131).

Bruno expects to be contradicted by his brother, a molecular biologist, the other protagonist of Houellebecq’s novel, to whom he makes this declaration, but Michel supports Bruno’s opinion with additional facts. He mentions Julian Huxley’s book *What Dare I Think*, published in 1931: “All of the ideas his brother used in the novel—genetic manipulation and improving the species, including the human species—are suggested here. All of them are presented as unequivocally desirable goals that society should strive for” (Houellebecq 2001: 132). He points out that Aldous “had always been in favor of complete sexual liberation, and he was a pioneer in the use of psychedelic drugs” (Houellebecq 2001: 132); therefore, there is no reason why he should criticize a society in which casual sex and mind altering drugs are available to everyone. Michel suggests that because “Nazi ideology completely discredited eugenics and the idea of improving the race” (Houellebecq 2001: 132), after the war, Aldous wanted to distance himself from his earlier notion of utopia and convinced other people that *Brave New World* should be read as a satire (Houellebecq 2001: 132).

This is what Jerry Andrew Varsava describes as “counterfactual intertextuality that radically transvalues Huxley’s insistent anti-utopian liberalism” (Varsava 2005: 158). The term does not seem to be precise, though, for what is really challenged (or “transvalued”) are not facts but their interpretations (or the intentions ascribed to Huxley)<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, all intertextuality is, in a sense, “counterfactual” (to stick to the term used by Varsova). Varsava seems to forget that intertextuality is always a two-way process. The text which is being referred to (intertext) contributes to the meaning of the text referring to it, but the intertext does not remain unaffected. When old texts are placed in a new context their meaning will be inevitably altered. Sometimes this alteration is very insignificant, at other times it is striking. Hence, in this chapter, I shall discuss both how Huxley’s novel influences our reading of *The Elementary Particles* and how *The Elementary Particles* might influence our reading of Huxley’s novel. In order to establish the latter, I will have to devote some space to the discussion of the reception of Huxley’s novel. The phrase “Brave New World”,

<sup>1</sup> Of course one has to remember that this is a conversation between two literary characters and one has to place it in the context of the story the novel tells. In other words, its analysis will not show us what Houellebecq truly thinks about Huxley’s *Brave New World* but how he uses it for his own purposes.

evoked in the title of my article, has at least a double meaning; it refers both to Huxley's work (reinterpreted by Houellebecq) and a certain vision (or rather visions) of the society described by Houellebecq (which may be compared to and contrasted with the society described by Huxley).

Bruno and Michel live in the late twentieth-century France. This is a world which, to a large extent, has been anticipated by Huxley, the world of market economy and ever developing science and technology, including genetic engineering. Interestingly enough, genetic engineering and broadly understood market economy (and its influence on the individual's private life) are the main focus of both Huxley's *Brave New World* and Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles*.

Many commentators have noticed that, unlike the other seminal dystopia, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which might have seemed outdated when liberal democracy defeated totalitarian communist regimes<sup>2</sup>, *Brave New World* anticipated the (post)modern world with much greater accuracy<sup>3</sup>. In 2003 Francis Fukuyama wrote in *Our Posthuman Future*: "Huxley was right [...] that the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and move us into a »posthuman« stage of history" (Fukuyama 2003: 7).

Others have noted that Huxley was also right about market economy (Zigler 2015: 55-60). Contrary to Hayek's famous argument (1944), market economy does not have to promote liberal democracy, as it is evidenced by the example of China. What is more, market economy might have a detrimental effect on liberal democracy by turning people into mindless units of consumption and production, rather than citizens capable of making responsible choices. In an article on the subject of

<sup>2</sup> Back in 1989 Richard Rorty wrote that "Orwell's best novels will be widely read as long as we describe the politics of the twentieth century as Orwell did" (169). He further developed this prediction: "Someday this description of our century may come to seem blinkered or shortsighted. If it does, Orwell will be seen as having inveighed against an evil he did not entirely understand. Our descendants will read him as we read Swift—with admiration for a man who served human liberty, but with little inclination to adopt his classification of political tendencies or his vocabulary of moral and political deliberation. Some present-day leftist critics of Orwell (e.g., Christopher Norris) think that we *already* have a way of seeing Orwell as blinkered and shortsighted" (Rorty 1989: 170).

<sup>3</sup> In the light of more recent political developments (Russia's aggressive foreign policy and the rise of antidemocratic sentiment in the West), this optimism, based on the conviction that the future will be shaped by the economic forces, not big politics, seems somewhat premature. Also Richard Rorty (1989) in his book *Irony, Contingency, and Solidarity* argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not make *Nineteen Eighty-Four* obsolete. He, however, offered an interesting reinterpretation of Orwell's work, claiming that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is primarily a philosophical rather than political novel. According to Rorty, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows the dangers connected with living in the world in which there is no objective verifiable truth, which to Rorty seems an apt description of the postmodern condition.

Houellebecq's first novel *L'Extension du domaine de la lutte* (quite surprisingly translated into English as *Whatever*), Carole Sweeney claims that we are already living in the age of Post-Fordism, "a particular mutation of late twentieth century capitalism":

Post-Fordism (sometimes called cognitive capitalism) has in its sights not just the transformation of labor but also the intimate spaces and activities of everyday life. This economic incursion into the private spaces of the ethical and erotic activities of subjectivity produces the flexible post-Fordist personality, happily and healthily consuming from cradle to grave in the new improved capitalist economy, now with added flexibility, immateriality and affectivity. In part, a more totalizing application of commodity fetishism, post-Fordism saturates the entire range of human activities (Sweeney 2010: 42).

Hayek believed that taking economic freedom away from the individual is the beginning of the road to serfdom and all centrally planned economies sooner or later degenerate into totalitarian regimes as political freedom is a corollary of economic freedom, apparently remaining oblivious to the fact that the corollary of economic freedom is not political freedom (i.e. liberal democracy) but consumerism and conformism. This danger was seen, for instance, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, living during the times of the early American capitalism, maintained that:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity (Emerson 1841).

In a sense, Emerson's insight is developed by Huxley, who does not cherish any illusions about the benevolent nature of market economy. *Brave New World* shows that the road to serfdom leads through consumerism and conformism. The inhabitants of *Brave New World* are perfectly happy to exchange their freedom for a pleasant and uncomplicated life.

Thus the critical consensus regarding the interpretation of Huxley's *Brave New World* is that liberalism and humanism are annihilated by the combined forces of genetic engineering and market economy. This is not a world in which we would like to live.

In *The Elementary Particles* Bruno suggests, and Michel seems to agree, that what is really wrong with market economy is not that it leads to mindless consumption but that it fails to deliver the goods for consumption. In the world of market economy individuals compete for a limited number of goods, be its material products or sexual partners, who are also bought with a kind of currency (personal attractiveness

or social prestige). And there is simply not enough of those. Thus, this is a world of constant anxiety and constant struggle. As Houellebecq wrote in *Whatever*:

Economic liberalism is an extension of the domain of the struggle, its extension to all ages and all classes of society. Sexual liberalism is likewise an extension of the domain of the struggle, its extension to all ages and all classes of society (Houellebecq 1999: 99).

The successful individuals accumulate money and sexual partners, the less successful ones, such as Bruno, who lives alone after his girlfriend dies of cancer, are left with nothing. For the old and ugly (and the poor) the possibilities of sexual satisfaction are rapidly shrinking. Eventually Bruno, who works as a French literature teacher, masturbates in front of his teenage student. In comparison with Houellebecq's vision of market economy, Huxley's world is a world of a kind utopian socialism in which goods are distributed to everyone, according to their needs, and individuals selflessly share sexual partners since everyone belongs to everyone else (so there is no need for economic or sexual anxiety). Furthermore, eternal youth and eternal health are not a lie but a reality there. This explains why Bruno perceives Huxley's *Brave New World* as a genuine utopia. This is a world which does not fail to deliver what it promises.

## Past Madness vs Future Lunacy

Bruno's reading of Huxley's novel is very similar to those very naïve readings which tend to identify the views expressed by the *Brave New World*'s officials with the author's beliefs. Most critics dismiss them as blatant misreading which misses the obvious satirical tone of the novel. Students who read *Brave New World* in this way frequently become the objects of teachers' jokes. Other teachers might conclude that this is only to be expected. Similarly to David Lurie, the main protagonist of Coetzee's *Disgrace*, they have "long ceased to be surprised at the range of ignorance of [their] students. Post-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate, they might as well have been hatched from eggs yesterday" (Coetzee 2008: 32). But this mistake, if it is indeed a mistake, is not made by naïve students only.

It has been made by a great number of people. Initially, there was a visible confusion as to what the author's intended message was. This is reflected in the fact that such countries as Ireland and Australia banned the import of the book, deeming it a

vile attack on religion and traditional values, extremely dangerous to public morality. In January 1933, Rev George A. Judkins, Director of the Social Services Department of the Methodist Church, wrote to Australian Customs Minister TW White:

I have read the book and I wish to state than its apparent advocacy of promiscuity, its suggestion of sexual games for children and its contemptuous reference to “a thing called God” brand it as a book unworthy of a place among decent literature and among self-respecting people (Lay 2013).

And in February 1932 an anonymous contributor to the Australian *Daily Telegraph* stated that:

Aldous Huxley does not write “literature,” nor has he ever been guilty of any idea likely to be of the least value. He belongs to the school of “bad, naughty little boys” of which G. B. Shaw and our own Norman Lindsay are such distinguished members. This school is not so anxious to teach as to shock... (Lay 2013).

Thus strengthened in their resolve to protect “simple and unsophisticated [sic] young people” (the phrase used by the wife of the resident Bishop of Thursday Island) from corruption, the Australian authorities continued to search for illegally smuggled copies and once they found them, they burned them (Lay 2013). The Australian ban was lifted 1937 but thirty years later, in 1967 the ban was introduced in India, where Huxley was called a pornographer (Lay 2013).

Of course such practices cannot be defended but some more recent critics to a certain extent redeem those guilty of similar misreading. They point to usually overlooked aspects of Huxley’s work which are not fully consistent with the novel’s accepted meaning. In other words, Huxley might have been at least partially responsible for this misunderstanding.

Margaret Atwood, for instance, in her 2007 review of *Brave New World* focuses on the fact that it is not only a satire on some hypothetical distant future but also on a very real, and not so distant—at least for Huxley—past, namely Victorian Britain. She reminds us that:

[...] when Huxley was writing *Brave New World* at the beginning of the 1930s, he was, in his own words, an “amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete”, a member of that group of bright young upstarts that swirled around the Bloomsbury Group and delighted in attacking anything Victorian or Edwardian (Atwood 2007).

Hence, similarly to the anonymous contributor to the Australian *Daily Telegraph*, she also suspects that Huxley’s intention might have been to shock his more conservative audience:



The word “mother”—so thoroughly worshipped by the Victorians—has become a shocking obscenity; and indiscriminate sex, which was a shocking obscenity for the Victorians, is now *de rigueur*.

“He patted me on the behind this afternoon”, said Lenina.

“There, you see!” Fanny was triumphant. “That shows what he stands for. The strictest conventionality”.

Many of *Brave New World*’s nervous jokes turn on these kinds of inversions—more startling to its first audience, perhaps, than to us, but still wry enough. Victorian thrift turns to the obligation to spend, Victorian till-death-do-us-part monogamy has been replaced with “everyone belongs to everyone else”, Victorian religiosity has been channelled into the worship of an invented deity—“Our Ford”, named after the American car-czar Henry Ford, god of the assembly line—via communal orgies. Even the “Our Ford” chant of “orgy-porgy” is an inversion of the familiar nursery rhyme, in which kissing the girls makes them cry. Now, it’s if you refuse to kiss them—as “the Savage” does—that the tears will flow (Atwood 2007).

This list of “Victorian” jokes could be much longer. There is, for instance, Calvin and his sixteen sexophonists performing at Westminster Abbey Cabaret. Should we protest against seeing a place of religious cult violated and a religious prophet demoted to the status of an entertainer, and pass unequivocal condemnation on the civilization responsible for such monstrosities? The scene is, however, very unlikely to evoke in its readers a sense of moral outrage. It is irreverent yet funny. Rather than any real values, arbitrary cultural norms are being challenged. Again, it is Victorians who are the target of the author’s satire as they attached much more importance to names and symbols than to realities.

The song that the band performs is also interesting. They deliver an elegy upon the impossibility of the return to the bottle: “Bottle of mine, it’s you I’ve always wanted! / Bottle of mine, why was I ever decanted?” (Huxley 1969:51). This time, however, the object of ridicule is not the Victorian mentality, but Freud’s idea of the return to the womb. The obvious absurdity of the clone’s desire to return to the bottle underscores the absurdity of the desire attributed by Freud to normal human beings. Had it been a critique of the dehumanized future, we truly would have had to believe that the grotesque dream of the return to the bottle is a parody of the lofty human dream of the return to the womb.

This illustrates a certain rhetorical, or structural, weakness of *Brave New World*’s argument. Insofar as *Brave New World* criticizes Victorians, it cannot effectively criticize the society which is the very opposite of the Victorian society. These two satires are at odds with one another (Greenberg and Waddell 2016). A work which is at the same time a satire on prudishness and piety, and a satire on promiscuity and Godlessness is marked by internal contradiction. This may be related to what Huxley

himself said about *Brave New World* in his 1946 foreword to the novel, where he acknowledged that the Savage has to choose between two evils, namely insanity and madness, the utopian and the primitive (Huxley 1969: viii). Since everything is relative, in comparison with the contemporary madness, the future lunacy might indeed seem to be a legitimate utopia.

## Reforming Human Nature: “Don't Worry Your Soul Is Already Dead”

Houellebecq's reading of Huxley's *Brave New World* may be viewed as an extension of this reasoning. Houellebecq dwells on the description of the contemporary madness. In order to make his critique of the contemporary world more effective, he delves both into the past and the future, contrasting them with the present. The past is represented by Michel's grandmother, who is idealized as a completely selfless creature, sacrificing herself, out of love and devotion, for others (not so much as thinking about it in terms of sacrifice). The implication is that such people could have existed only in the old world; in the world of market economy people are decisively different. This idealization of the past seems to be strangely at odds with Houellebecq's apparent praise of sexual liberation<sup>4</sup>. Probably the only moment when Bruno is truly happy is when he is with Christine on holiday at Cap d'Agde, a famous nudist beach, freely exchanging sexual partners, caring not only about his own sexual satisfaction but also about the satisfaction of his partner. Afterwards Bruno will conclude that sexual pleasure is the most intense feeling that human beings are capable of.

Yet it is far more interesting what Houellebecq is to say about the future, disconcertingly similar to Huxley's *Brave New World* and still viewed as unambiguously positive. In *The Elementary Particles*, *Brave New World* is reinterpreted from the post-modern perspective. Fukuyama admits that Huxley's future horrifies him because he, similarly to Huxley, believes that “nature itself, in particular human nature, has a special role in defining for us what is right and wrong, just and unjust, important and unimportant” (Fukuyama 2003: 7). Furthermore, he believes that “human nature exists, is a meaningful concept, and has provided a stable continuity to our experience

<sup>4</sup> What Houellebecq criticizes is not sexual liberation itself but what he describes as “sexual liberalism,” i.e. sexual activity, during which the individual thinks only about his or her own pleasure.

as a species. It is, conjointly with religion, what defines our most basic values” (Fukuyama 2003: 7). The dangers of interfering with it (which means biotechnology), “captured so well by Huxley, [...] are summed up in the title of an article by novelist Tom Wolfe »Sorry, but Your Soul Just Died«” (Fukuyama 2003: 8). In *The Elementary Particles* Houellebecq’s argument is twofold. First, as a postmodernist, he challenges all metaphysics, both that of established religion and that of nature. His ethics is painfully rational, even brutal. If injustice is a part of human nature, then human nature should be abolished. Second, as a radical critic of the contemporary civilization he argues that we have nothing to lose, as our souls are already dead.

As it has already been noted, genetic engineering is an important theme both in *Brave New World* and *The Elementary Particles*. Michel Djerzinski is the world’s leading molecular biologist who studies DNA and the methods of cell division. His research eventually leads to a groundbreaking discovery, foreshadowing the demise of mankind. In the article *Toward Perfect Reproduction*, which he wrote before committing suicide, he explained how to create a new rational species that will not have to reproduce sexually. In the Epilogue we learn that this new species, asexual and immortal, “which had outgrown individuality, separation and evolution” (Houellebecq 2001: 277), finally replaced mankind.

The story is allegedly told from the perspective of these posthuman beings who reminisce upon the sad lives of their distant maker and his brother. This perspective is particularly visible in the Epilogue and the Prologue, where the narrator introduces his tale in the following manner:

This book is principally the story of a man who lived out the greater part of his life in Western Europe, in the latter half of the twentieth century. Though alone for much of his life, he was nonetheless occasionally in touch with other men. He lived through an age that was miserable and troubled. The country into which he was born was sliding slowly, ineluctably, into the ranks of the less developed countries; often haunted by misery, the men of his generation lived out their lonely, bitter lives. Feelings such as love, tenderness and human fellowship had, for the most part, disappeared. The relationships between his contemporaries were at best indifferent and more often cruel (Houellebecq 2001: 7).

This miserable world Houellebecq contrasts with Huxley’s *Brave New World* in order to make his point: There is no need to fear Huxley’s future, our present is much worse. The world of Western Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century is, like Huxley’s *Brave New World*, characterized by conspicuous consumption and sex-

ual liberation, but unlike Huxley's *Brave New World*, it is also full of violence and suffering. Its inhabitants are deeply unhappy and they cannot come to terms with old age and dying.

The principal cause of this unhappiness is economic and sexual liberalism. This is the message that Houellebecq consistently repeats in all his novels. Arguably, his most recent novel, *Submission*, is the most outspoken critique of liberalism. There is already too much freedom, Houellebecq seems to be saying, and what the world needs now is not more freedom but its opposite, submission. This is what will guarantee true happiness. Therefore, in *Submission* Islam becomes so popular in France. It is a way out of the existentialist and spiritual crisis caused by celebrating individualism.

This anti-liberal philosophy also permeates *The Elementary Particles*, which is a work considerably darker in tone. Houellebecq draws attention to the disorganization of the world. Yes, religion is right, he argues, human nature is corrupt. Humans will not be able to create a better world unless a better man is created. But how could this be achieved? How can corrupt creatures "discorrupt" themselves?

Puritans believed it to be impossible. The Bible emphasizes that "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matthew 7:18)<sup>5</sup>. Hence the Puritans maintained that people cannot change themselves; they believed in the necessity of the divine intervention. Only God's grace could transform a merely natural man, i.e. a sinner, into a saint, to purge him of the original sin.

Interestingly enough, it was deeply religious Puritans, and not atheists, who provided one of the most compelling arguments against nature. They equated nature with corruption (nature was the realm of the devil) and demanded that it should be perfected, redeemed. This condemnation of nature was based on the following quotations from the Bible: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14), "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption" (2 Peter 2: 12), or "But these speak

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from the Bible form King James Version.

evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 1: 10).

Jonathan Edwards in *Sinners in the Hands of Angry God* wrote that “natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it” (Edwards 1739). And he further warned his audience:

[...] those of you that finally continue in a natural condition, that shall keep out of hell longest will be there in a little time! your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly, and, in all probability, very suddenly upon many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in hell (Edwards 1739).

This radical anti-nature sentiment is preserved today by the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They define the concept of “natural man” in the following terms:

A person who chooses to be influenced by the passions, desires, appetites, and senses of the flesh rather than by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Such a person can comprehend physical things but not spiritual things. All people are carnal, or mortal, because of the fall of Adam and Eve. Each person must be born again through the atonement of Jesus Christ to cease being a natural man (Lds.org 2016).

This definition is supported by a number of quotations from their holy texts (all quotations below from: Lds.org 2016):

The natural man is an enemy to God and should be put off (Mosiah 3:19).

He that persists in his own carnal nature remaineth in his fallen state (Mosiah 16:5; Alma 42:7-24; D&C [Doctrines and Covenants—M.P.] 20:20)

What natural man is there that knoweth these things? (Alma 26:19-22).

Natural or carnal men are without God in the world (Alma 41:11).

Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God (D&C 67:12).

Houellebecq adapts this religious argument to his secular beliefs. The original sin truly exists. It is neither a symbol nor a metaphor, but something that can be seen under a microscope; specific genes that are responsible for human selfishness, manifesting themselves in the economic and sexual rivalry (which, using religious vocabulary, may be described as greed). Obviously, baptizing children (or performing any other rituals) will not make any difference, still science can fix this problem. The defective genes may be eliminated. Thus Houellebecq, quite surprisingly, uses religious arguments to support genetic engineering. Genetic engineering is primarily a

solution to moral problems. Probably equally surprising, especially in the light of his earlier remarks regarding *Brave New World*, is his claim that the road to true happiness leads not through instant gratification of every desire but elimination of desire.

Genetic engineering is described as a metaphysical mutation comparable to the rise of Christianity. In the last pages of the novel Michel Djerzinski is styled after Jesus. He works on his theory in seclusion, studying illuminated Gospels. After submitting for publication a sensational article, he disappears in mysterious circumstances. People speculate about him committing suicide but his body is never found. Then, after some time, a man named Frederick Hubczek enters the scene. He bears a strong resemblance to Saint Paul. He may not exhibit the genius of Djerzinski but he is an extremely efficient organizer. He popularizes Djerzinski's ideas, stressing that mankind must give way to a new species. Not getting any support from the established religions, such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam (they condemn him for trying "to undermine human dignity in uniqueness in its relation with the Creator"), he turns to the commonly ridiculed New Age ideology, and eventually, using slightly modified New Age ideas, thanks to his great rhetorical skill and cleverness, he manages to bring the world's opinion to his point of view. And a new species which will replace natural man is created (Houellebecq 2001: 264-272).

## Conclusion

*The Elementary Particles* presents the following diagnosis. Utopia cannot be achieved unless human nature is changed. Mankind "must break with the twentieth century, its immorality, its individualism and its libertarian and antisocial values" (Houellebecq 2001: 266). This is possible. The Revolution, to use Hubczek's slogan, will not be mental, but genetic. However, one should bear in mind that *The Elementary Particles* is primarily a critique of the western civilization, "its immorality, its individualism and its libertarian and antisocial values". Houellebecq's seemingly wholehearted acceptance of genetic engineering and his praise of Huxley's *Brave New World* is a rhetorical trick which he uses to make this critique even more effective for his conservative audience. Thus, ultimately, Houellebecq turns out to be a moralist. Similarly to a biblical prophet, he warns his readers that if mankind persists in its follies, it should be destroyed.

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## *The Unusual Dystopia of “Never Let Me Go” (2010)*

ELENI VARMAZI

### Introduction

In this chapter I argue how *Never Let Me Go* (2010) differs from other dystopian films regarding both its aesthetics and theme. The film was not created in order to fulfil the functions performed typically by dystopian hard science fiction films. On the contrary, it discusses ideas and subject matters of a different nature that belong to other genres, if at all. This fact makes *Never Let Me Go* a special case study which resists categorization.

The film is an adaptation of a novel with the same title by the Japanese born, British raised writer Kazuo Ishiguro. It is directed by the American director Mark Romanek. The screenplay was written by Alex Garland and the whole film was produced with the collaboration and the consultancy of Kazuo Ishiguro, a fact deeply appreciated by the whole cast and crew (Carnavale 2010). It is set in an alternate dystopian history of England<sup>1</sup>. It takes place between the late seventies and the mid-nineties. It follows the coming of age of three friends who are developing a love tri-

<sup>1</sup> I refer here to Thomas Moylan's definition of dystopia: "Dystopia is thus clearly unlike its generic sibling, the literary *eutopia*, or its nemesis, the anti-utopia. The dystopian text does not guarantee a creative and critical position that is implicitly militant or resigned. As an open form, it always negotiates the continuum between the Party of Utopia and the Party of Anti-Utopia" (Moylan 2000: xiii).

angle during the process of growing. These three characters: Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy are destined to lead a brief life, since their only purpose of existence is to donate organs to other people in order to prolong their lives.

Importantly, the film is set in an alternate history of England and not in the near or distant future as most hard science fiction films. However, the titles in the beginning of the film set the atmosphere for the audience within a science-fictional framework:

The breakthrough in medical science came in 1952.  
Doctors could now cure the previously incurable.  
By 1967, life expectancy passed 100 years (Romanek 2010).

The whole plot of the film is given as a flashback and is narrated by Kathy, who states that she is now twenty-eight years old and she has been a carer for nine years. Her narration, and therefore the film, is divided into three chapters, which are indicated with titles. The first one: *Hailsham, 1978*, depicts the growing up of the three main characters in Hailsham, an English boarding school, designed especially for educating and boarding clones. However, the word "clone" is not used in the film at all. Instead the term "donor children" is applied. During their school years one of the tasks that the children are asked to do is develop artwork for the school gallery. Periodically Miss Emily, the school headmistress, and Madame Marie-Claude, judge and select the best works for exhibition. While in Hailsham the children learn the "purpose" of their lives. One of the guardians in the school, Miss Lucy, who is losing her job for openly explaining to the children their "purpose", states to them:

The problem is that you've been told and not told. That's what I've seen when I've been here. You've been told but none of you really understand. So I have decided that I'll taught (sic) you in a way that you will understand" (Romanek 2010).

Then, she continues by explicitly telling them that they will become adults and before they are middle-aged they will start donating their vital organs. On the third or fourth donation, they will "complete".

In this chapter the kids who are becoming teenagers also develop feelings for each other. Kathy progressively falls in love with Tommy but her good friend Ruth steals him from her. Ruth's action stems a bit out of stubbornness and ego as she tries to prove to Kathy that she can take Tommy away from her. Tommy, on the other hand, develops serious feelings for Kathy and the two become very good friends,

with a deep understanding and communication. However, as far as his love and sexual interest is concerned Tommy lets himself get seduced by Ruth, without of course being fully aware of the rivalry between Kathy and Ruth concerning him.

Later in the first chapter Tommy buys Kathy a present, an old tape with songs from Judy Bridgewater. Kathy, who is heartbroken, incessantly listens from the tape the song entitled “Never Let Me Go”, which gives the title to both the book and the film. Judy Bridgewater is a fictional character-singer, created by Ishiguro. In the film the song “Never Let Me Go”, also created especially for the soundtrack and written by Luther Dixon, is performed by Jane Monheit (Howell 2010).

The second chapter is *The Cottages, 1985*. The life in the cottages is a period of transition, where the three characters work and live for a few years before being called for the donation surgeries. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy have the opportunity to get a touch of the outside world, watching television, taking strolls and travelling to the countryside and to English towns. They also attempt to trace their “originals” but it is all in vain.

As Escudero Pérez astutely observes:

Getting to know the original is a different aim from that of learning the reasons why they were created. In some cases, as in *Never Let Me Go*, this goal is presented as potentially enabling to explain their existential profile. Unfortunately for Ishiguro’s clones, more than a source of answers the figure of the original ends up being perceived almost like a chimera, having inspired all sorts of speculation and hypothesis within the group of friends who never get to know who they have been cloned *from* (Escudero Pérez 2014).

Furthermore, they learn about the rumour of the “deferral”. The “deferral” is something that a donor couple can apply for if they can prove that they are genuinely in love. If their application is accepted, then their first donation can be deferred for a few years. On an emotional level, Ruth and Tommy start having problems as a couple and that makes Ruth very angry and jealous of Kathy. Tommy confesses to Kathy that he actually had, and still has, deep feelings for her. This situation leads to the collapse of the friendship of the three characters. Kathy decides to become a “carer”<sup>2</sup> in order to get out of this situation.

The third chapter is entitled *Completion, 1994*. After a few years, while the three of them have lost touch, Kathy who is now working around hospitals as a carer, meets

<sup>2</sup> A carer is a person who keeps company and shows compassion to the clones while they are going through their donation surgeries until they die—“complete” in the terminology of the film.

Ruth by coincidence in one of them. Ruth is there for her second donation. Her physical and psychological health is in a very bad condition. A nurse acknowledges Ruth's poor psychology when speaking to Kathy: "I think she wants to complete and as you know, when they want to complete, they usually do" (Romanek 2010).

Kathy takes Ruth on a trip in the course of which they find Tommy in another recovery centre. Ruth apologizes to Kathy for having intruded in her relationship with Tommy. She admits that it should have been Kathy and not her to have entered into a relationship with Tommy. To make up for the past, Ruth gives Kathy and Tommy the address of Madame Marie-Claude, so that they can ask for a deferral of their donation surgeries. Ruth dies in her third surgery, and Kathy together with Tommy, after finally reuniting; go to find Madame Marie-Claude. Unfortunately, they find out that there is no possibility for deferral, in fact there never was. Tommy dies during his fourth surgery and the film ends with Kathy announcing in the narration that she also has been called for her first surgery. Kathy's last words are: "What I am not sure about is if our lives have been so different from the lives of the people we save. We all complete. Maybe none of us really understand (sic) what we lived through or feel we had enough time" (Romanek 2010).

## The Unconventional Aesthetics

As David Desser states:

SF is [...] a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment (Desser 1999: 84).

It would be fair to say that the dystopian literary tradition has found its most appropriate form in cinema (Booker 1994b: 18). Most of the famous and successful science fiction dystopian films have been adapted from or inspired by literary works. *Never Let Me Go* is also an adaptation of a novel in which, nevertheless, the *mise en scene* does not estrange the spectator. Vivian Sobchack notes:

[...] in every SF film there is a visual tension between those images in such earnestness in any other genre—a tension between those images which strive to totally remove us from a comprehensible and known world into romantic poetry and those images which strive to bring us back into a familiar and prosaic context" (Sobchack 1987: 88).

Although usually dystopian films construct the space, they are set in (far planet, countryside, city, etc.) pointing out elements about the social, cultural, and political conditions they are concerned with, this is not exactly the case in *Never Let Me Go*. According to Mark Romanek, it is a science fiction film without science fiction tropes (Sciretta 2010). Romanek, while researching for the film, had in mind *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and *Alphaville* (1965) but no other science fiction references. Moreover, although many science fiction tropes were tried during the preparation and the research of the film, at the end nothing seemed to work. In an interview he admits that:

There was some temptation to put in some futuristic buildings, or make this about gadgets. It never felt right. And one day I said, "Well, maybe this is the science-fiction film with no science fiction in it whatsoever." And everyone got very excited by that idea and aesthetic approach. From that point on, it was that (Adams 2010).

Thus, while technically *Never Let Me Go* is a dystopian science fiction, Romanek's vision for the film version of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel leans more towards a touching melodrama. It is a story less about a dystopian world of cloning—and the political and moral issues associated with it—and more about love and loss.

Indeed science fiction has been discussed as a generic hybrid and genres generally are considered as "intersubjective, discursive constructs, full of contradictions and constantly in flux" (Vint and Bould 2009: 51). However, in *Never Let Me Go* the singular allusion to science fiction is the idea of the existence of originals and clones. None of the audio-visual aspects of the film suggest estrangement. There is only one technological element depicted in the whole film and it is actually shown twice. It is a very discrete bracelet that the donors are wearing, which they slide in front of a small panel when they go out and come back from Hailsham's building and the cottages. However, the rest of the settings, costumes and art design have nothing futuristic, nothing that indicates high technology. Even in the numerous scenes in the hospitals where we see the surgeries for donations taking place there is no indication of a future progress in High Technology. As Escudero Pérez points out about the book:

Real science is completely absent, both in the plausibility of the plot and in its textual presence. Instead, a murkier science is suggested: not only is its abuse legal and public, but it is also portrayed as unthinking, irrational and, to a certain extent, naïve in its incapacity to foresee the obvious ethical conflict into which the practice would lead (Escudero Pérez 2014).

There is in that sense an enormous effort in the film not to create estrangement in the viewer. There is not even a distinction between nature and technology. Everything is kept very familiar.

The settings of the film, on the contrary, emphasize the old and the worn; they have a feeling of retro and rustic. Additionally, the colours of the film are very earthly greens, browns, and blues avoiding all the neon and very saturated colours that we usually witness in the futuristic science fiction films. Mark Romanek particularly asked for a gentle colour palette and forbade the colour black, since he wanted "the film to have a gentle delivery" of the disturbing truths that it discusses (Curtis 2010). Furthermore, the lighting of the film avoids also utmost stylization. There is no *chiaro scuro* lighting or any other type of low-key lighting even in interior and night scenes, thus allowing the audience to have a clear view of the screen.

The cinematography in *Never Let Me Go* by Adam Kimmel also stays extremely close to the human point of view. It avoids shots from unusual angles. There are no high or low or diagonal or bird's point of view angles as in futuristic dystopian films like *Blade Runner* (1982), *Total Recall* (1990), *Dark City* (1998), *The Island* (2005), *In Time* (2011), and others. The whole film is shot from a human-eye perspective discouraging estrangement in the audience's visual perception. The final result of the film is a hybrid of British and Japanese sensibilities. In an interview the director states:

Then I read in an interview that Kazuo felt very influenced by certain Japanese cinema, perhaps even more than by other authors, so that sent me on a journey of just immersing myself in Japanese cinema and Japanese ideas of aesthetics and art. I tried to overlay a sort of British story with some sort of quality of the simplicity that you see in Kazuo's writing (Carnevale 2010).

From Britain Romanek managed to capture the sense of elegant decay and, while exploring concepts in Japanese aesthetics in art, he came up with three concepts that helped him define the mood and the tone of the film. These three concepts are the *yūgen*, the *wabi-sabi*, and the *mono no aware*. The *yūgen* can be literally translated as "dim", "deep", or "mysterious". It comes from Noh Theatre and expresses the "joyful acceptance of the basic sadness of life". It is "the calm surface that belies the deep strong currents underneath" (Sciretta 2010). This "Profound Grace" is expressed in the film in Kathy's stoicism and the graceful way she accepted her fate as well as in the general subtle emotional mood of the film. The concept of *wabi-sabi*, literally translated as "beauty that is imperfect or incomplete", represents the notion that things which are "broken or rusted or cracked or worn or torn or old are far

more beautiful than things that are new and perfect". It is the "Simple Beauty of something or someone that has aged well" (Sciretta 2010) and in the film it is particularly obvious in the art design of the settings and the costumes. Finally, the Japanese concept of *mono no aware*, literally "the pathos of things", describes the idea of how impermanent things are and expresses the main subject of the film, the preciousness of time, the brevity of the human lifespan. Mark Romanek stresses the importance of *mono no aware* in an interview:

[...] one of the concepts I thought was really germane to the film was this idea of *mono no aware*,« [...] It's another way of saying a perpetual sigh, this quality of indefinable eternity that you can find in the most mundane things, and the sense of the transience and the impermanence of things. I think that's a lot of what the book is about in some ways, and I tried to make a cinematic equivalent of *mono no aware* in this English world, which is a strange hybrid (Adams 2010).

All these aesthetic principles were implemented during the shooting in England with a British cast and crew and mingled with the English environment film set in order to create a visual and a tonal analogue to the book's language. Everything in the film is very restrained and subtle, a characteristic that belongs to both British and Japanese cultures. The same tone of reserved emotions was applied also in the voice over, in the narration of the film, which is implemented by Kathy's character, in the beginning and the ending of every chapter and at the final ending of the film.

## The Unconventional Ideas

Through the aforementioned characteristics one is led to believe that *Never Let Me Go* tries to focus on more internal issues and not so much on social and political critiques. As Booker remarks:

Dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions (Booker 1994a: 3).

Usually in dystopian films, made in order to criticize social and political systems, both sides of the system are presented, i.e. the authority and power of the established system as well as its victims. In *Never Let Me Go* this is not the case. By whom, how, and why this system is established is not known and it is not presented. There is an

enormous lack of information about how the clones are created and who authorizes their creation. Is it the matter of social class? Can some people have clones and some not? All these issues are not addressed in the film. We also never see an original of the main three characters or of any other donor. In other words, there is no duplication of a character. Escudero Pérez, while discussing the book notices, "We are alien to this in Ishiguro's fiction because, in its narrative rareness, we never get to meet any other copies of the characters we are introduced to. We know they are clones but we don't have the originals or other reproductions". She also points out that:

The double threatens the physical, mental and spiritual survival of the original, whereas the clone doesn't. In spite of one's initial rejection of the figure of the clone as an impostor, in most clone narratives there is no tension or rivalry between the original and the clone(s): they either don't co-exist or are simply unaware of each other's existence (e.g. *Never Let Me Go*) (Escudero Pérez 2014).

The structure of dystopian fiction whether it concerns books or films, as Raffaella Baccolini states, is "built around the construction of the narrative [of the hegemonic order] and a counter-narrative [of resistance—E.V.]" (Moylan 2000: 148). The dystopian novel or film starts within the nightmarish society, and therefore "cognitive estrangement is at first forestalled by the immediacy, the normality, of the location" (Moylan 2000: 148). The protagonist becomes dislocated, as she becomes alienated from the society and the rules of the hegemonic system; therefore she becomes aware and usually brought into submission in the end, or else finds a way to escape from the nightmare. Then, the resistance of the protagonist is towards the hegemonic system that is presented. The antagonist of the novel or film, which is the hegemonic system itself and its ideological apparatuses, is closely related with the present time that the novel or film is written/produced.

However, this is not the case in *Never Let Me Go*. Neither the book nor the film are concerned with the present of the author in terms of time and place, hence the choice of an alternate dystopian past England. The only form of authority presented is the teachers together with Madam Marie-Claude and Miss Emily, the headmistress of Hailsham. However, what one finds in the third chapter is the fact that Hailsham was a school established to protect the clones, to morally question their existence, to prove that the clones also have souls. Miss Emily states in the third chapter:

You have to understand, Hailsham was the last place to consider the ethics of donation. We used your art to show what you were capable of, to show that donor children are human but we are providing an answer to a question none was asking. We did not have the gallery in order to look into your souls. We had the gallery to see if you had souls at all (Romanek 2010).



Another unusual aspect of this dystopian film, which also stirred a debate among critics and audience, is that the clones do not rebel or revolt (SciFi.StackExchange.com 2011). Usually dystopian films that involve clones, replicas, or subordinates as main characters, lead to a revolt and possibly to at least a rupture or even an overthrowing of the established hegemonic system. These, for example, are the cases of *Total Recall* (1990), *The Island* (2005) and the *Divergent* series (2014-2015). *Never Let Me Go*, however, does not involve any kind of rebellion; on the contrary, the characters seem to accept their fate, their purpose for “completion”, in a very calm and esoteric way. The only resistance shown in the film, which is not really a resistance but more of a hope, is Kathy’s and Tommy’s attempt to get a deferral. Again, this is just an attempt for postponement for a few years that does not come through. As Escudero Perez points out: “In Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, exceptionality resides mainly in the conformism of the victims, but the contextual assembly also differs significantly from any other clone narrative” (Escudero Pérez 2014).

## Ending Remarks

In conclusion, *Never Let Me Go* is not so much a criticism of a socio-political system. Its form and content do not bare typical dystopian films’ characteristics. According to Mark Romanek:

The whole cloning concept was meant to be experienced as a sort of metaphoric delivery-system for these larger, very Ishiguroan themes—the very human tendency toward self-delusion, an often wilful lack of perspective about our lives, and our inability to really grasp the preciousness and brevity of the human life span (Giroux 2010).

As Fredric Jameson notes, from a narrative analysis perspective, what is important to the Utopian construct “is not what is said, but what cannot be said, what does not register on the narrative apparatus” (Jameson 2005: xiii). Although the film on a second level touches upon ethical issues that concern contemporary societies (such as those concerning medical progress), it focuses mostly upon things that we all know, but we tend or want to ignore: the human condition and the essentials of human existence, such as emotionality, hope, conflict, as well as poses an emphasis on mortality. The alternate dystopian England is just an excuse not to critique social and political conditions, which belong to “now” and “here”, but to reflect deeply on

human mortality, which is an issue that "has always been" and still is a disturbing truth and belongs to the sphere of "ever". Ishiguro also seems to agree on that aspect:

If you're referring to the fact that the children are actually clones, and they're being brought up for [the sake of] organ donations—that all sounds rather ghastly. Personally, I prefer to get that out of the way, so that people can focus on what the film is really about. I think the surprising thing about the story comes later on, in a more subtle way" (Block, Greene 2010: 01,14-01,33).

Later on Ishiguro adds that: "what interests [him—E.V.] is the surprising enormous extent to which most people accept the fate that's been given to them, and find some dignity" (Block, Greene 2010: 04,11-04,22). This seems to be also the reason for why the audience learns about (or rather, is spoiled) the purpose of the characters' existence early during the first chapter in Hailsham in order to be able to emotionally engage with the love story. When the teacher in Hailsham spells out the truth to them and, therefore, loses her job, there is a sense that the children almost knew what was going on but they were unable to fully capture it intellectually. They were unable to understand the deeper meaning of her words. According to Romanek, this is the moment that really sets the film in motion—"the repercussions of having this knowledge is what the rest of the story is about" (Block, Greene 2010: 02,57-03,02).

Mark Fisher tries to place *Never Let Me Go* next to *Hunger Games* (2012) and *The Island* (2005) by stating that: "The peculiar horror of the film, in fact, resides in the unrelieved quality of its fatalism" (Fisher 2012: 30). He compares Hailsham to "an ideological state apparatus" which is so strong that prevents clones to escape because there is nowhere to escape. "The fact that the clones' time is short lends their thwarted love affairs, their lazy afternoons spent reading in meadows, and their day trips to the coast a nearly unbearable intensity" (Fisher 2012: 30). The film's concerns are very different from the ones to which he is comparing *Never Let Me Go*. It is impossible to escape the futility of time or mortality. The short length of life, the preciousness of time, loneliness, hope, human emotions and relationships are important, but hardly acknowledged whether you are a clone or not.

The film aims at addressing human issues that are rarely discussed in dystopian films by using the short lives of clones as an excuse in order to make the audience more aware of big truths usually expressed in Ishiguro's writings. It is a sensitive study of love and mortality. Mark Romanek successfully reversed the patterns of hard science fiction dystopian films in order to address these issues in a gentle way and resonate the book's deceptive simplicity.

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*“Transmetropolitan”.*  
*Dystopia, Hyperbole, and the Superhero*

JUSTYNA GALANT

## Introduction

The comic book series *Transmetropolitan* written by Warren Ellis, pencilled by Darick Robertson and published by DC Comics between 1997 and 2002, is an acclaimed futuristic vision of an American metropolis and its notorious journalist, Spider Jerusalem, who returns to the city after a long absence to publish a series of articles headlined “I Hate It Here”. In the symbiotic relationship, the urban space allows the man to find the Anger and the battle spirit to fight for the revelation of the constantly obscured Truth, while the city, the nurturer of his journalistic passion, uses him as a voice, a means of expression, and a medium.

Crucially, in its lack of hope for the improvement of humanity’s capacity to make informed choices, *Transmetropolitan* is a text with a strong dystopian undertone which offers a vision of a rampantly consumerist high-tech city. Essentially a hyperbole of some of today’s problems, it contains a message with a warning against the forgetfulness and the intellectual laziness that come with comfort and escapist media culture, and chastises its readers for the sins they are certain to continue committing. Importantly, the dystopian ambience of the comics is constructed through carnivalization, *sensu* Bakhtin (1968: 273), here a process which elevates the category of excess to the status of a crucial defining feature of the locus, the protagonist, and the artistic means of expression.

Characterised by the levelling of the various social classes, the degradation and violence inflicted on the mighty, general atmosphere of permissiveness, laughter, and the concentration on the excessive body, the Bakhtinian carnival compromises also the importance of the individual as she or he becomes valid only as part of the larger, reigning, temporal space of carnival. As he explains:

the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed (Bakhtin 1968: 19).

Constructed around the common trope of an urban dystopia<sup>1</sup>, ultimately and permanently established in the era of the Industrial Revolution, Ellis and Robertson's work combines an important aspect of the dystopian tradition with the medium-specific<sup>2</sup> comic book figure of a superhero bound to his city, as exemplified by the relationship of Batman and Gotham, or New York and Spider-Man, The Fantastic Four or The Avengers. Transcending the familiar superhero—metropolis correlation, *Transmetropolitan* offers a story where the superhero is not presented "from the worm's-eye view of ordinary citizens watching [him] fly and fight between skyscrapers" (Ahrens and Meteling 2010: 135), as the dystopian city itself lives up to the prefix "trans-" in its progression away from the function of a setting and towards a personified, carnivalized heroic entity.

## The Carnivalized Metropolis: Contradiction and Excess

Transmetropolis is depicted as an overbearing and oppressive creature, a sensual, bordering on sentient, being, immanently characterised by excess and greed. As Spider Jerusalem observes upon his return, "The city never allowed itself to decay or degrade. It's wildly, intensely growing. It's a loud, stinking mess" (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 18). The primeval soup of transhumanity, "containing the dregs of every gene pool on Earth" (Ellis, Robertson 2011: 172), accommodates abundant variations of humanoid beings: Transients—people partially transformed into aliens, and Cryogenic

<sup>1</sup> The development of the motif of an urban dystopia in the history of utopian writing is discussed, for example, by Brain Stableford in *Ecology and Dystopia* (2010).

<sup>2</sup> As Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling comment, "In no other media or culture has a character like the superhero been invented, and he is always related to a city" (2010: 10).

revivals—the unwanted, future-shocked humans defrosted after lasting for centuries in a deep freeze and fully downloaded, immaterial beings. Spider Jerusalem’s comments on the city are truly Bakhtinian assertions of its vivacity: “It takes strength from its thousands of cultures. And the thousands more that grow anew each day. It isn’t perfect. It lies and cheats. It’s no utopia [...] but it’s alive. I can’t argue that” (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 18). Well-nourished by the sheer number and the variety of people, deriving strength from the multitude of cultures they create, the city flourishes.

Crucially, the state is a democracy where presidential candidates still compete for votes, omnipresent media broadcast news and diversified opinions, and countless variations on political convictions, sexuality, race and religion openly co-exist in an ultimately permissive atmosphere. The carnivalistic excess of liberalism, the defining feature of locus, is highlighted by the omnipresence of sex pubs, “sit ‘n sin machines”, shops advertising animal traits with a “Be Yourself” slogan, the unashamedly fascist campaign of the presidential candidate Heller, and the fact that “one new religion [is] invested every hour” (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 126).

## The Utopian within the Urban Jungle

The complex urban entity contains vestiges of idealism which Spider faithfully traces. Although the city abounds in passive individuals, is packed with diners serving cloned human meat, advertisements of porn puppet shows, it contains people capable of opposing abuses of power and idealists inspired by the immense possibilities the present offers. Notably, the utopian schemes tend to fail, sometimes spectacularly, reinforcing the image of the city as both a space for hope and bold planning, and a locus which retains its dystopian *status quo* of chaos while accommodating the impulses towards improvement.

Thus, one of missionary city projects concentrates on the preservation of ancient cultures in sealed reservations, complete with the recreation of the original setting, beliefs and living conditions. As no information is available from the outside, the sheltered civilisations are free to live a life at their own pace and solve their own problems independently. As a result, dedicated to “[p]reserving past cultures honestly” (Ellis, Robertson 2009b: 51), the management of the reservations finds itself re-establishing the Tikal culture for the fifth time, after the civilisation yet again fails to establish the association between the sacrificial offerings thrown into the river and the spread of a decimating disease.

The irony of the well-intentioned designs is pushed further in the almost forgotten story of a visionary scientist which is briefly retold in the seventh volume of the comic book series. Working persistently for years on developing the "Mathematical expressions of ethics, and love, and dignity" (Ellis, Robertson 2010: 134), the utopia eventually disappears after fire consumes the building the scientist inhabits, leaving only his office intact.

Nonetheless, idealism exists in *Transmetropolitan* also in the form of realised utopian dreams: humanity enjoys a significantly prolonged lifespan and the immunity to a number of previously lethal diseases, nano-machines—"foglets"—comprise the immortal disembodied downloaded people who now need only to entertain themselves, "work miracles and play forever in the fields of the city" (Ellis, Robertson 2009b: 18). Based on the same technology, household appliances called "makers" can create something out of "nothing", re-connecting atoms or garbage or air into desired shapes.

## The City as a Carnivalized Dystopia

Significantly, these achievements do not change the dystopian ambience of Transmetropolis. Jerusalem bleakly notices that centuries in the future people still constitute a "zero society" (Ellis, Robertson 2009c: 93) where advancements in science have not been equalled by the betterment of the human nature. As he comments, "[w]e can make magic with engines smaller than a virus. And yet, just today, twenty-four people in this city alone will die from having walked into the wrong district or community" (Ellis, Robertson 2009c: 93). Moreover, another dystopian message of the text is related to the actual decision-makers, the inhabitants of the country who have "earned" the present state of affairs "with their silence" (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 67).

Violent and dangerous, the city is likened to a jungle ruled by alpha animals, the politicians, and state entities often described by Jerusalem as feral creatures. The serving president, notoriously nicknamed The Beast, is later replaced by a far more cynical skilful manipulator of social sentiments, The Smiler (infamously modelled on Tony Blair)—a sadistic misanthrope who cuts the constitution and masturbates into the American flag. One of the organs of the state, the civic centre, is compared to a dumb animal (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 61), a bloodthirsty monster, sexually aroused by its power and the violence it performs—"I can see a blatantly unarmed Transient man with half his face hanging off, and there are three cops working him



over anyway. One of them is groping his own erection” (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 65). In the same line, the state-orchestrated clash between the police and the rioting Transients—people partially transformed into aliens—is described sensually, as a bloody, loud, violent event. Observing the dramatic developments from a rooftop, Jerusalem comments: “There's a jungle rhythm beating out below me; the sound of truncheons hammering on riot shields, police tradition when the streets get nasty” (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 63).

Corruption and self-interest of the mighty reach impressive proportions in the dystopian ambience of *Transmetropolitan*, where the political survival instinct is aided by the technological advances. Growing human clones allows conjuring up a political candidate without a trace of a shameful past, victimbots—robots playing the roles of grateful victims—cling tearful and hopeful to the President in the wake of a disaster. In a Gordian-Knot solution, poverty-stricken areas of the city are erased to avoid addressing the problems of misery and overpopulation.

The carnival state of existence described by Mikhail Bakhtin is present, in its modified form, in the metropolis: in an ultimately permissive world of hedonism the authorities, while retaining the discourse of order and officialdom, seem to be involved in a topsy-turvy game of their own—politicians are murderers and puppet-masters, both threatening and clownish, who cannot exist outside of the all-embracing ambience of the carnival. In effect, *Transmetropolitan* depicts a reality without a clear division into the official and the carnivalised, where rule-breaking is the universal foundation and a guarantee of the universe's permanence, producing the subversive energy which “revives and renews at the same time” (Bakhtin 1968: 11).

## Spider Jerusalem as Lord of Misrule: the Epitome and the Voice of the Metropolis

The hero—Spider Jerusalem—both epitomises the carnivalesque qualities of his metropolis and attempts to change the city by raising the awareness of its citizens, educating them in matters of justice and ethics. By evoking the association with New

Jerusalem, the protagonist's surname hints that the character may represent the utopian impulse<sup>3</sup> in the urban setting, a connection enhanced by his profession of a journalist, which he recognises as a hopeless mission to enlighten the people. Simultaneously, his methods often serve to remind the mighty of their inclusion in the permanent carnival; his attacks on politicians with a bowel disruptor serve as a reaffirmation that Spider Jerusalem is, above all, a creature of the time and place he inhabits.

As a highly successful artistic creation, the hero holds our attention throughout the work, amusing the readers with his unorthodox violent behaviour and memorable lines, and garnering respect for his devotion in the pursuit of the story. As the nemesis of the powerful corrupt, the fear-provoking challenger of the degenerate politicians and fighter for The Truth, Jerusalem has much in common with the justice-seeking superheroes who dare the system and punish the mightiest. His off-beat, two-shaped, two-coloured mirror shades and the customised black suit with a jacket worn over a bare chest constitute a trademark costume (Reynolds 1992: 26) which places him within the tradition of the image-conscious superheroes<sup>4</sup>. As a journalist, however, his influence on the shape of the world he inhabits is limited and he becomes repeatedly frustrated by the ignorant masses slow to take interest in the matters of the state.

Notably, the protagonist always needs to be considered as a collective character in conjunction with the city, a conclusion reinforced by the depiction of his ecstatic, hyper-energising reunion with the metropolis after he leaves his mountain retreat. Abandoning his vehicle on a motorway, Spider Jerusalem runs on roofs of the cars immobilised in traffic jams, thrusting his arms in the air and yelling at the city, experiencing a "home-again" (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 27) feeling which translates into the sensation of "[f]inding yourself naked on a busy freeway [...]. With mice up your ass" (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 17). Contact with the city comes across as an extreme and confusing multi-sensual encounter; Spider Jerusalem smells "[s]atay, and guarana... Cooking ribs, and arabica coffee... Marijuana and cherries" (Ellis, Robertson

<sup>3</sup> An in-depth explication of the anticipatory nature of human consciousness can be found in Ernst Bloch's monumental *The Principle of Hope* (1964).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion on the significance of the superhero costume and its relation to the superhero identity see, for example, Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (1992), and Mila Bongco, *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books* (2000).

2009a: 17) and hears the “chattering and laughing and screaming [...] lots of screaming” (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 16).

As a professional and a citizen through and through, the protagonist immerses himself in the urban space for inspiration: the city reaches his senses and provokes him. His journalism is fed by the stories he hears and investigates, yet the essential spirit of his professional experience seems to be bolstered by the sheer interaction with the city. In his work *Spider Jerusalem* purposefully alternates a bird's eye view perspective with the ground-level involvement with the street life. We see him writing while observing riots from a rooftop, looking down at the city while perched on a neon sign high above street level, gazing down from a skyscraper. At the same time, the comics contain a number of full-page panels without speech bubbles or commentaries, in which the all detailed art concentrates solely on depicting Spider in a throng of citizens, walking on pavements covered with tell-tale trash, constituting the hyper-conscious, absorbent presence, taking in the energy of the city, digesting it into a story.

His behaviour seems to reflect the two epistemic approaches to the city, as discussed by Michel de Certeau and commented on by Ole Frahm:

The walking-writing of the passersby is [...] set in opposition to the seeing-reading of the panoptic gaze. While the panoptic gaze is seeing-reading the swell of verticals as a unified surface, the spatial practice of walking transforms this order to a perforated surface. While the panoptic gaze is transparent to itself, walking is opaque to itself, nearly blind, always irritated by the entangled coexistence of heterogenous elements of the city (de Certeau 2010: 32).

The oscillation between the two modes of perception foregrounds the duality of *Spider Jerusalem's* character, who is simultaneously a larger-than-life hero and a citizen with a job at the local newspaper, an avid observer of the lives of others.

Importantly, the city's life coagulates in the spot-on journalism of *Spider Jerusalem* as its stories take the material form of words—the raw events of *Transmetropolis* are translated into columns of text with a potential to reach everyone in the city. The text is printed, sometimes displayed on omnipresent TV screens, read out loud by its recipients—the stories of the city become present in multiple forms in the urban space. In this manner, through *Spider Jerusalem*, the city is fed back to itself, its existence reaffirmed.

Although *Spider Jerusalem* occasionally comes across as a Jesus Christ suffering for the sins of humanity and working hard and hopelessly towards its salvation, he is no match for the metropolis, and his function is that of a medium which, while giving

voice to the city, emulates its characteristics. From the beginning, his qualities—the abuse of drugs, predilection to violence, obscenity and scatology, the capacity for mercy and greatness—are all reflections of the daily life of Transmetropolis. Although Spider Jerusalem may declare his weapon is a typewriter—the metaphorical mighty pen of journalism—he also carries with him a bowel disruptor, using it liberally on enemies and bodyguards barring his way to The Truth. Violent and vulgar, he searches for the reality behind politics, following the ways of the urban jungle. Appropriately, his vision of a better future offers a scatological carnivalesque twist to the apocalyptic imagery where, in a carnivalesque fashion, he sees himself multiplied into a many-bodied herald of a hierarchy-threatening new order which expresses itself in the language of rampant sexuality typical of Bakhtin's grotesque:

I want to see people like ME, rising up with hate, laying about them with fiery eyes and steaming genitalia—[...] waving their breasts and improbable penises at the secret chiefs of the world—naked glowing god-journalists brown-trousering the naughty twenty-four hours a day, a new planet Earth (Ellis, Robertson 2009d: 69).

With the subversive and the obscene as his distinguishing features, Spider Jerusalem comes across as a carnivalesque Lord of Misrule, a function which connects him with the depiction of the City as a space in a permanent state of carnival. Simultaneously, a voice of reason and a participant in the highly disordered city life, he combines the instinct for lawfulness with the spirit of permanent creative chaos of his metropolis. When, in the third volume, we see him urinating onto the street from the top of a skyscraper, the panoptic perspective is compromised by the association with an animal marking its territory—Spider, even in his superheroic mode, very much remains a creature in an urban jungle.

## The Medium of the Comics and the Question of Perception

The tensions inherent in the medium of the comics—its long-standing tradition of a superhero and its revisionist<sup>5</sup> aspirations are intrinsically a subject worth exploring, adding another interpretative layer to the text, drawing our attention to the interplay of the graphic novel medium with the features of dystopian writing.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of revisionist developments in superhero comics see, for example, Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why* (2002) or Terrence R. Wandtke, *The Meaning of Super-hero Comic Books* (2012).

On close reading, along the evils included and commented on in the text, one finds the seeds of many more—on the margins of the pages, sometimes half-hidden in the carefully-drawn details of the background, there are the germs of trouble-to-come which bring home the awareness that the City indeed evolves, and the future will be at least as hard as the present. Snippets of stories and episodes which remain undeveloped constitute the easily-disregarded layer of the text. We hear of a “Viking funeral for the courier boy who sold his skin as adspace” (Ellis, Robertson 2009a: 16), we may spot a warning on a supermarket trolley which threatens to “release an Ebola level virus” if not returned to the shop (Ellis, Robertson 2009d: 43), “Liquid Holy Thoughts” are available to be administered directly to the brain from a portable appliance.

Significantly, the excess-loving, manipulable, intellectually lazy “New Scum” of *Transmetropolitan* refers directly to the social environment of the comics’ readers. As Spider Jerusalem blatantly states: “Just a little reminder: when I talk about the doomed, the scum, the people who no longer give a shit, the people who look away from pain in the streets, the people who don’t care who runs the country [...] When I talk about the filth of the city [...]. I’m talking about you” (Ellis, Robertson 2011: 242).

Paradoxically, in this context, the choice of the comics as the medium and the focus on the central charismatic character both encourage the re-enactment of the civic blindness, as the readers may be inclined to scan the text for the sake of entertainment provided by the protagonist and overlook much of the background detail or implicit messages. What becomes particularly relevant is the fact that comics, as a visual medium, are particularly successful in re-enacting the experience of being exposed to the city. As Ahrens and Meteling notice, “comics and the cityscape are very much alike in terms of their semiotics and their hybrid mixing of words and pictures” (2010: 14). Eventually, the readers are faced with a choice how much background detail they discern, and whether the imposing character of Spider shifts their focus away from the problems he is investigating, from the story onto the storyteller. Consequently, taking a walk through Transmetropolis, the readers might suffer from the opacity of vision due to the amount of graphic details—an experience which mimics exposure to any real-life metropolis.

While the medium re-creates the experience of fragmentary perception which can be linked to the dystopian experience of lack of control, it is the city’s overwhelming variety—its oversaturation with detail and multitude of signs—which exclude the possibility of order and improvement. Ultimately, the city’s fundamental

characteristics determine not only its dystopian nature, but also the feeling of impotence in the face of a gargantuan spatial being which overproduces stimuli.

## Concluding Remarks: the City as a Trans-heroic Bakhtinian Dystopian Entity

More than an object of journalistic scrutiny and a scenery for Spider Jerusalem's adventures, the city can be seen as a heroic textual presence with the protagonist as its medium. Similarly to an animal, it is neither bad nor good, the feature which foregrounds the fact of its existence as such. The readers are invited to embrace its complexity wholesale, in a carnivalesque manner, as they admire and cringe at the parades of freak-humanity, the displays of bizarre creatures and rubbish—the shreds of the city life. In this respect, the city is trans-heroic, going beyond the concept of heroism associated with positive values, and offering an amalgamation of characteristics and a range of ethical stances instead. It is also trans-heroic in its departure from the concept of a hero as a human being and an affirmation of the urban space as the dominant "force of nature".

Instead of an individual constituting the superego of humanity, the readers are offered a central, focalising dystopian space which is a repository of what constitutes humanity, a composite of urban tales, beasts, cityscapes and energies. In effect, the text proposes a city as a post-human hero unfathomable, on account of its extreme diversity, existing beyond good and evil, whose undeniable attractiveness lies in its excess and vitality. The superheroic space of the future is a carnivalesque vivacious, primeval, all-inclusive locus, capable of containing both utopia and dystopia, an always-transforming dynamic space "in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future" (de Certeau 1984: 91), as well as "a universe that is constantly exploding" (1984: 91). Noticeably, the category of excess becomes an aesthetic and ideological choice which determines all crucial levels of *Transmetropolitan*; the characterisation of the protagonist, the depiction of the city, and the style of the art, resulting in a carnivalised dystopia where the hero-city, as the "ever unfinished, ever creating body" (Bakhtin 1968: 26), thrives and, evolving, indiscriminately incorporates all forms of modernity—a feature which determines its character as a dominant unmanageable entity driven by the forces of chaos and change.

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*Liberation, Redemption, Autonomy:  
Contemporary Utopias in Southern Italian Popular Music*

MARCELLO MESSINA<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Alongside the passionate interest, shown by Southern Italian intellectuals and artists, for the renegotiation of the official historical narratives (Messina 2015), the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy have at times reawakened the need to imagine a better future. These exercises in utopianism have constructed, from time to time, a future characterized by the liberation from the mafia, or by the bridge of the economic gap with the rest of the country, or even by the overcoming of national unity towards autonomy or independence-based solutions. Taking Connelli's (2013) and Polizzi's (2013) works on Southern Italy (aka *Mezzogiorno*) and post-coloniality as fundamental premises, this work seeks to interpret this phenomenon in the light of the theoretical tools provided by postcolonial studies, and in particular by the concept of postcolonial utopia, formulated, among others, by Ashcroft (2012).

A key element is memory, whereby historical chronicles become, in a way, the allegory of present power relations and the discussion of the past serves to open up a debate about the present (Slemon 1988). Ashcroft argues that memory is also fundamental "in the formation of utopian concepts of a liberated future" (2012: 2), and

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Raquel Ishii, Jairo Souza, Cristina Perissinotto and Albert Göschl for their precious insights.

continues by mentioning two other characteristics of postcolonial utopias, namely the obsession with place and the problematic relationship with the concept of nation (2012: 3-4).

In light of this last point, one can already try to interpret utopianism in Southern Italian songs as postcolonial utopia. Although the South has a tradition of political unity prior to the Italian unification, the prospect of a future Southern Italian nation-state is not unanimously shared among artists. Utopianism in songs oscillates between desires of shared spaces which overcome national barriers, and opposite ideas, which contemplate the exasperation of existing borders. Thus, Eugenio Bennato's *Che il Mediterraneo sia* supports the idea of a free and united Mediterranean, "a gateless fortress, where everyone can live" (2003)<sup>2</sup>, while in *Allarga lo Stretto* (2010) the Sicilian band Brigantini polemically and ironically proposes the reinforcement of the natural border between Sicily and mainland Italy, as a protest against the projected construction of the Strait of Messina Bridge. Both songs suggest the overcoming of the national Italian space, nonetheless, while Bennato advocates the overcoming of such imaginary borders as the national or European communitarian ones, Brigantini sardonically imagines the paradoxical strengthening of a natural barrier. Coherently with Ashcroft's formulation of postcolonial utopia, both songs are centred on the concept of place, as Bennato's utopia is spatialised around the Mediterranean, while Brigantini focus exclusively on Sicily. Bennato appears to resist the idea of the nation-state explicitly, while it is not clear whether Brigantini are seriously supporting a clear independence agenda connected to Sicily<sup>3</sup>.

In this chapter I explore utopia in songs released in the period of the celebrations for the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification (2011): with regards to these songs, I will focus on how aspirational images of the future can be articulated around the concepts of place and memory, as suggested by Ashcroft. During the period of the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary, the celebration of the

<sup>2</sup> "Che il Mediterraneo sia/la fortezza ca nun tene porte / addo' ognuno po' campare / d'a ricchezza ca ognuno porta". Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Italian are mine.

<sup>3</sup> It needs to be clarified that Brigantini's song contains some apparently offensive lyrics against African women migrants: "They promise us that with the bridge things will change / it will be the right thing to do, everyone will envy us/ and once completed, if there will be some cement left/ they will build another bridge from Tripoli to Agrigento/ so that Egyptian, Libyan, Ghanaian and Nigerian women/ will come here roller skating to work as whores [Con il ponte, ci assicurano, le cose cambieranno/ sarà fatta cosa giusta, tutti ce lo invidieranno/ e appena completato se resterà cemento/ un altro ne faranno da Tripoli a Agrigento/ così egiziane, libiche, ghanesi e nigeriane/ verranno con i pattini per fare le buttane]". (Brigantini, 2010). In denouncing the unacceptability of these lyrics, I would also like to acknowledge the distance between *Allarga lo Stretto* and the rest of the Sicilian cultural production engaged with ideas of independence and autonomy, normally characterised by non-racist and non-sexist views.

past triggered the need for a critical revision of historical events (Monsagrati 2014) which inevitably became renegotiation of the present and imagination of the future.

Before analysing the songs, it is useful to take advantage of another argument made by Ashcroft, namely the interpretation of the term “postcolonial”. For Ashcroft, “the term refers to post-invasion rather than post-independence, it identifies neither a chronology nor a specific ontology—it is not »after colonialism« nor is it a way of being. Post-colonial is a way of reading—a way of reading the continuing engagement with colonial and neo-colonial power” (Ashcroft 2012: 1). For the sake of this chapter, it is useful to transpose this reading to the dualism that characterises Italy, and propose the identification of a “post-Italian” discursive space. Those involved in the production of post-Italian discourses do not necessarily address the desire of overcoming Italian national unity, but rather seek to rethink their own identities and aspirations as the result of a direct engagement with a past historical moment.

In this work, preference is given to the term “post-Italian” over the term “anti-Italian”, proposed, for example, by Ernesto Galli Della Loggia (2014). For the sake of countering the plethora of allegations and prejudices springing from the description of the critical renegotiation of the past, the present and the future in Italy as “anti-Italian”, I consciously choose to employ the prefix “post-”, although this might recall strongly contested concepts such as that of “post-modernism” (Callinicos 2010), or “post-coloniality” itself (Mignolo 2000). While acknowledging the ambiguousness of these concepts and their partial or total failure in describing reality accurately, and while accepting the consequent suspiciousness associated with the prefix “post-”, I consciously embrace the potential failures and ambiguities embedded in the term “post-Italian” as a necessary component of the discursive phenomenon I attempt to describe. After all, what I attempt to describe as “post-Italian” is characterised both by the lucid perception of a persisting and intolerable condition of coloniality and by the consciousness of a potential failure to embrace an effective decolonisation agenda.

It is important to clarify that the post-Italian discourse is produced by historical narratives on the Unification that are considerably different from the official narratives, i.e., the narratives that can be evinced from national celebrations, national media, and school. On the one hand, the official narratives propose the glorified act of liberation of a chunk of Italy from a foreign sovereign; on the other hand, revisionist narratives focus on the violence exerted on Southern people, the politico-economic

interests that led to the Unification, the plunder of Southern resources, and the progressive impoverishment of the South, among other things.

This revisionist tradition has led to the production of a myriad of works attempting at proposing alternatives to the traditional historiography (among the most notable examples see Ciano 1996; Izzo 1999; Di Fiore 2010; Guerri 2010). The most influential of these works, at least in terms of mass culture, is Pino Aprile's *Terroni* (2010), which deals with most of these issues and makes them accessible to the public. This book has often been criticised by academics, either for alleged overstatements (Felice 2012) or for methodological weaknesses (Cassino 2013), or for having sold as shocking new discoveries facts that were long time known in academia (Tintori 2012). Discussing these positions is not among the purposes of this paper, suffice it to say that Aprile's work is considered here in relation to its present influence on songwriters, rather than as a history treatise.

Taking these positions as a starting point, it is possible to articulate post-Italian discourse along several different interpretive lines, proposed by various authors, unveiling a much broader and complex scenario than the monolithic "anti-Italian" perspective identified by Galli Della Loggia. For instance, as part of a research on Sicilian society, Pardalis argues that Sicilians resort to the assertion of their own, separate identity as a means to renegotiate their position within Italian society, and not as a way to claim political independence for Sicily (2009: 233-234). Joseph Pugliese goes a bit further, and identifies Southern practices of resistance described as "a tactical blackening of Italy in the face of a virulent and violent caucacentrism" (2008: 2). Furthermore, Pugliese talks of "Provisional Street Justice" when describing the graffiti that disfigure the statue of Dante Alighieri in Naples: these manifestations, perceived as incomprehensible and vandalism by the dominant social groups, are on the contrary attempts to propose alternative political discourses, capable of reorienting the "caucacentric, monoglossic nation-state space into a place that is coextensive with southern community histories, politics and cultural practices" (Pugliese 2008: 13). Francesco Festa looks at protest movements in Naples and talks about a spontaneous tendency to self-organisation, seen as a form of constructive antagonism against both the state and the criminal organisation (2014). Finally, it is important to consider the genuine autonomy/independence agendas, whose spirit can be partly unified under Nicola Zitara's call for a Southern Italian struggle for national liberation (1973). Zitara was not the first advocate of national liberation for Southern Italy: before World War II, in a congress secretly held in Cologne in 1931, the Partito Comunista d'Italia (The

Communist Party of Italy) had drafted a document that advocated the constitution of independent republics in Sicily, Sardinia and mainland Southern Italy, as part of a confederation of Italian republics (Perri 2012). In the 1940s, the Sicilian Independence Movement also advocated the idea of an independent Sicily within an Italian confederation (Finkelstein 1998: 189). Today, autonomy and independence agendas are supported by many of the Southern Italian movements and associations described by Patruno (2011). It is evident how even the most radical instances of antagonism, autonomism and independentism are hardly ascribable to a genuine “anti-Italian” feeling, in that forms of dialogue with the rest of the country are almost always contemplated, even when the imagined scenario involves the political separation from the rest of Italy. The three case studies presented below introduce songs released between 2010 and 2011, in the period of the celebrations for the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary, which present relevant affinities with the different interpretive lines of post-Italianism proposed above.

### Rediscovering Unity: Mimmo Cavallo’s *Quando saremo fratelli uniti*

Mimmo Cavallo’s 2011 album *Quando saremo fratelli uniti* [*When we will be united brothers*] was written for a musical theatre work called *Terroni: Centocinquant’anni di menzogne* [*Southerners: 150 years of lies*] (2011), directed by Roberto D’Alessandro and based on Pino Aprile’s aforementioned book *Terroni*. Many songs in Cavallo’s album are strongly inspired by Aprile’s work, to the point that some of the lyrics quote passages of the book, almost word by word, as it happens, for instance, in the song *Fora Savoia* [*Savoy go out*]<sup>4</sup>.

The album appears to convey a utopian message from its very title, which expresses hope for the end of divisions between Italians. The title track, *Quando saremo fratelli uniti*, develops this concept by connecting future improvements with the recuperation and clarification of historical memory. In other words, Cavallo claims, after Aprile, that a revision and a rewriting of history are necessary to solve the tension that characterise the present, in order to progress, in turn, into a future characterised by solidarity and sisterhood/brotherhood:

<sup>4</sup> The House of Savoy unified and ruled the Kingdom of Italy from 1861 until 1946.

Italy, ungenerous stepmother  
 recover your memory,  
 let's be  
 a family.  
 But in order to be together,  
 to live in peace and in glory,  
 maybe we should  
 rewrite history.  
 When we will be united brothers  
 from north to south, the white and the black,  
 we will reason about helping each other  
 when we will be brothers.  
 When we will be united brothers  
 from north to south, real brothers,  
 without outvoicing each other  
 we will talk about love and peace (Cavallo 2011)<sup>5</sup>.

The spatial dimension of this utopia appears to coincide with the territory of Italy, although the reference to north and south can be well extended to a wider space, such as the Mediterranean or the entire world. Coherently with Pardalis's arguments on the implications carried by the questioning of Italian identity, here Cavallo's critique of Italy ("ungenerous stepmother") is aimed at the solicitation of a renegotiation of the condition of the Mezzogiorno, and of a revision of the north-south relationship.

### Resisting the State and the Mafia: Kalafro's *Resistenza Sonora*

My background in practice-led avant-garde music research urges me to compare Cavallo's conciliatory vision to some of the avant-gardist manifestos that populated the first two decades of the twentieth century in Italy. In particular, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's general futurist manifesto (1909) and Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* (1916) staunchly refuse ideas of social conciliation, and celebrate war as both a necessary and desirable occurrence, "the world's only hygiene" (Marinetti 1909) and a producer of pleasing aural results (Russolo 1916: 43-49). Commonly associated with

<sup>5</sup> "Italia, madre-matrigna / ritrova la memoria, / facciamo pure in modo / che sia tutta una famiglia. / Però per stare insieme, / per stare in pace e in gloria, / occorrerebbe forse / riscrivere la storia. / Quando saremo fratelli uniti / fra nord e sud, fra bianchi e neri, / ragioneremo in termini di aiuti / quando saremo fratelli. / Quando saremo fratelli uniti / fra nord e sud, fratelli veri / senza diritto di alzare la voce / e parleremo d'amore e di pace".

the Italian right wing, Futurism was “looked upon with suspicion and disapprobation” (Berghaus 2012:395) by Post-World War II avant-gardes, including Luigi Nono, who nevertheless shared part of Russolo’s aesthetics in terms of celebrating “noise”, alongside the urge to imagine a liberated future based on class war (Nono 2007).

The Calabrian hip-hop/reggae group Kalafro articulates a radical Southern aesthetics that seem to contrast with the Northern identities of Marinetti and Russolo as well as Nono. Kalafro imagines a liberated future around a lucid decolonial politics of Southern Italy, that through the coinage of the phrase “*brigantaggio postmoderno* [postmodern brigandage]” (Kalafro 2011b) celebrates both its link with a present historical moment and its connection with the past struggles of the *briganti*, the Southern post-unification freedom fighters who fought against the Piedmontese/Italian army in the 1860s. In 2011, Kalafro published the album called *Resistenza Sonora* [*Sonorous*<sup>6</sup> *Resistance*], which is full of references to historical memory. In the songs, Kalafro repeatedly compare themselves to the *briganti*: in the song *Briganti* (2011a), for example, the fight of Calabrian people against the *Ndrangheta* (Calabrian mafia) is compared to the fights of the *briganti* against the Italian army. Furthermore, in the same year, 2011, as part of an unrelated solo project, Kalafro member Nicola Casile aka MastaP released the song, *Atterrite queste popolazioni* [*Terrorise these populations*], which is totally centred on a critical revision of the history of Unification.

Within this framework of historical memory and revisionism, the title track of the album, *Resistenza Sonora*, opens with a utopian vision of the future, characterised by a violent civil war fought by Calabrians against the *Ndrangheta* bosses:

I dream of a coup d’état organised in the street,  
an armed revolution, a new intifada,  
people in barricades, angry youth,  
blocking every border, from Sicily to Basilicata.  
From the countryside, some women, on an ordinary day  
will say the names of those scoundrels;  
their voice will give voice to those who now are silent  
and the last boss will be the last man of peace (Kalafro, 2011c)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Both in the sense of “sonic” or “aural” and in the sense of “loud” and “strong”.

<sup>7</sup> “Sogno: colpo di Stato organizzato in strada, / insurrezione popolare armata, nuova intifada, / gente barricata, gioventù incazzata, / ogni frontiera bloccata dalla Sicilia alla Basilicata. / Dalle campagne, donne, un giorno qualunque / faranno i nomi degli infami e metteranno il fuoco dentro ai bunker; / la loro voce darà voce a chi ora tace / e l’ultimo boss sarà l’ultimo uomo di pace”.

The civil war fought by the Calabrians does not seem to be fought together with the state. On the contrary, Kalafro refers explicitly to a “*coup d’état*”, whereas the idea that “the last boss will be the last man of peace” alludes quite explicitly to the issue of the connivance between the Italian state and the criminal organisations, which is explained and developed in the rest of the song and in the rest of the album.

Kalafro’s exaltation of paramilitary violence resonates both with the political thought of Nono<sup>8</sup> and with the militaristic aesthetics of the futurists. However, the idea of “blocking every border, from Sicily to Basilicata” introduces an additional post-Italian element of detachment from the Italian national space that goes towards an autonomous reorganisation of the Calabrian community.

The antagonism advocated by Kalafro is similar to the one described by Festa (2014), as it is spontaneous, and organised in a way to oppose both the criminal organisations and the state at the same time. This antagonism is generated by narratives that appear to stand in opposition to those proposed by national Italian media, which often describe self-organised rebellions in Southern Italy as the product of dynamics controlled by the mafias, and, more in general, as the expression of feelings and agendas that are hostile to the nation’s common good (Festa 2014: 205).

### Autonomism vs. Officiality: Sfasciatura’s *Splendi Sicilia*

Francesco Festa’s critical work strongly resonates with the thought of Nicola Zitara, and especially with Zitara’s formulation of “*proletariato esterno* [external proletariat]”, (Zitara 1973) when discussing the chronic neglect of the Southern population operated by national political movements and parties in Italy. Festa is also associated to the EuroNomade and Uninomade projects, which host contribution from intellectuals such as Toni Negri, Christian Marazzi, and Franco “Bifo” Berardi. It is important here to discuss the tensions produced in the encounter between Zitara’s decolonial approach and Italian operaist and post-operaist intellectual traditions. Speaking at the beginning of the 1970s. Zitara was sceptical about any possible collaboration between the Northern industrial working classes and the Southern proletariat, mainly unemployed, underemployed, or absorbed by the rural sector (Zitara 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Among other things, Nono was imprisoned in Lima in 1963 for voicing his support for the Peruvian guerrilla (Restagno and Nono 1987: 45).



Arguably, this allowed Zitara (alongside a number of Third-Worldist authors) to unveil the trappings of orthodox Marxism much earlier than the articulation of a critique of traditional categories offered by Berardi (2015), Negri (2008), and others. Negri, for example, in *Goodbye Mr. Socialism*, declares that there is “no longer Taylorism but the fluidification of labor power, no longer Fordism but precaritization, no longer macroeconomic techniques of control but pure monetarism” (2008: 238). For Negri, this is the result of a process that started in “the early 1970s, when the factories began to throw labor out” (2008: 237). Zitara, on the contrary, describes these same phenomena as being the product of colonial dependency, and as affecting Southern Italy since Italian Unification (Zitara 1973). In his volume *Heroes*, Berardi says that, since “the year 1977 [...], what had been produced by labour and social solidarity in the centuries of modernity started to fall under finance’s predatory process of de-realization” (2015: 5-6). A few lines below, Berardi describes the current Neoliberalist regime arguing that:

[...] in the second decade of the twenty-first century [...] this new system started to swallow and destroy the product of two hundred years of industriousness and of collective intelligence, and transformed the concrete reality of social civilization into abstraction (Berardi 2015: 6).

Interestingly, in the above quotes the process of contemporary disintegration of reality is deemed to menace “the concrete reality of social civilization” that had been achieved as part of “the centuries of modernity” and of “two hundred years of industriousness”, elsewhere referred to as “five hundred years” (Berardi 2016). The association of such signifiers as “modernity” and “civilization” with the long durations indicated by the author appears to insist problematically on a Eurocentric chronology, which uncritically identifies modernity with the violent European conquest of America, started more or less “five hundred years” ago, and later with the “discovery” of Australia and the early phases of the partition of Africa, which started more or less at the beginning of the “two hundred years of industriousness” identified by Berardi. As Enrique Dussel puts it,

[...] modernity only truly began when the historical conditions of its real origin were met: in 1492, when a real worldwide expansion took place, when the colonial world became organized and the usufruct of its victims’ lives began. Modernity really began in 1492: that is my thesis. The real overcoming of modernity (as subsumption and not merely as Hegelian *Aufhebung*) is then the subsumption of its emancipatory, rational, European character transcended as a worldwide liberation project from its denied alterity (Dussel 2000: 474).

In other words, a global politico-economic system that bases its prosperity on annihilation and “the disintegration of reality” (in terms of territories, communities, languages, identities, natural resources, etc.) has been in power for at least five hundred years. Contrarily to what Negri, Berardi and a plethora of other authors say, what has happened in the last few decades is not that new, unless we actively (and absurdly) postulate that what happens in Europe, North America and Australia globally deserves more attention and more emotional participation than what happens in Africa, South America and Asia. In this sense, the “liberation project” advocated by Dussel appears (to me) the only global solution ever possible, and resonates with the aforementioned struggle for the national liberation of Southern Italy imagined by Nicola Zitara.

This struggle for national liberation seems to be advocated in the song *Splendi Sicilia* [*Shine, Sicily*], released in 2010 by Sicilian band Sfasciatura. The original version of the song, published on the internet together with an official video, talks, clearly and concisely, of autonomy:

Shine Sicily,  
centre of the world,  
autonomy  
is not just a dream (Sfasciatura, 2010)<sup>9</sup>.

The statement that “autonomy is not just a dream” is a clear reference to one of the fundamental points of the political debate on Sicily. The administration of the island is regulated by a Statute of Autonomy, which came into force in 1946, and devolves to the Regional Government some fundamental powers, normally administered by the National Government. Autonomy was conceded to Sicily as a compromise, following what was precisely a decolonial struggle for national liberation which saw Sicilian independence militants gaining electoral momentum and embarking in armed resistance against the Italian State between 1943 and 1947 (Paci and Pietrancosta 2010). Currently, a faction of detractors of the Statute of Autonomy (Lanfranca et al 2012) is opposed to the autonomists, who, on the contrary, claim that the Statute was never really implemented (Costa 2009). This debate, which has been at the base of Sicilian electoral politics until the present day, is undertaken by Sfasciatura, who clearly stand with the autonomists, and optimistically foresee the future

<sup>9</sup> “Splendi Sicilia / centro del mondo / l'autonomia / non è solo un sogno”.

implementation of the regional autonomy, implying that the current situation does not constitute a real autonomy, and implicitly putting autonomy in relation to the centrality of Sicily.

On 16/17 March 2011, Sfasciatura featured in a concert in Catania, which was a part of the celebrations for the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the Italian unification. When playing this song, they altered the lyrics in correspondence to the reference to the autonomy. The new lyrics were::

Shine Sicily,  
centre of the world,  
your redemption  
is not just a dream (Sfasciatura 2011)<sup>10</sup>.

The replacement of the reference to autonomy with a much vaguer idea of redemption depoliticises the utopian message of the song and makes it compatible with the monologic and monoglossic unity celebrated by the official event. It is not difficult to imagine that this small modification might have been made under the pressure of the organizers, or as a result, in the best-case scenario, of the musicians' self-censorship, made in the fear of being excluded from the event.

This episode permits to reflect on the celebrations: while on the one hand revisionism has often been accused of undermining national unity (Monsagrati 2014; Galli Della Loggia 2014), the celebrations are part of an official Italian monologue which intervenes on the ideas and aspirations of people and submits them to violent revision, to the point of depoliticising or even silencing them. Here one could refer to the division between subjective and objective violence proposed by Slavoj Žižek, where subjective violence is caused by a "clearly identifiable agent" (2008: 1), and "is seen as a perturbation of the »normal«, peaceful state of things" (Žižek 2008: 2), while "objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this »normal« state of things" (Žižek 2008: 2). While subjective violence is immediately identifiable and condemnable, objective violence is the very cause of subjective violence (Žižek 2008: 1-7). In this case, despite Sicily's autonomy is officially contemplated by the Italian constitution, Sfasciatura's autonomist utopia is perceived as the perturbation of a natural state of things, and thus it is coercively depoliticised in light of the need to preserve the official narrative of a harmoniously united Italy. It is not important to

<sup>10</sup> "Splendi Sicilia / centro del mondo / il tuo riscatto / non è solo un sogno".

ascertain whether this (symbolic) violence was self-inflicted by Sfasciatura themselves, or if it was the result of a directive coming from the concert organisers: the very imperceptibility of the agent of this intervention makes the violence more difficult to challenge and condemn—no one did it, it just happened.

## Final Remarks

To summarise, in this chapter I have presented some instances of utopianism that characterize the current debate about Southern Italy, through the study of the lyrics of some songs released between 2010 and 2011, during the celebrations for the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the Italian unification. In line with Ashcroft's insights on postcolonial utopia (2012), I have shown the fundamental connection between the critical revision of official historical narratives, on the one hand, and the imagination of a better future on the other hand. This connection is, in turn, centred on the concept of place, which somewhat engages with, or resists, the concept of nation (Ashcroft 2012). This concept remains fundamentally ambivalent and problematic in the songs examined in this work, and this ambivalence is coherent with the complexity of the utopian positions connected to a critical revision of the history of Italian unification. As shown above, it is possible to identify attempts to renegotiate the position of the South aimed at the recuperation of national unity, as in Mimmo Cavallo's *Quando Saremo fratelli uniti*, alongside the support of forms of self-organised resistance, in antagonism with both the state and the criminal organisations, as in Kalafro's *Resistenza Sonora*. It is also possible to identify autonomism and independence, which, as seen apropos of Sfasciatura's *Splendi Sicilia*, are often subjected to censorship or self-censorship, following an attempted dialogue with officiality that normally proves to be extremely imbalanced in favour of the latter (Gribaudi 1997). In defence of this attempted dialogue, and in defence of the complexity of the attempts at rethinking one's Italianness and recuperating/revising historical memory, I have proposed the term "post-Italian", coherently with a theoretical framework offered by postcolonial studies, and in opposition to the term "anti-Italian" proposed by Dalla Loggia (2014) among others. Rather than being anti-Italian, Southern Italian utopias seek to reconsider Italianness by formulating aspirations that deal with the overcoming of the national Italian space and with the achievement of an effective equality between the North and the South of the country.

In 2014, well beyond the period of controversies and debates that accompanied the celebrations for the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary, Rocco Hunt has released the song *Nu juorno buono* [*A good day*], based on a Southern Italian utopia as well and characterised, among other things, by the imagined bridging of the gap between the North and the South of the country:

Forget having to emigrate to find a job  
 New industries will flourish in your own territory  
 Forget the banks, we will lend money to them  
 Zero rulers, we will overthrow them [...]  
 Scrap that border that divides the north and the south (Pagliarulo, Merli, Clemente 2014)<sup>11</sup>.

The song won the Newcomers' section (*Nuove Proposte*) of the Sanremo Music Festival, an event of extreme relevance in Italian popular culture, perhaps proving the urgency and significance of these issues and aspirations at national level.

In other words, Rocco Hunt's victory probably demonstrates that Italy, despite the criticism, ostracism and censorship experienced by some of the artists and authors discussed in this chapter, is secretly interested in listening to the "post-Italian", and perhaps in contemplating Southern liberation among the number of desirable futures to look forward to.

<sup>11</sup> "Dimentica di andare fuori per lavoro / Le nuove aziende fioriranno nel tuo territorio / Dimentica le banche, li presteremo noi a loro / Zero padrone, gli ruberemo il trono [...] / Tagliate quella linea che divide nord e sud".

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*Arnold Schoenberg's Dodecaphonic Method  
as a Representation of an Artistic Utopia*

IWONA SOWIŃSKA-FRUHTRUNK

Every great idea is a tyrant when it first appears;  
hence the advantages which it produces  
change all too quickly into disadvantages.  
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## Defining an Artistic Utopia: Music and Progress

The purpose of this chapter is to propose closer approach to certain aspects of Arnold Schoenberg's life and work as situated in the context of utopian thinking. I seek to establish a link between the composer's religious and political beliefs, his interest in philosophy and mysticism, and his musical output, focusing mainly on the dodecaphonic method invented by the artist. The primary intention is to prove that the above-mentioned aspects of Schoenberg's personality and work reveal a life lasting and somehow naïve wish to create and believe in the utopian world. Finally, the opposite, dystopic face of the utopian thinking is examined using the example of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, where the invention of dodecaphony is attributed to devil himself.

In order to establish a foundation for this research it is crucial to explain shortly the parallelism occurring between musical art and the general concept of progress in art with an emphasis on the beginning of the twentieth century. The idea of utopia,

as described by Thomas More, has been transferred from political and social areas to art, receiving great attention particularly in the twentieth century in the thought of Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno, among others. Since utopia means “no place” and “ideal place” (Rinehart 2014: 26) at the same time, it is as such an intentional object, like a musical work, according to Roman Ingarden’s concept (Ingarden 1966: 169-307). The essence of a political or social utopia is a state that decides what humanity is and how to realize it (Kiereś 2010: 49): Thus, some utopias contain already the premises of dystopia that unveil fully when the insubordination appears. A centrally controlling organism (whatever we call it a state, an idea, or a work of art) assumes unquestionable happiness and obedience to its laws (understood as “natural”). In this aspect, an object acquires the status of a subject; the human ruler fulfils only mechanical actions in order to keep the whole machine running. For the purpose of this chapter the notion of utopianism defined by Ruth Levitas in terms of a “wide range of forms, functions and contents” (Levitas 2010: 207) all based on “the desire for a different, better way of being” (Levitas 2010: 209), may serve as a point of departure.

Richard Rinehart states specifically that “utopia thrived under Modernism” since a condition for it is “creating a break with past civilization” (Rinehart 2014: 2). Breaking with the representation and aiming towards an ideal, a “non-existing” world is also characteristic for modernism. One more important feature of modern utopias is that they were “totalizing” as “all-or-nothing propositions” (Rinehart 2014: 10). In the words of Theodor W. Adorno, “each artwork is utopia insofar as through its form it anticipates what would finally be itself, and this converges with the demand for the abrogation of the spell of self-identity cast by the subject. No artwork cedes to another” (Adorno 2002: 135). Adorno points at art’s general, repeating necessity and longing to be new; at the same time that utopian longing can never be fulfilled since it “would be art’s temporal end” (Adorno 2002: 32).

Ernst Bloch’s view proves to be similar; he sees music as the prediction and symbol of a utopia (Fubini 1997: 465), emphasizing at the same time that “music as the inwardly utopian art lies completely beyond anything empirically demonstrable” (Bloch 2000: 162). Bloch’s *The Spirit of Utopia* was written in 1915-16 and published just after the First World War, i.e. exactly between Arnold Schoenberg’s atonal and dodecaphonic periods. Bloch’s thought mirrors the dialectical tension between form and expression in music, echoed especially in Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic opera *Moses und Aron* from 1932. In the book *Schoenberg and the New Music* Carl Dahlhaus writes:

The concept of the »new«, which Ernst Bloch has said is in a bad way, taken as a historical category, as unavoidable as it is precarious. It is unavoidable in the trivial sense that the matter of history is that which changes, and not that which is static or that which repeats itself in the same form. It is precarious because the principle which states that history is to be understood as continuity urges the historian to trace the new, if at all possible, back to the old. [...] The new is not significant in itself, but solely in relations to its antithesis, as the irreducible and unresolved remainder. Thus the new can be seen, paradoxically, as being at one and the same time the actual subject-matter and the blind spot of history (Dahlhaus 1989: 2).

Dahlhaus sees the modern version of progress in Bloch's idea of utopia "as a matter of hope, which was developed in the context of a philosophy of music" (Dahlhaus 1989: 14). It should be specified that Bloch understands hope as the opposite to security: "[...] hope is critical and can be disappointed" (Bloch 1988: 16-17). It is interesting to note that for Bloch too many rules or too much mathematics in music distance it from its proper utopian function (Korstvedt 2003: 56). This would partly explain why for Schoenberg's utopian thinking the musical idea was given priority in a work of art and the "mathematic rules", which he was often wrongly accused to over-use, play minor role and are submitted to musical expression.

Already *Jugendstil* and expressionism were regarded as utopian, but the real revolution in this aspect was just about to come. Dahlhaus comments harshly on Schoenberg's atonal "turn":

[...] it is, strictly speaking, impossible to give a reason for Schoenberg's decision of 1907. Those who speak of historical necessity, of the dictates of the historical moment which Schoenberg obeyed, make the event appear more harmless than it actually was. The suspension of the existing order, the proclamation of the musical state of emergency, was an act of violence (Dahlhaus 1989: 88).

Robert Nisbet draws attention to the persistence of the idea of progress through ages. A combination of this idea with utopian thinking promises an optimistic outcome (Nisbet 2009: 311). Golan Gur, a Schoenbergian scholar, points at the importance of ideology of progress in composer's theoretical writings. Schoenberg clearly saw the breakdown of the tonal system as an inevitable progress (understood in terms of an evolution) and as a historical achievement of Western music, including his own person as a part of it. This kind of progress was also related to other aspects than music, mainly moral and ethical values. For Schoenberg the artistic principles were not universally valid but rather historically conditioned. Collapse of tonality and the necessity of inventing the twelve-tone method was supposed to insure, in composer's view, the supremacy of German music over the next hundred years. There is an echo of absolutism in a wish expressed so clearly. Schoenberg cared much about being

important in the history of music, comparing himself with Brahms, among others. In his article *Brahms the Progressive* (1947) the composer praises avoiding unnecessary passages and undeveloped repetition as Brahms' ideal (Gur 2012: 8). Schoenberg claimed the same ideal in his own compositions. It is not without importance that Modernism rejected representational art. Tonality could be seen, indeed, as a quintessence of representation (understood as *mimesis*) with the vast repertoire of means: rhetoric (the doctrine of the affections), topics, gestures, symbols. Dodecaphony was supposed to grant music autonomy not only inside the field of art, as an opposition absolute *versus* programme music but also in the relationship between music and society. At the same time Schoenberg's strong belief in progress smoothened the accusation of the intention to shock the audience. Intelligent, educated but also snobbish audience was needed for comprehension of new music. Starting a revolution Schoenberg wanted nevertheless to retain a Romantic status of an artist in the society combined with a Classical concept of genius. As Gur observes, no other composer supported his idea of progress with such rational arguments (Gur 2012: 11).

## Religion and Politics

In order to fully understand Schoenberg's personality, his *Weltanschauung*, as well as the inner need to change the musical reality, one needs to take a closer look at his religious, philosophical, social, and political environment. Although Schoenberg was born in a Jewish family, his way to Judaism was long and complex. The works such as *Moses und Aron*, *Die Jakobsleiter* and *A Survivor from Warsaw* were a kind of settlement, not only with religious issues but also with the very recent past. Schoenberg's relation to his religious belief led him toward radical political beliefs. In 1898 the composer was baptized into the Austrian Lutheran Church and on July 24, 1933, just before leaving for the United States, he re-entered the Jewish community by making a formal declaration in Paris (DeVoto 1989). Already in 1925, when Schoenberg moved to Berlin, the political situation started to be difficult for him to cope with. In 1932 he wrote to his pupil and friend, Alban Berg:

I've had it hammered into me so loudly and so long that only by being deaf to begin with could I have failed to understand it. And it's a long time now since it wrung any regrets from me. Today I'm proud to call myself a Jew" (Schoenberg 1965: 167).

Being still in Europe Schoenberg had in mind a daring project and created a plan with the intention:

[...] to engage in large scale propaganda among all of Jewry in the United States and also later to other countries, designed first of all to get them to produce the financial means sufficient to pay for the gradual emigration of the Jews from Germany. I propose to move the Jewish community to its very depths by a graphic description of what lies in store for the German Jews, unless they receive help within the next two or three months (Ringer 1990: 135).

What is astonishing in all these words is Schoenberg's incredible sharpness of view on the political matters and his concerns for the future of European Jews. At the same time it reveals a kind of an utopian hope that good will and work may change things, no matter how bad they look.

In the United States Schoenberg tried to create some awareness about the dramatic situations of the European Jews, however without much success due to "a general indifference in America to the tenebrous developments in Germany" (Strasser 1995: 8). In 1934 Schoenberg even wrote to Rabbi Stephen Wise of the American Jewish Congress. But any radical steps against the Nazis in the 1930s could not be possibly promoted by a "rabbi who represented assimilationist Jews" (Feisst 2011: 87). In December 1938 the composer created himself *A Four-Point Program for Jewry*, on which he has worked for several years. Schoenberg warned that "millions of European Jews were in danger" and concluded: "the time of words is over and if action does not start at once, it may be too late" (Feisst 2011: 87). He was, however, unable to publish this text, despite many efforts made in that direction. During the Second World War Schoenberg could not proceed with any other action of that kind. His only dream that came true was the creation of the State of Israel. He consecrated to this occasion an unfinished work to his own text *Israel exists again* (1949) and also commented on that fact in 1951: "For more than four decades it has been a most cherished wish of mine to see erected an independent Israeli state. And more than that: to become a citizen residing in this state" (Feisst 2011: 84). That wish was never to happen; the same year Schoenberg died in Los Angeles.

## Philosophy and Mysticism

In this section I focus on another aspect of Schoenberg's life that is crucial for understanding his relation to idealism and utopian thinking. I suggest that certain philosophical concepts as well as the works by Emanuel Swedenborg had great influence on composer's view on art and creative process in general. Schoenberg fought all his life to balance the two aspects: heart and brain, thus proving that his works are based on their cooperation and complementing. The mystical philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg should be mentioned here as a main source of inspiration. The composer knew Swedenborg's theories chiefly from the novel *Séraphîta* by Honoré Balzac, from 1834. Swedenborg's influence spread widely over the centuries and can be traced in the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Immanuel Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer. In Balzac's novel an androgynous protagonist embodies a perfect match of masculine and feminine, materiality and spirituality, feeling and mind. Moreover, the interpretation of an artist as a Creator is essential for Schoenberg's thought. One way to emphasize this conviction is the prime mover feature of a musical motive which corresponds with the concept of a musical idea as an incarnation of Kantian noumenon, as well as Schopenhauerian will in music (Covach 1995). Being led by a musical idea, a composer gains an access to will (Trottier 2005) Motive is not anymore a purely technical means of formal structure; caused by an impulse it becomes a direct expression of will, a creative act comparable with a divine creation. Such understanding of an artist-demiurge dates back to philosophy of Plato, and then Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Nietzsche.

## Schoenberg's Dodecaphonic Method

In this part I argue that both atonal and dodecaphonic techniques used by Schoenberg may be regarded as products of utopian thinking, followed by a bitter disappointment. Dodecaphonic method was invented by Schoenberg in 1923 after about 10 years of thinking of and working on it. Unlike the appearance of atonality around 1908, which was a clear sign of modernistic turn, dodecaphony was rather a step towards a new understanding of *avant-garde*, being, in certain terms, somehow "post-modernistic". Still, it proves to be utopian since Bloch claims that "[...] the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present" (Bloch 1989: 12). According to Luigi Rognoni, the gap between an artist and the society at the beginning of the twentieth



century urged a constructive formulation of moral and ethical mission of music (Rognoni 1978). Schoenberg wrote himself: "The method of composing with twelve tones grew out of a necessity" (Schoenberg 1984: 216). The composer called dodecaphony a "Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Which are Related Only with One Another" (Schoenberg 1984: 89), renouncing the notions of system or theory, suggesting more abstract attitude and proposing his pupils to "use the same kind of form or expression, the same themes, melodies, sounds, rhythms as you used before" (Schoenberg 1984: 213).

Schoenberg's method was based on the equality of all the twelve tones of the chromatic scale, meaning that they should appear approximately the same number of times during the musical piece, without privileging any. Since the tones were related only with one another, there was no tonality involved. Therefore, the most difficult thing for the listeners of the dodecaphonic music was not the number of dissonances, but the lack of harmonic gravity. The basic set or series, although composed in the first place, could appear at any place of the piece, not necessarily at the very beginning. It gave an impression of a possibility of unlimited expansion, since there were no tonal boundaries, and "unlimited" combinations of tone-rows' forms. Rognoni, among other scholars, points at the similarities of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (being created since 1913) and dodecaphony. *Epoché*, a suspension of judgment or bracketing, led to the reduction of the tone field. It could be compared with a passage from the "inner consciousness" to the "intentional consciousness"; to the pure, primeval sound. Each note was viewed in its "essence". A tone-row served as an "intentional act", already present in the imagined object (Rognoni 1978: 101). Schoenberg was conscious of the high requirements of his method:

The restrictions imposed on a composer by the obligation to use only one set in a composition are so severe that they can only be overcome by an imagination which has survived a tremendous number of adventures. Nothing is given by this method; but much is taken away (Schoenberg 1984: 223).

On the other hand, the composer stated that: "One has to follow the basic set; but, nevertheless, one composes as freely as before" (Schoenberg 1984: 223). As freely as before in terms of musical expression, but the order was soon "inevitably tempered by practical considerations: they worked on the basis of an interaction between ordered and unordered pitch collections" (Whitall 2008: 24).

Wilhelm Worringer views an abstraction in art as "the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the external world" (Korstvedt 2010: 64). Schoenberg

wrote: "Music is not merely another kind of amusement, but a musical poet's, a musical thinker's representation of musical ideas; these musical ideas must correspond to the laws of human logic; they are a part of what man can apperceive, reason and express" (Schoenberg 1984: 220). The composer was known for saying that there is no way in between when it comes to art. On the other hand, he never made his revolutionary step fully, as Anton Webern did, for example. Breaking with the tonal system, Schoenberg did not retract at the same time from the traditional form, counterpoint, instrumentation, texture, and, most importantly, expression. The same, known material received a new organization. Paradoxically, it was an utopian idea because of its smooth treatment of the rules. Being proud of his method, Schoenberg wanted to connect it backwards not only to his own music, but, in general, to the whole musical German tradition (Covach 2000). A disappointment came, once the "updated" harmonic layer was not able to carry alone the burden of consequences. Schoenberg has finally retracted from the strict dodecaphony and moved toward a more "eclectic" style, combining tonality, atonality and dodecaphony. As Adorno says: "the fulfilment of the wishes takes something away from the substance of the wishes [...]" (Bloch 1989: 1). Still, the utopia island arises not only "if we travel there, but *in that* we travel there" (Bloch, 1989:1). Schoenberg's commented in the following way:

Whether one calls oneself conservative or revolutionary, whether one composes in a conventional or progressive manner [...], whether one is a good composer or not—one must be convinced of the infallibility of one's own fantasy and one must believe in one's own inspiration. Nevertheless, the desire for a conscious control of the new means and forms will arise in every artist's mind; and he will wish to know *consciously* the laws and rules which govern the forms which he has conceived »as in a dream« (Schoenberg 1984: 218).

### Towards a Dystopic Face of Dodecaphony: *Doctor Faustus*

This part illustrates how an utopian idea may be turned into a dystopian one simply by wrong positioning of ideas such as humanism, tradition, and national supremacy. Collaboration of Thomas Mann and Theodor W. Adorno on *Doctor Faustus* brought consequences that were fatal for the composer in this aspect. Schoenberg wrote to Thomas Mann for the first time on 1 November 1930, not knowing him personally yet. He was asking for signing a request for a foundation of Adolf Loos (gravely ill at that time) school (Schoenberg 1965). When Mann's *Doctor Faustus* was published (in

the autumn of 1947), the two artists already knew each other personally. Schoenberg did not get the rumours that the book was connected with himself until 1948. It was Alma Mahler-Werfel who suggested that Schoenberg should take a position against *Doctor Faustus*. Schoenberg confessed in a letter to Josef Rufer:

I didn't read *Doctor Faustus* myself, owing to my nervous eye affliction. But from my wife and also from other quarters I heard that he had attributed my twelve-note method to his hero, without mentioning my name. I drew his attention to the fact that historians might make use of this in order to do me an injustice. After prolonged reluctance he declared himself prepared to insert, in all subsequent copies in all languages, a statement concerning my being the originator of this method. Whether this has been done I don't know (Schoenberg 1984: 255).

Mann has finally written a dedication in the book: "To Arnold Schoenberg, the real owner" (Stuckenschmidt 1977: 494). He also suggested that the protagonist was closer to Nietzsche than Schoenberg. In 1949 a regular article battle was taking place in the newspapers. Finally, in 1950 the quarrel was finished by a reconciling letter by Schoenberg. Not only the invention of dodecaphony by a pact with the devil and mental illness caused Schoenberg's anger, but also the figure of Mann's adviser in musical matter, Adorno, whom the composer knew since the twenties and who was also living in Los Angeles. Their relations were never friendly, rather cold, including battles of words at meetings in houses of common friends (Stuckenschmidt 1977: 495). In *Doctor Faustus* the twelve-tone technique appears as a prediction of totalitarianism. It is not only relating Schoenberg's method to nihilism, but also to retraction from love, emotions and a collapse of German culture, as well as politics. As Leverkühn's, Schoenberg's fate was paralleled by politics, but he found a way to win over it, as he found a way out of his utopian method. In addition, as Malcolm MacDonald notes: "Quite apart from feeling that Mann had encroached on his »intellectual property«, Schoenberg feared an even wider dissemination of the superficial ideas about his music which he had always fought, and one which by its literary context could be used as a weapon against him" (MacDonald 2008: 85).

## Conclusion

Adorno states that: "The older Schoenberg is reliably reported to have said that for the moment there was no discussing harmony. Clearly this was not a prophecy that someday one would again be able to compose with triads, which he by the expansion

of the material had relegated to exhausted special circumstances” (Adorno 2002: 36). Schoenberg’s late words (dating from 1948) reveal a clear denial:

[...] a longing to return to the older style was always vigorous in me; and from time to time I had to yield to that urge. This is how and why I sometimes write tonal music. To me stylistic difference of this nature are not of special importance. I do not know which of my compositions are better; I like them all, because I liked them when I wrote them (Schoenberg 1984: 109).

Adorno predicted that longing, warning that “[...] one need only imagine how easily the equally well-founded longing for the reconstruction of monodic lines could be transformed into the false resurrection of what the enemies of new music miss so painfully as melody” (Adorno 2002: 37). But the real reason for renouncing the strict twelve-tone method was the impossibility to create works distinctive enough (expression-wise), while obeying the rules. Dodecaphony as a technique developed to serialism that went two different ways: making possible the emergence of composers such as Luigi Nono, Olivier Messiaen, Luciano Berio, or Mauricio Kagel and at the same time producing the whole group of purely technical exercises, devoid of humanism.

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*Space Utopia in the 1970s of the Twentieth Century  
on the Basis of the Kobaian World*

ŁUKASZ STEC

## Introduction

Utopia has been depicted in a plethora of works of culture. Thus, its omnipresence creates a considerable incentive to approach the subject from a completely different angle. Endeavouring to put the problem of utopia into wider perspective, this chapter focuses on music and its relation to utopian concepts and notions. Utopias tend to raise the problem of the world improvement. According to Lyman Tower Sargent “most utopias compare life in the present and life in the utopia and point out what is wrong with the way we now live, thus suggesting what needs to be done to improve things” (Sargent 2010: 5).

When it comes to music, there have been plenty of bands approaching utopianism<sup>1</sup>; however, there is only one that stands out among the rest, i.e. Magma, a French group led by Christian Vander, a drummer, who along with other members of the

<sup>1</sup> There is a long list of bands playing different kinds of music which referred to both utopia and dystopia. With regard to rock music, there are well-known albums such as *Animals* by Pink Floyd based on George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and the opus magnum of Roger Waters *The Wall*, *Brave New World* by Iron Maiden based on Aldous Huxley, *666* by Aphrodite's Child which is believed to have been staged in Barcelona and directed by Salvador Dalí. The topic of utopian discourse across media including music, computer games, films, visual arts is thoroughly discussed in the book *(Im)perfection Subverted, reloaded and networked* edited by Barbara Klonowska, Zofia Kolbuszewska and Grzegorz Maziarczyk (Klonowska, Kolbuszewska, Maziarczyk 2015).

band have been playing truly original and pioneering music since 1969. Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to juxtapose space utopia that can be found in music of Magma with the examples from literature. Moreover, the influence of jazz is to be explained to present the origins of space utopianism.

In order to explain the phenomenon of Kobaïan utopia, it is vital to provide a brief outline of the events that took place in May 1968 in France, which triggered the worldwide revolution. At that time people were seething with discontent with both political and social order. There were Trotskyites and Maoists who protested against Charles DeGaulle's government. Furthermore, there was a growing objection to social roles which were imposed on people. Eventually, "one-dimensionality" of life—explicitly defined by Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse 1991: 1-18)—in rapidly developing economy roused deep yearnings for a better world. This revolutionary turmoil and ideological staffage took place in the shadow of the clash of civilizations, i.e. the Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, the Space Race between them, or their efforts to colonise the space.

Utopias from the 1970s are likely to lie somewhere on the horizon and they are neither fully imagined nor fully developed. Tom Moylan, who uses critical method to analyse utopias, explains that:

In generating preconceptual images of human fulfilment that radically break with the prevailing social system, utopian discourse articulates the possibility of other ways of living in the world. The strength of critical utopian expression lies not in the particular social structures it portrays but in the very act of portraying a utopian vision itself (Moylan 1986: 26).

A critical study of "the images of human fulfilment" portrayed in the Kobaïan universe and its intertextual borrowings are thoroughly exemplified in the next parts of the chapter.

## Space is the Place—Romantic Nostalgia and Afro-futurism

Christian Vander, along with Laurent Thibault decided to form a band in 1969. Then, there were other musicians who joined them: Jannick Top, Klaus Blasquiz, Francis Moze, Bernard Paganotti and others (the band was regrouped several times). Their music seems to be similar to progressive rock which was popular in the 1970s. In terms of romanticism in progressive rock, it is often emphasized that lyrics evoke



certain ideas that are entrenched in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the most distinctive feature of the compositions, which merits attention, is the fact that they are all complex and often complemented by melodious harmony due to the Hammond organ and the mellotron, which create an impression that the music comes from mediaeval times.

Admittedly another important feature of progressive rock and romantic nostalgia can be noticed in lyrics that have been used to tell a particular story that turns into an epic one. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, apart from the *signifiant* (signifier) element set in a musical code, there is also the *signifié* (signified) one, articulated in a text (Saussure 2011: 71-79). The latter enables to see various borrowings and inspirations which stimulate the author's works. Following Gerard Genette's idea of palimpsest, it is possible to embrace hypertextuality by way of source texts and peritextuality by analysing album covers (Genette 2014: 7-13). A good example here might be *The Court of the Crimson King*, performed by King Crimson and written by Peter Sinfield, which may be regarded as a madrigal that bears a resemblance to the Prince Prospero's castle from *The Masque of the Red Death* by Edgar Allan Poe. Furthermore, in 1970s music groups recorded conceptual albums focused on certain ideas, for example, *Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd, devoted to a man who is faced with the problems of civilization and the challenges of the modern world. Musicians drew inspiration from philosophy, spirituality, mysticism, and literature.

In respect of Magma, Christian Vander failed to define his music as progressive, but he insisted on calling it celestial rock or zeuhl. He also described it as the "music of the universal might". The innovative character of Magma lies in the fact that it is deeply rooted in jazz and contemporary classical music. *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane left Vander with an overwhelming impression, but soon after the news of Coltrane's death in 1967 his admiration turned into staggering despondency. Vander recalls that he was in Italy then and he found it difficult to pull himself together. He was overusing alcohol and drugs, listening to Coltrane's music at the same time. This was a turning point in his life when he decided to form a band that would pay a tribute to his musical master.

Being under a great influence of Ravi Shankar, Coltrane not only composed music that is not deprived of spirituality but also was able to apply different sound scales and take advantage of Indian rhythm which is repetitive (Porter 1998: 211; Holm-Hudson 2003: 484). Amiri Baraka, known as James LeRoi, in his collection of

essays entitled *Black Music*, which centres on jazz music in the 1960s, writes that Coltrane had “a strong religious will, conscious spiritual will, conscious of the religious evolution the pure mind seeks. The music is a way into God” (LeRoi 1968: 193).

Magma’s compositions, defined in terms of classical music, resemble Igor Stravinsky’s dodecaphony, e.g. *Les Noces*, Carl Orff’s choral compositions such as *Carmina Burana* and *Trionfo di Afrodite*, and finally Béla Bartók’s syncopations (Holm-Hudson 2003). Nonetheless, there is the apparent discrepancy between classical music and jazz, and the attempt to merge them together is a symptom of cultural egalitarianism. As French modernist composers, particularly Erik Satie and Claude Debussy, developed a new approach to music, it was possible to produce egalitarian music, and thus those who were not from the upper class could find chamber music appealing. The artistic work of Magma set a precedent for a genre that crossed the boundaries and became universal in the twentieth century. Indeed, for the 1968 revolution, it would have never occurred and it ought to be seen as a proof of mutual interpenetration of freedom and aesthetics.

Regarding the artistic work of Christian Vander in which he attempts to develop a space utopia, it is important to note that apart from Magma there were other musicians who expressed an intense interest in space motifs long before the Kobaian universe appeared. According to Amiri Baraka, jazz music in the 1960s displayed liberating qualities. The extraterrestrial imaginarium was an example of being an outsider—the one who was bound up with social disidentification, striving to express the spirit of otherness. Space to move was a metaphor for obviating oppression experienced by Afro-Americans at that time. In terms of black music, Amiri Baraka explains:

There are other new musicians, new music, that take freedom as already being. Ornette was a cool breath of open space. Space to move. So freedom already exists. The change is spiritual. The total. The absolutely new. That is the absolute realization. Sun-Ra is spiritually oriented. He understands “the future” as an ever widening comprehension of what space is, even to the “physical” travel between the planets as we do anyway in the long human chain of progress. Sun-Ra’s Arkestra sings in one of his songs, “We travel the spaceways, from planet to planet”. It is science-fact that Sun-Ra is interested in, not science fiction. It is evolution itself, and its fruit. God as evolution (Leroi 1968: 198-199).

John Corbett adds that the phenomenon of this space escapism can be considered as an allegory of searching for an ideal place:

What happens, then, in the case of Ra, Clinton, Perry, is that they build their mythologies on an image of disorientation that becomes a metaphor for social marginalization, an experience familiar to many African Americans though alien to most of the terrestrial, dominant white “center”. Staking their claim on this eccentric margin—a place that simultaneously eludes and frightens the oppressive, centred subjectivity—the three of them reconstitute it as a place of creation. It is a metaphor of being elsewhere, or perhaps of making this elsewhere on your own (Corbett 1994: 18).

Yet, Martin Hegarty and Martin Halliwell coined a term Astro Black Mythology to describe music played by Sun Ra (Herman Poole Blount), who claimed that he had come from Saturn and his music was to bring peace on Earth which was oppressed by colonialism and slavery. His album *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra II* (1966) consists of a map of the solar system which is supplemented with the images of Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, and Nicolaus Copernicus (Hegarty and Halliwell 2011, LeRoi 1968).

Considering space jazz and Magma together, it is possible to find some affinities between them, thus drawing a conclusion that several musicians in the 1960s were eager to create a quasi-utopian universe which was fully developed by Magma in the following decades.

## Literary Inspirations for the Kobaïan Saga

Initially, it is crucial to point out that the albums of Magma, which convey utopian concepts, fail to be chronological. Their debut album, *Kobaïa*, was released in 1970 and soon afterwards, in 1971, it was followed by the next chapter *1001° Centigrades*. Nonetheless, their opus magnum, a trilogy *Theusz Hamtaahk [Time of Hatred]* was being recorded between 1973-1974. It consists of *Köhntarkösz* (1974), *Wurdah İtah* (1974), and *Mekanik Destruktiw Kömmandöh* (1973). Obviously, the trilogy is not chronological in terms of a release date, however, it constitutes the preconceived idea of utopian discourse. In the first five albums representative motifs of utopianism like a long voyage and an arrival at a destination, an attempt to share acquired knowledge and wisdom with common people can be noticed. Moreover, the trilogy itself provides a peculiar story of a prophet who makes efforts to bring salvation to people.

Due to a non-chronological approach, a thorough analysis may encounter particular difficulties. By the same token the artificial language used by Vander to tell a story is quite problematic, owing to the fact that it is a combination of Slavic and Germanic languages and it was invented only to complement the melody—French was not expressive enough, according to Vander.

The music and the lyrics come up at the same time. If I am singing, and if it has to be in Kobaian, they come up in Kobaian. Sometimes here is a word that is maybe French or English and I leave it in because it is there, and it's natural. The lyrics come at the same time, parallel to the music. For pieces like *Mekanik*, they were not written in one shot or one session. I had to run a tape recorder to be able to capture it instantly—it goes very fast. I sing with new words that I don't know, and when I am improvising further, the same words come back, even though I don't know them. But I didn't learn them, they impose themselves on me (Thelen 1995).

Henry Chartier in *La musique du diable. Le rock et ses succès damnés* explains that the Kobaian language appears to be shamanic incantations (Chartier 2010: 646). Apparently, it is close to the phenomenon of glossolalia which occurs with a trance state. Hence, undertaking any research, it is necessary to analyse the official statements made by the band which are also explained in interviews and the album booklets. It is worth mentioning that Vander was reluctant to provide a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the meaning of his music, seeing it as “»steps« or »stairs« that leaves room for imagination”. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to give prominence to the output of utopian concepts being presented in Magma's works, and to try to find their origin in literature.

*Kobaïa*, which was released as a double-LP, tells the story of Earthmen in not so distant future who decide to look for a better place. In order to fulfil their ambitions, they build a spaceship and depart from Earth, hoping to reach the planet Kobaïa—one can easily draw an analogy between the story mentioned above and one of the verses from Sun Ra Arkestra “we travel the Spaceways from planet to planet” (Sun Ra Arkestra, *We Travel the Spaceways*). The album cover depicts the northern hemisphere grabbed in the talons of a bird of prey or an ancient reptile. Among similar block of flats, there are identical silhouettes of people who are raising their arms as though they were crying for help. Whilst on the right side of the hemisphere there is a sacral building similar to the Cathedral of Vasily the Blessed or the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, on the left side there are skyscrapers denoting the East Coast of the USA. On that account one can see a contemporary reference to a political and military tension between the Western and Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. The whole civilization is seemingly descending into utter chaos and decadence. The aim of the band was to create the prophetic vision of doom which can be treated as an allegorical illustration of the 1960s.

The next album follows the story of the Kobaïans' return home. The landing spacecraft is greeted with the procession of Earthmen, who set their hopes on the visitors' arrival. The emissaries are willing to preach the gospel and convince people

on Earth that only by purification they can find elation and contentment. Eventually, the delegates from Kobaïa stand before the rulers of Earth, who feel suspicious of their revelation. The rulers decide to imprison the Kobaïans, who manage to send a message home saying that their lives are in danger. Soon after, the Kobaïans issue an ultimatum to the Earth's rulers, informing that the planet will be destroyed unless the emissaries are released. Ultimately, the Kobaïans are set free but they are made not to come back to Earth anymore.

Taking the first two albums into consideration, it is possible to draw a close analogy between the Vander's story and a utopian novella. We can observe common motifs such as an arrival to a new place or will to share the experience with other people. Regarding extraterrestrial visions of a better place, we can provide many examples of space motifs in literature some of which deserve special attention. In the seventeenth century there were books about faraway lands on Earth, however, there were also publications which described different locations somewhere in space. For example, *Somnium* (1608) by Johannes Kepler tells a story of a young boy who is told by a demon that there is a mysterious land—Levania—located on the Moon. Kepler provides a scientific description of the Earth's satellite, however, Francis Godwin goes further and depicts a space utopia in *The Man on the Moone* (1638). The protagonist, Domingo Gonsalo, is an adventurer who tries to come back to Spain after years of wanderings. Failing in health on his way home, he is forced to stay on the island of Saint Helena. While recovering from a disease, he watches a wild swan which is capable of carrying heavy loads. It inspires him to construct a flying machine that uses the power of swans to rise up. Eventually, the birds carry Domingo higher and higher and he reaches the Moon, where he discovers the state of Lunarians who live in accordance with a Christian model. Initially, he finds it difficult to communicate with them easily since the Lunarians use a different language—similarly to Thomas More, Godwin developed a new language. After some time Gonsalo succeeds in learning it and he familiarises with the Lunarians' way of life. Nevertheless, he gets homesick and decides to leave the Moon and comes back to Earth. Finally, he lands in China, where the rulers treat him suspiciously—vide the emissaries from Magma's album *1001° Centigrades*—as if he were a magus. Owing to his linguistic capabilities, he finds it easy to learn Chinese and gives an account of the Lunarians' state. It is sufficient to convince the rulers to set him free. It is worth mentioning that *L'Autre monde ou les états et empires de la Lune* by Cyrano de Bergerac is parallel with Godin's *The Man on*

*the Moone*. The main character, likewise Domingo Gonsalo, contrives a machine and travels to the Moon, where he observes an ideal society.

Admittedly, it is difficult to state whether Vander had familiarised with the above-mentioned books before he developed his genuine vision of Kobaïa. Nonetheless, the de Bergerac's book grew in popularity in the 1970s in France. Supposedly, Vander might have read it even though he fails to tell anything about his inspirations. There is no doubt that the story of the first two albums is utopian and corresponds to some literary works, particularly the first ones from the science fiction genre.

There is also another theme in Magma's saga that is worth discussing. The trilogy *Theusz Hamthaak*—as has already been mentioned—treats of apocalyptic visions and eschatology. The whole story happens after the emissaries' visit on Earth, when a young adventurer called Köhntarkösz, who is a keen archaeologist, discovers a forgotten tomb of an ancient priest Ęmēhntēhtt-Ré. While exploring the tomb, Köhntarkösz has a vision and he learns about the priest's life. He finds out that Ęmēhntēhtt-Ré had been close to achieve immortality before he was murdered. And on top of that, he becomes acquainted with the prophecy that the Earth would be destroyed by the Ork people. The story is followed by the next album *Mekanik Destrüktiw Kommandöh*, which is believed to be an opus magnum of Magma. Like *deux ex machina*, another figure is introduced who tries to relieve people from chaos. It is Nebehr Gudahtt who makes a prophecy about the Earth's annihilation. In the official material added to the vinyl it is stated that:

This work, written in all humility, is the story of Nebehr Gudahtt, a man who one day tells the Earth people that in order to save themselves from ultimate doom, to purify their minds and so to have access to Ultimate Existence, they must sacrifice their lives on Earth. But this message is far from being understood.

Earthmen, you cursed race!  
 If I have called you here it is only because you deserve it.  
 My divine and on so cerebral conscience compels me to it.  
 You perfidious and coarse deeds greatly displeased me.  
 The penalties which will be inflicted upon you  
 Shall exceed the bounds of Understanding.  
 For you see:  
 In you incommensurable pride and your unfathomable ignorance  
 You have dared with impurity to defy me,  
 to challenge me, to provoke me,  
 and to unleash in all its immensity my frightful and destructive wrath,  
 bringing upon yourself your own inexorable punishment.

Oh inexhaustible Faith,  
 design to rest your Divine Sight  
 on a heart so sensitive and fair.  
 Support this supreme act:  
 Those who in their senseless pride  
 have dared to doubt Eternal Wisdom  
 must be punished.  
 Forces of the Universe  
 mete out your incoercible anger!  
 Infernal Creatures from the endlessness of Time  
 open the Gates Of Darkness so that Light should be no more!  
 Unfurl upon mankind your silent incandescent legions  
 that they may crush the earth, wipe-out the crowds and erase space,  
 and that in this inextinguishable apocalypse  
 ashes should burn for ever,  
 and all the blood of all the universes should mingle with  
 this immeasurable, putrid chaos—your last shroud.  
 And from it, before the Angels of Darkness take it beyond all infinities,  
 a solitary tear will fall;  
 the tear of your remorse and your suffering,  
 a tear so pure and clear,  
 that in it you will see your final destiny—  
 Purification,  
 State Of Grace,  
 Faith and Magnificence  
 Mansuetude  
 (Magma 1973)

The prophet reviles people and calls for betterment of society through self-purification—it might have some inclinations in Christian baptism. People do not want to listen to him and regard him as an impostor. Stunned and stupefied they want to kill Nebehr and all of a sudden one man stops and turns to his fellows to bridle emotions and he says: “I have seen the Angel of Light and he smiled at me. He smiled at me, he smiled at me, the Angel of Light!” (Magma 1973) The people begin to change their minds and the march against Gudahtt turns into the march of gratitude and the will of unification with the Infinite Wisdom. In the official booklet one can read:

The Universe guides them into the Celestial March—the one from which there is no return. And immutable Fate now completes its work.

They do not feel their dying. Angels and seraphim bow to them in respect and for their human perception this is such a strong sensation that they simply faint into space.

The State of Grace is achieved (Magma 1973).

Apart from Infinite Wisdom the people have to put their live into Kreuhn Kohrman's hands.

We recognize Kreuhn Korhmahn as the only and ultimate dispenser of Life, Death and Inspiration, through Space and Time. It is that to which we dedicate our physical and spiritual vessels, and which beyond any values grants to us the knowledge of the Just, and the Beautiful. We recognize the Holy Seal [the Magma logo] as the symbol of Love, Force and Destruction [...]. That Its Invocation brings us the Science of the Music of the Spheres, and carries on us the Fertile Shade of the Holy Prophet; We recognize Kobaia as the only and genuine planet, the others being only its faded reflection and corruption, dedicated to annihilation. It is the Place Of All the Possible ones, the Distant Paradise which we know since the day when we opened our eyes, millions of years ago... (Magma 1973)

The Age of Discoveries gave free rein to the imagination of people who came up with new ideas, regarding unknown lands and marine creatures. Some of them, e.g. Kepler or Godin were absorbed in their thoughts about terrae incognitae of celestial oceans, seeking for a perfect place on the Moon. Science fiction literature expands proportionally to the knowledge about the universe. Each epoch has its own perfect place which reflects contemporary yearnings of people.

Whilst the first two albums are a good example of utopian poetics, considering especially their closeness of the resemblance with seventeenth century literature, the trilogy *Theusz Hamthaak* seems to be bereft of utopian euphoria. The narrative figure of the prophetic visions of annihilation brings to mind some kind of desolation that can be observed in science fiction literature throughout the twentieth century.

Apparently, utopian literature is like a litmus paper which transposes all social tensions, conditions and desires. Hence, there is an opportunity to observe changeable attitudes towards the world—from idealisation to anxiety that was clearly depicted in *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells. Moreover, some authors, for example, Mark Watney, Andy Weir, Arthur C. Clarke, have preoccupied their minds with the problem of colonisation. As the knowledge about the universe evolves, we reach the destination of a galactic empire portrayed in Frank Herbert's *Dune* or Robert A. Heinlein's *Expanded Universe*. Albeit the evolution of science fiction literature is intriguing, we cannot focus too much attention on this problem and it is necessary to look at some books which correspond to the Kobaian saga. Therefore, it is probable that one may find primal texts that could have influenced Kobaian perspective. Consequently, it would be possible to indicate that lyrics and music could be analysed intertextually.



The prophecy described in the trilogy *Theusz Hamthaak* corresponds to the literature treating of an inevitable disaster. In books by H. G. Wells written in 1930s we are able to observe an irreversible decline of urbanized world in which automatization directly leads to consumerism. Furthermore, deindividualization gives rise to a sense of utter emptiness and apathy. According to some researchers, these are common motifs typical of dystopia (Moylan 2000: 111-202, Graaf 1971: 25-26). There is a certain analogy between the Kobaian story and *The Time Machine* (1895) by H. G. Wells. Earthly beings portrayed in *Wurdah İtah* by Magma are similar to the Eloi, who are the heirs to intelligent society—likewise the one from the *Ėmēhntēht-Re's* period. Nevertheless, the Eloi are bound to be destroyed by the Morlocks who are supposed to administer justice to the Eloi who have betrayed their principles. The situation is analogous with the Ork people who are alleged to destroy the Earth.

Another important theme is degradation of culture and humanity leading to the collapse of moral values. Such situation met with harsh criticism from the prophet Nebehr Gudahtt on the M.D.K. album. It brings some connotations with the book *Last and First Men* (1930) by Olaf Stapledon, in which people would improve themselves, reaching a level of the most advanced only if they trust in Cosmic Mind, which is described in detail in another book, *The Star Maker* (1937). It can be associated with the benefits of trusting in Kreuhn Kohrman, "When a man dedicates his will to the will of the Supreme Being and gives him all he has, the Kreuhn Kohrman makes of him more than just a man". Cosmic Mind alike Infinite Wisdom unifies the space, enabling people to achieve a higher level of evolution. The last theme which is described in *Theusz Hamthaak* is the procession led by Gudahtt and it could be connected with *Childhood's End* (1952) by Arthur C. Clarke.

Taking into account the Kobaian universe, we are deluged with various inspirations and borrowings. We can regard the motifs as actants constituting a narrative model which develops semiotic structure of utopian narration. Owing to thorough research, the picture of utopia may be more explicit and coherent.

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# FRONTIERS *of* NOWHERE

VOL. I

The book *More After More. Essays Commemorating the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia* is the first volume of Facta Ficta Research Centre's in Kraków series "Frontiers of Nowhere", published in co-operation with Villa Decius Association as a part of the world-wide research initiative *Utopia 500* to celebrate five hundred years since the publication of sir Thomas More's *De Optimo Reipublicæ Statu Deque Nova Insula Utopia Libellus Vere Aureus, Nec Minus Salutaris Quam Festivus* in 1516.

*The twenty-six essays which compose this collection cover a substantial range of both historical and theoretical themes, indicating at the least that the utopian idea thrives today across a number of disciplines as well as in domains (like computer games) which are themselves of recent origin and which indicate that utopia can also be addressed as an aspect of the internal psychic fantasy world. There is some consideration here of the lengthy and complex historical relationship between utopian ideals and religion. There is some effort to reconsider practical efforts to found actual communities which embody utopian ideals. Several authors revisit the emotional substrata of utopian aspiration rendered accessible through music in particular. Literature is here nonetheless the chief focus, in keeping with the form of Thomas More's original text and that of the tradition which has imitated and satirised it. The themes represented here mirror in literary form the dystopian drift in the external world discussed above. Many of the leading authors of post-totalitarian dystopian fiction are included here, notably (to name but a few) Margaret Atwood, James Graham Ballard, Robert A. Heinlein, David Foster Wallace and, most recently, Michel Houellebecq. Within these treatments, the possibilities are explored that dystopia may emerge from or assume the form of racist regimes, environmental destruction, corporate dictatorship, or religious fundamentalism, or some combination of these factors. Such potential outcomes of modernity need, the authors of this volume also assure us, to be balanced against the utopian promise which bodily remodelling entertains, and the possibility of longevity which scientific and technical advances encapsulate as the epitome of modern individualist utopianism.*

— from an introduction by Gregory Claeys, Royal Holloway University of London



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