

PHILIPP SCHWEIGHAUSER

Who's Afraid of Dystopia? William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Fredric Jameson's Writing on Utopia and Science Fiction

In the ominous year of 1984, William Gibson published an important dystopian assessment of America in the age of information technology.¹ His *Neuromancer* depicts a world so fully permeated by electronic flows of information that the boundaries between empirical reality and its representation have become thoroughly blurred. Gibson's characters live in a world of simulations and commodified subjectivities they fully take for granted. The first sentence of Gibson's cyberpunk novel already registers the complete obliteration of anything we could confidently call nature: "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (9).² That this is not merely a metaphorical description of a gray sky but a representation of a technologically produced "reality" becomes clear when the color of the sky in Freeside, a zero-gravity holiday resort, is described as "the recorded blue of a Cannes sky" that can be "turned off" (148).

Neuromancer's fictional world is a thoroughly dystopian space in which ecocide has already occurred. It is a world in which the "real" sky is a "poisoned silver sky," horses are extinct, and rats grow to the size of small children (13; 112-3). Gibson's characters are fascinated

1 I thank Nicole Nyffenegger, Matt Kimmich, Tom Moylan, and Michael J. Griffin for useful feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

2 Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction (sf) that has affinities with so-called "hard" sf in its focus on technology and, to a lesser degree, science, but it departs from many traditional examples of the genre in its depiction of a *near* and consistently dystopian future. *Neuromancer* is widely regarded as the inaugural work of cyberpunk (McCaffery 11-12).

and repulsed, elevated and diminished by conspiratorial webs of information of a truly global order – an order that is dominated by ruthless multinational corporations and their vast informational grids. Gibson's fictional subjects surgically enhance their bodies with inorganic prostheses or organic implants readily available at black-market clinics. *Neuromancer's* world is, in short, a world of cyborgs in which human memory, knowledge, and actions are enhanced, interfaced with, and sometimes replaced by machines and the simulations they produce.

The sheer "density of information" of Gibson's world triggers near-religious states of consciousness (261). When Case, the novel's protagonist, "jacks in" and projects his consciousness into cyberspace, he experiences a feeling close to mystical union:

Symbols, figures, faces, a blurred, fragmented mandala of visual information.

Please, he prayed, *now*—

A gray disk, the color of Chiba sky.

Now—

Disk beginning to rotate, faster, becoming a sphere of paler gray. Expanding—
And flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach.

And somewhere he was laughing, in a white-painted loft, distant fingers caressing the deck, tears of release streaking his face (68–9).

What we find at the heart of the experience of cyberspace is a merging of the subject's own information-processing systems with those that exist outside its body. In this important passage, mystical rapture is rendered in the double register of sexuality ("*now* [...] *Now* [...] And flowed, flowered for him," "fingers caressing the deck," "tears of release") and religion ("mandala of visual information," "Please, he prayed," "extending to infinity") familiar from descriptions of mystical moments of being. Case experiences his immersion into cyberspace as a communion with the infinite space of a technological other.

At the same time, however, this passage registers the material reality beneath the virtual reality of the matrix.³ The references to a Japanese-American bank and "the spiral arms of military systems" evoke the socioeconomic context of globalization, a context that is crucial to any understanding of Gibson's world of information. Gibson's vision of the near future belies Daniel Bell's assertion that "in the post-industrial society, production and business decisions will be subordinated to, or derive from, other forces in society [...] not only the best talents but eventually the entire complex of prestige and status will be rooted in the intellectual and scientific communities" (344–5).⁴ In *Neuromancer*, Gibson singles out multinational corporations rather than knowledge institutes as the new seats of (global) power and thus identifies more accurately than Bell the dominant socioeconomic actors of the late twentieth century: "Power, in Case's world, meant corporate power. The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers" (242). *Neuromancer* identifies with some accuracy a social trajectory that Frank Webster describes as "the continuation of existing social relations rather than the emergence of a 'post-industrial' society in which 'theory' is decisive" (49).

In its oscillation between mystical rapture and dystopian resignation at the prospect of a world fully organized around the capitalist production, distribution, and exchange of information, *Neuromancer* is an example of what Linda Hutcheon has usefully analyzed as a "paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique," i.e., a postmodernism "that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social

3 This is also true of Gibson's depiction of the cybercity, which corresponds to what Castells has referred to as the "bipolarization" of the "informational city," i.e., the emergence of divided cities like New York or Tokyo – nodal points of the information age in which highly qualified information workers spend their daytime side by side with a steadily growing mass of the underprivileged (*Informational City* 184).

4 Bell's concept of the postindustrial society is problematic, both as a tool of sociological analysis and as a description of the set of concerns raised in Gibson's novel. See Castells for a concise critique of Bell (*Rise* 203–8).

forces of the twentieth-century western world" (11). Gibson's depiction of corporate power structures and acts of violence ensures that Case's fascination with the informational networks of multinational capitalism is never fully transferred to the reader. Case's emotional and cognitive response itself is more accurately described as a mixture of fascination and fear, of transport and entrapment. His response is more properly analyzed as the sense of awe the subject experiences in the presence of the sublime.

Fredric Jameson has asserted that Gibson's work belongs to those "most energetic postmodernist texts" which "afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime" (*Postmodernism* 37). In the postmodern era, he argues, nature has given way to technology as the radically other capable of inspiring awe. Nature, now largely domesticated, is no longer the mighty force that inspires astonishment and terror (as it did for Edmund Burke) or produces – in the case of Immanuel Kant's mathematical sublime – a temporary overwhelming of our faculty of imagination. Today, the new technologies that enable the vast communicational networks of late capitalism are home to the sublime. Yet while Jameson does acknowledge the vitality of Gibson's work, his judgment of its politics of representation is ultimately a negative one. After classifying cyberpunk as "entertainment literature" and dismissing it as "high-tech paranoia," he goes on to state that

conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt – through the figuration of advanced technology – to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system. It is in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that, in my opinion, the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized.

Such narratives, which first tried to find expression through the generic structure of the spy novel, have only recently crystallized in a new type of science fiction (sf), called *cyberpunk*, which is fully as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself: William Gibson's representational innovations, indeed, mark his work as an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production (*Postmodernism* 38).

Jameson's critical judgment of cyberpunk is consonant with his analysis of postmodern art in general and is already formulated in the first footnote of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: "This is the place to regret the absence from this book of a chapter on cyberpunk, henceforth, for many of us, the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419 n.1). Jameson's most recent pronouncements on cyberpunk in his long essay, "The Desire Called Utopia," in *Archaeologies of the Future* reiterate his earlier verdict. With "the free-enterprise, neo-conservative celebrations of present-day cyberpunk," he suggests, the imbrication of literary production in the networks of late capitalist production reaches its apex (132).

At this point, I want to clarify my own take on Jameson's writing on postmodernism. As should have become clear by now, I read Jameson as a detractor of postmodernism, not as one of its proponents. Even though he is genuinely fascinated by the ingenuity and energy of much postmodern art, Jameson ultimately considers its politics baleful. No careful reading of his work can, I believe, reach a fundamentally different conclusion. That this is so should, moreover, already become clear to anyone who has pondered on the implications of the title he, an avowed Marxist, has given his *opus magnum*: *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Having said this, I must admit that I am mystified by attempts to recuperate Jameson as either a neutral observer of the postmodern age and its art or even a (however ambivalent) champion of it.⁵ To be sure, Jameson is ambivalent about aesthetic postmodernism (if not about socioeconomic postmodernity) – although he tends to conflate the two. But he is not ambivalent about the politics of postmodern art. I

5 See Helmling (online) and Bertens (160–84) for overviews of readings of Jameson's stance on postmodernism. In his article, Helmling deems it necessary to warn his readers that "neither [Jameson's] repudiation of modernism, nor his embrace of the postmodern are so simple as many of his more excited readers have wanted to believe" (par. 3 online). To me, Jameson vastly prefers the temporal imagination and depth of modernism to the flat surfaces of postmodernism. I am forced to conclude that I am not Helmling's implied reader.

cannot shake the feeling that “affirmative” readings of Jameson’s writings on postmodernism exemplify a tendency within postmodern culture and theory, analyzed by Jameson and others: the acceleration of processes by which dissent is co-opted and transformed into consent. My own reading of cyberpunk, then, makes use of Jameson as a critic of postmodernism and acknowledges the importance of his critique. It does, however, suggest that one can, and I think should, develop a critical perspective on postmodernism in all of its forms that is *less* dismissive of its politics of representation than Jameson’s.

With respect to *Neuromancer*, I argue that beneath the hip neologisms of Gibson’s work and its obvious fascination with new technologies, the reader can always detect the material reality of multinational corporations that exert enormous power and, in Gibson’s dark vision, do not shrink from using violence to secure their business interests. In *Neuromancer*, the representation of ecological disaster and the surveillance society, paranoia, and conspiracy theory become tools of a cultural critique that can by no means be brushed aside as merely delusional. Paranoia in Gibson is as a strategy of making sense of the increasing complexity of the world. As such, it has an ambivalent political valency. Case’s identification in the above passage of “the spiral arms of military systems” as that which ultimately remains “forever beyond his reach” pinpoints in no uncertain terms “that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions” in terms of which “the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 38).

Gibson’s novel may not provide the “cognitive mapping” Jameson calls for, and some of the more sympathetic commentators have all too hastily identified cognitive mapping as a social function cyberpunk actually serves (see Lohmann). With *Neuromancer*, Gibson does not “achieve a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing [multinational capitalism], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 54). Yet, while Gibson’s fiction does not provide a

blueprint for a passage that would lead us from a sense of overwhelming awe before the technological sublime to political action, neither does it simply “express” late capitalism (no work of fiction does that). Instead, in its peculiar mixture of joy and terror in the face of late capitalism’s informational networks, it stages what Hutcheon describes as “complicitous critique,” a “strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own *complicity* with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine” (4).

Considering that Jameson is a frequent contributor to *Science-Fiction Studies*, the absence of a sustained discussion of cyberpunk in his landmark study on postmodernism is indeed surprising. A possible reason for this absence can, however, be found in “Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?,” the most influential of Jameson’s contributions to the journal and his most succinct statement on the function and meaning of Utopia – which, following Darko Suvin, he considers a “socio-economic sub-genre” of sf (“Desire” xiv). For Jameson, sf enables a historicizing of the present, irrespective of whether its imagined future is utopian or dystopian. Sf thus acquires the capacity to “defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*” (“Progress” 151). In a sense, then, sf is always critical of the status quo even if many of its varieties belong to mass culture. This is not only so because it constructs an alternative future – and thereby transcends the endless repetition of existing societal relations other products of the culture industry “hamme[r] into human beings” – but also because it passes a negative judgment on our own inability to imagine a future that is fundamentally different from our present (Adorno 90). It is in this respect that sf inherits “the true vocation of the utopian narrative,” which is “to confront us with our incapacity to imagine Utopia” (Jameson, “Progress” 156).⁶ This

6 Much critique of Jameson’s work focuses on his assertion – which is at the heart of *Postmodernism* and still informs his discussion of postmodernism in “The Desire Called Utopia” (165–9) – that “late capitalism” is “not only [...] something like a literal translation of the other expression, *postmodernism*, its

summarizes Jameson's basic position on the politics of utopian thinking, a position he has reiterated in many publications including, most recently in "The Politics of Utopia."

In his latest work on Utopia, Jameson modifies this take on the political function of the genre somewhat, arguing that "the Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think of the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things would be like after the break" ("Desire" 232). In the light of recent resurgences in utopian thinking – think of Attac's slogan, "Un autre monde est possible," and the discursive shift on parts of the Left from antiglobalization to alter-globalization (*altermondialisme*) – Jameson de-emphasizes our ideological imprisonment and stresses that utopian thinking invites us to consider both the necessity and the difficulty of imagining and ultimately realizing systemic rupture (*Attac France* online). Jameson here suggests a somewhat more sanguine view of the possibility of radical systemic change in which utopian thinking becomes "a rattling of the bars and an intense spiritual concentration and preparation for another stage which has not yet arrived" (233).

While Jameson is at pains to point out that sf possesses a critical potential "irrespective of the 'pessimism' or 'optimism' of the imaginary future world," his focus on fictional as well as nonfictional imaginations of a future world that is *radically* different (read: better) than our own, betrays a preference for utopias rather than the near-

temporal index seems already to direct attention to changes in the quotidian and on the cultural level as such. To say that my two terms, the *cultural* and the *economic*, thereby collapse back into one another and say the same thing, in an eclipse of the distinction between base and superstructure that has itself often struck people as significantly characteristic of postmodernism in the first place, is also to suggest that the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic" (*Postmodernism* xxi). On challenges to Jameson's conflation of the cultural and the socioeconomic – of postmodernism and postmodernity – see Hutcheon (26); Brooker (26); and Schweighauser (143–8).

future visions of dystopias ("Progress" 153).⁷ This preference is readily apparent in his endorsement of Kim Stanley Robinson's and Ursula K. Le Guin's work. The sense of hope Jameson invests in sf is expressed most succinctly in his contention that, "in the twilight of late capitalism's virtually global hegemony, with all its post-modern complacency, the utopian imagination is very much on the agenda!" ("Critical Agendas" 102).

An important reason for Jameson's aversion to dystopian fiction stems from the antiutopian impulses of many works of the genre, ranging from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to David Fincher's movie *Fight Club* and beyond. This emerges most clearly in Jameson's angry denunciation of dystopian writers such as George Orwell or Fëdor Dostoevskij, whom he labels "enemies of Utopia" who would "sooner or later turn out to be the enemies of socialism" ("Islands" 3). Yet this would not explain his negative stance on cyberpunk. The political valency of *Neuromancer's* dystopian imagination is, in any case, very clearly different from that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which Jameson rejects with such gusto. Gibson does not, as Orwell arguably does, discredit socialist visions of a better future.

However, the politics of dystopian writers are deeply problematic for Jameson even if they do not join the chorus of those who equate utopian totality with totalitarianism – a position that has gained increasing currency, also in poststructuralist circles, since the end of the Cold War (*Seeds* 53; "Desire" 191–9). Dystopias are not necessarily anti-utopias. In fact, in *The Seeds of Time* (a work that was published twelve years after "Progress Versus Utopia"), Jameson argues that utopia and dystopia do not constitute a pair of opposites (an "optimist" and a "pessimist" vision of the future, respectively). While a utopia "does not tell a story at all. [...] it describes a mechanism or even a kind of machine, it furnishes a blueprint" for "the construction of material mechanisms that would alone enable

7 The "secession of the Utopian space itself from the world of empirical or historical reality" is for Jameson one of the defining features of the utopian mode ("Desire" 39).

freedom to come into existence," a dystopia "is generally a narrative [...] what is in the language of science-fiction criticism called a 'near-future' novel" (55-7).⁸

What Jameson finds most troubling about dystopian narratives is that the stories they tell about a bleak near future have, he claims, the effect of hardening us into accepting the harsh realities under late capitalism, thus blocking our utopian imagination. In Jameson's own words, dystopian visions of "pollution, destruction of the ecology, overpopulation, fallout, and the like" serve "American business [...] to exchange the older consumer optimism for some new and more austere acceptance by the public of collective constraints and communal living" ("Introduction/Prospectus" 364). His discussion of cyberpunk literature and film in *The Seeds of Time* suggests the genre's even greater complicity with the late-capitalist restructuring of social relations. Unlike earlier dystopian narratives, cyberpunk invites us not only to accept the current socioeconomic order but to derive pleasure from what Jameson now diagnoses as an empty, lawless social space emerging out of the displacement of civil society – here conceptualized as the space between bourgeois privacy and state rule – by the hegemonic sway of corporate logic: "such conceptions of the no-man's-land are not altogether to be taken as nightmares; they do not [...] have any of the bleak otherness of the classical dystopian fantasy, and the very freedom from state terror lends the violence of

8 Note that Jameson in "Desire" shifts emphasis most decisively from Utopia as the figuration of a better future to Utopia as a self-reflexive meditation on the difficulty of imagining radical political change. He goes as far as suggesting that the "vacuous evocation" of the utopian wish "as the image of a perfect society or even the blueprint of a better one are best set aside from the outset without any further comment" (72). In his earlier work, both views are still allowed to co-exist side by side. To be fair, his shifting positions are due less to any argumentative inconsistency on his part than to changes in the genre itself. He suggests as much when he writes that "the older texts seemed indeed to offer blueprints for change" while now, with works such as Robinson's Mars trilogy, "arguments about the nature and desirability of Utopia as such [...] move to the center of attention" (216). For further discussion of the distinction between dystopianism and antiutopianism, see also Fitting ("Impulse").

the no-man's-land the value of a distinctive kind of praxis, excitement rather than fear – the space of adventure that replaces the old medieval landscape of romance with a fully built and posturban infinite space, where corporate property has somehow abolished the older individual private property without becoming public" (159). It is in line with this reconsideration of cyberpunk as excitement that Jameson in "The Desire Called Utopia" toys with the idea that the genre might actually be less dystopian than "something like the Utopian expression of late or finance capital as such" (190).

This takes me back to my discussion of *Neuromancer*, a close reading of which will highlight some of the limits of Jameson's writing on Utopia and sf. Jameson's assertion that cyberpunk evokes an atmosphere of "excitement rather than fear" certainly captures something of Case's exhilaration in the face of the multiple challenges he faces in the networks of technology and power, and it surely also helps explain the genre's appeal to a predominantly male young-adult readership. Yet, while Case's acts of aggression are sanctioned as those of a lone adventurer, about which more needs to be said below, the systemic violence perpetrated against Case and other characters never is. As readers, we are asked to identify with Case but not with the radically debased world in which he moves. That world exhibits much of the bleakness Jameson does not find in it. Its pathologies include the death of nature, urban poverty and decay, snuff porn, corporate violence, schizophrenia (Armitage), inhuman viciousness bordering on the psychotic (Riviera), and a general disregard for human life. These and other social and psychological pathologies are neither recuperated nor neutralized by the excitement the adventure story format generates, and Gibson's fictional take on our possible near future continues to oscillate between fascination and repulsion.

If utopian sf betrays our own inability to imagine a world better than our own, Jameson's writing on sf betrays an inability on his part to perceive the critical potential of visions of a future worse than our own. The limits of some forms of Marxist critique of cyberpunk are also demonstrated by the work of Tom Moylan, one of the more influential commentators on recent dystopian sf. In his article on Gibson's trilogy, Moylan focuses almost exclusively on the novels' utopian enclaves, in which he locates all "possibility of historical

change" and "resistance to the dominant forces" ("Global" 186-7). Unable to find viable alternative models of living that are affirmed in Gibson's trilogy, Moylan concludes that "Gibson's texts begin to lose their critical edge as the utopian enclaves (as developed in the iconic register of the alternative world) fall under the compromising influence of the primary plot and protagonist (as developed in the register of the 'master narrative' running through all three volumes)" (189). In its straightforwardness, Moylan's argument crystallizes some of the problems that also beset Jameson's writing on dystopian fiction. Subsequently, in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, he has proposed the term "critical dystopia" for those contemporary dystopian narratives that present and affirm utopian spaces against the background of a radically darkened world. While I find "critical dystopia," as does Jameson, a highly useful term, it does not allow for an appreciation of the critical potential of the dystopian itself as a cognitive mode since it locates the possibility of cultural critique exclusively in the utopian vision of dystopian narratives. Bearing in mind Jameson's categorical distinction between utopia and dystopia in *The Seeds of Time*, we may well ask whether Marxist critics are not demanding too much from dystopian narratives when they approach them with expectations regularly raised and met by classical utopian but not by classical dystopian texts.

This question, it seems to me, needs to be answered in the affirmative not only for Jameson's work but also with respect to many of the re-evaluations of the dystopian mode collected in Raffaella Baccolini and Moylan's important *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Let me give but two examples. Phillip Wegner's reading of *Fight Club* and *Ghost Dog* as dystopian films that exhibit close affinities with cyberpunk does acknowledge their "brilliant critique" of outmoded but still active notions of masculinity only to conclude that "in the end, both films pass beyond the engagements of the critical dystopia and give way to the 'resigned pessimism' of the naturalist ideologies from which the form arises in

the first place" (182).⁹ Peter Fitting's contribution to *Dark Horizons* even raises the stakes: to him, only those dystopias deserve to be called "critical" which offer "an explanation of how the dystopian situation came about as much as what should be done about it" ("Unmasking" 156).

Against such tendencies in recent sf criticism, I argue that dystopian extrapolations of a nightmarish future from our present age of multinational capitalism may constitute critiques of the status quo even if they do not hold out the promise of a radically different world. Cultural critique need not be affirmative to achieve its aims. True to Jameson's assertion that sf's visions of the future have the effect of "transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" and contrary to his claim that postmodernism has lost all sense of history, I maintain that dystopian writing such as Gibson's *Neuromancer* stages a cultural critique by historicizing the present state of the world as an undesirable condition with an even less desirable future ("Progress" 151-2).¹⁰ Gibson's critique is inscribed precisely in the bleakness of his vision.

Yet Gibson's novel does bear heavy ideological burdens. Gibson freely draws on the conventions of established narrative genres without giving much thought to some of their less sanguine implications. As Tom Myers points out, Case's name already links him with the detective genre (888). A number of other important postmodernist texts – including Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Thomas

9 I should add here that I find *Ghost Dog* a far less obvious candidate for a discussion of dystopian film than *Fight Club*.

10 It is also in this sense, not merely in its depiction of a *near* future, that Gibson's fiction belongs to extrapolative sf. The utopias Jameson privileges largely belong to speculative sf. As Brian McHale points out with recourse to Carl D. Malmgren's distinction between extrapolative and speculative sf, "extrapolative sf begins with the current state of the empirical world, in particular the current state of scientific knowledge, and proceeds, in logical and linear fashion, to construct a world which might be a future extension or consequence of the current state of affairs. Speculative world-building, by contrast, involves an imaginative leap, positing one or more disjunctions with the empirical world which cannot be linearly extrapolated from the current state of affairs" (244).

Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* equally develop a detective plot. Yet what distinguishes Gibson's use of generic conventions from that of his fellow postmodernists most sharply is its utter lack of parodic inflection. And it is primarily this lack which renders Gibson's return to traditional narrative forms problematic.

Case's coolness, his obstinacy, substance abuse and less than legal methods make him a cyberspace version of the hard-boiled detective.¹¹ Andrew Ross has characterized Gibson's fiction as "hard-boiled masculinity, second time around," and feminist critics have rightly criticized cyberpunk's masculinist bias (Ross 156; Hollinger 31). What I consider the most troublesome aspect of Gibson's writing, though, concerns yet another trait it shares with hard-boiled detective fiction. When George Grella notes that the American detective novel is "energized by the self-reliance of the frontier" and "customarily establishes its moral norm within the consciousness of an individual man," he might as well describe Case's narrative function within *Neuromancer* (104). In his excellent discussion of Gibson's novel, David Brande suggests that its frequent references to westward expansion and frontiers, its designation of hackers as "console cowboys," and its evocation of the matrix as a space "extending to infinity" are manifestations of late capitalism's political unconscious (*Neuromancer* 52). Gibson's cyberspace stages a crucial ideological fantasy of the late-capitalist system: the possibility of a limitless space into which capital can expand to escape its own inherent contradiction of overaccumulation. So far, Brande's analysis, published in the same year as *The Seeds of Time*, is rather close to Jameson's reflections on

11 Grella's description of some of the characteristics of hard-boiled detective fiction reads like an account of *Neuromancer*'s style and thematics: "The American detective novel, paradoxically, combines its romance themes and structures with a tough, realistic surface and a highly sensational content" and is "characterized by rapid action, colloquial language, emotional impact, and the violence that pervades American fiction" (104).

cyberpunk's "posturban infinite space." Yet Brande adds that Gibson's fiction should not be read as a mimetic reflection of socioeconomic realities but as a staging of both the fantasies and the contradictions of late capitalism:

Gibson's fiction, on one hand, helps to structure real capitalist social relations by providing constitutive fantasies of the final subsumption of all symbolic exchange, and the subject itself, into the money form of value: cyberspace as the answer to crises of overaccumulation [...] On the other hand, as an ideological dream, his fiction announces the lack that mobilizes these fantasies: the insatiable hunger of the market and its systemic and inevitable tendency toward crisis – the internal contradictions of capitalism (536).

I fully concur with Brande's reading, but I would add that the contradictions of capitalism emerge most fully in the dystopian vision of Gibson's novel. It is the dystopianism so many Marxist critics, including Jameson, are uncomfortable with which ensures that Gibson's critique does not disappear beneath his novel's ideological burdens, its conventional narrative strategies, its gadget-crammed surface, and its obvious enchantment with the hum and glitter of the new technologies of information. Whether Gibson intended this or not, *Neuromancer* issues a warning: "if you continue in your ways, your future will look like *this*." It is, finally, the bleakness of Gibson's vision that allows him to continue the work of cultural critique despite his realization that, in the postmodern era, positions *wholly* outside the prevalent discourses and material structures are no longer available – if, indeed, they ever were.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. J.M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, 1991. 85-92.
- Attac France. 2006. Attac France. 25 August 2006
<<http://www.france.attac.org/>>.

- Baccolini, Raffaella and Tom Moylan (eds). *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Bell, Daniel. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
- Bertens, Hans. *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Brande, David. "The Business of Cyberpunk: Symbolic Economy and Ideology in William Gibson." *Configurations* 2.3 (1994): 509-36.
- Brooker, Peter. "Introduction: Reconstructions." *Modernism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Peter Brooker. Harlow: Longman, 1992. 1-33.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban-Regional Process*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- _____. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Fitting, Peter. "Impulse or Genre or Neither?" Rev. of *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* by M. Keith Booker, and *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* by M. Keith Booker. *Science-Fiction Studies* 22.2 (1995): 272-81.
- _____. "Unmasking the Real? Critique and Utopia in Recent SF Films." *Dark Horizons*. Ed. Baccolini and Moylan. 155-66.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. London: Harper Collins, 1984.
- Grella, George. "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel." *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Robin W. Winks. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980. 103-20.
- Helmling, Steven. "Failure and the Sublime: Fredric Jameson's Writing in the '80s." *Postmodern Culture* 10.3 (2000): 35 pars. 25 August 2006 <<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.500/10.3helmling.txt>>.
- Hollinger, Veronica. "Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism." *Mosaic* 23.2 (1990): 29-44.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Critical Agendas." Rev. of *Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction* (Ed. George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabin), *Storm Warnings: Science Fiction Confronts the Future* (Ed. George E. Slusser, Colin Greenland and Eric S. Rabin), and *Utopie per gli anni Ottanta: Studi interdisciplinari sui temi, la storia, i progetti* (Ed. Giuseppa Saccaro del Buffa and Arthur O. Lewis). *Science-Fiction Studies* 17.1 (1990): 93-102.

- _____. "The Desire Called Utopia." *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005. 1-233.
- _____. "Introduction/Prospectus: To Reconsider the Relationship of Marxism to Utopian Thought." *The Jameson Reader*. Ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. 361-7.
- _____. "Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse." *Diacritics* 7.2 (1977): 2-21.
- _____. "The Politics of Utopia." *New Left Review* 25.2 (2004): 35-54.
- _____. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- _____. "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science-Fiction Studies* 9.2 (1982): 147-58.
- _____. *The Seeds of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Lohmann, Ingrid. "Cognitive Mapping in Cyberpunk: Wie Jugendliche Wissen über die Welt erwerben." *Out of this World! Beiträgen zu Science-Fiction, Politik und Utopie*. Ed. Petra Mayerhofer and Christoph Spehr. Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 2002. 171-84.
- McCaffery, Larry. "Introduction: The Desert of the Real." *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*. Ed. McCaffery. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. 1-16.
- McHale, Brian. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Moylan, Tom. "Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy." *minnesota review* 43/44 (1995): 182-97.
- _____. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview, 2000.
- Myers, Tony. "The Postmodern Imaginary in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 47.4 (2001): 887-909.
- Ross, Andrew. *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Schweighauser, Philipp. *The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006.
- Suvin, Darko. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre." *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Mark Rose. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976. 57-71.
- Webster, Frank. *Theories of the Information Society*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

- Wegner, Phillip E. "Where the Prospective Horizon Is Omitted: Naturalism and Dystopia in *Fight Club* and *Ghost Dog*." *Dark Horizons*. Ed. Baccolini and Moylan. 167-85.
- Williams, Raymond. "Utopia and Science Fiction." *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*. Ed. Patrick Parrinder. New York: Longman, 1979. 52-66.

PAULA MURPHY

Paradise Lost: The Destruction of Utopia in *The Beach*

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world [...],
Sing heavenly muse.
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

In his introduction to *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch states that "thinking means venturing beyond. [...] Real venturing beyond knows and activates the tendency which is inherent in history and which proceeds dialectically. Primarily, everyone lives in the future, because they strive, past things only come later, and as yet genuine present is almost never there at all" (4). This impetus to seek out a better future is the driving force behind any utopia, whether ancient or modern; but it is also a feature of the theories of two prominent poststructuralists, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. On the surface, the incorporation of these writers into a discussion on Utopia may appear problematic, as Lacan has often been described as nihilistic and dystopian. Equally, Derrida's relentless deconstruction of signification and his critique of its inherent hierarchies seem to leave little room for a utopia of any sort. However, like Bloch, Derrida argues that humanity is unavoidably directed towards the future: "this question *arrives*, if it arrives, it questions with regard to what will come in the future-to-come. Turned toward the future, going toward it, it also comes from it, proceeds from [*provident de*] the future" (xix). In this extract from *Specters of Marx*, Derrida is referring to the question of justice in the political realm, suggesting like Bloch, that the desire for positive change must be situated in the future. Lacan too, in his writings on psychoanalysis, encompasses the future orientation of personal and

theory, especially psychoanalysis, deconstruction and postmodernism, and contemporary Irish studies. She is the editor of the forthcoming *New Voices in Irish Criticism*, and is currently writing a book on Irish drama. She is an associate editor of *The Irish Book Review* and *Kritikos: Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text and Image*.

CAITRÍONA NÍ DHÚILL is a researcher at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography, Vienna, where her research areas include the history of biography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal. She has held lectureships at the universities of Durham and St. Andrews.

EUGENE O'BRIEN is Senior lecturer, Head of the English Department and director of the Mary Immaculate College Irish Studies Centre in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. He has published five books to date on critical theory and Irish Studies. He is editor of the *Contemporary Irish Writers and Filmmakers* series, of *Studies in Irish Literature* and *Irish Studies* series, and of the *Irish Book Review*.

AIDAN O'MALLEY graduated from the European University Institute, Florence in 2004 with a PhD on the Field Day Theatre Company. Since then, he has worked at the Humanities Institute of Ireland at University College Dublin, where he has been preparing a monograph on the Field Day enterprise.

PHILIPP SCHWEIGHAUSER is currently teaching at the University of Berne. He is the author of *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics*. He has also published articles on Nabokov, DeLillo, American realism, French philosopher Michel Serres, literary soundscapes from realism to postmodernism, the poetry of Ruth Benedict, and masculinities. He co-edited (with Paula Bernat Bennett and Karen Kilcup) *Options for Teaching Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*.

GERALDINE SHERIDAN is Associate Professor of French at the University of Limerick. She has published widely on aspects of eighteenth-century culture and the history of ideas, including a

monograph on *Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy and the Literary Underworld of the Ancien Régime*. She developed an interest in the history of women in the trades when researching an article on "Women in the book trade in eighteenth-century France" for *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, and is currently completing the manuscript of a book on visual images of women and work in the eighteenth century.

DAN SMITH is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art Theory at Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London. He is a regular contributor to *Art Monthly* magazine, and has published critical and historical writing on art and material culture in *New Statesman*, *Parachute* and *Things*. At the time of writing, he is engaged in the final stages of a PhD thesis on H.G. Wells and Material Culture at the Slade School of Art, University College London.

DARA WALDRON is Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Critical and Contextual Studies at the Limerick School of Fine Art and Design. His doctoral research concerned the problem of evil in different yet related genres of international film and his published work has dealt with ethical and aesthetic concerns in the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Liliana Cavani and Andrei Tarkovsky.

BARRIE WHARTON was awarded his PhD at the University of Limerick in 1997 for work on Islam and Europe. He has lectured and published throughout Europe, North America, and the Islamic World. He lectures at the University of Limerick and he is currently on leave as a Senior Research Fellow at New Zealand's National Centre for Research on Europe at the University of Canterbury.

CHRISTOPHER YORKE is currently based in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tokyo as a visiting research student, and is a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow. Previous areas in which he has published include ethical and political philosophy.

EXPLORING THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE

ESSAYS ON UTOPIAN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

Exploring the Utopian Impulse presents a series of essays by an international and trans-disciplinary group of contributors that explores the nature and extent of the utopian impulse. Working across a range of historical periods and cultures, the essays investigate key aspects of utopian theory, texts, and socio-political practices. Even as some critique Utopia, others extend its reach beyond the limits of the modern western tradition within which utopianism has usually been understood. The explorations offered herein will take readers over familiar ground in new ways as well as carry them into new territories of hope and engagement.

"As the second volume in the Ralahine Utopian Studies series, this volume is notable for the quality of the individual essays and for its clear and useful organization (into theory, texts, and politics). The essays will be useful to both established and new scholars for research as well as teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. What particularly impresses me is the set of theoretical interventions with which the volume begins. These opening essays take off from the ground-breaking work of Darko Suvin, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Fredric Jameson and break out into new and challenging directions. The overall effect of this volume is to demonstrate in all its pages how vital utopian thinking has become in our contemporary, fragmented, disintegrating world."

Professor Toby Widdicombe, Department of English, University of Alaska, Editor, *Utopian Studies*

"This timely book broadens our view of the central issues in utopian studies today. By discussing the transformative energy of Utopia from a threefold perspective – theory, texts, and politics – it sets out to prove the validity and the growing importance of this field of study and of utopian thought and practice itself. Carefully edited, the book gathers essays which interact in a multidisciplinary dialogue. Drawing on a wide range of critical resources, it offers new and important insights into known and unexplored territories. *Exploring the Utopian Impulse* is destined to become a standard reference for all those interested in rethinking the utopian impulse."

Professor Fátima Vieira, Department of Anglo-American Studies, University of Porto, Chair, Utopian Studies Society (Europe)

Michael J. Griffin (Lecturer in English Studies, University of Limerick) has published several articles on eighteenth-century, utopian, and Irish studies, in journals such as the *Review of English Studies*, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, *the Field Day Review*, and *Utopian Studies*.

Tom Moylan (Glucksman Professor and Director, Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies, University of Limerick) has published *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*; *Scraps of the Unlainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*; *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*; and *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* (with Raffaella Baccolini).

ISBN 978-3-03910-913-5

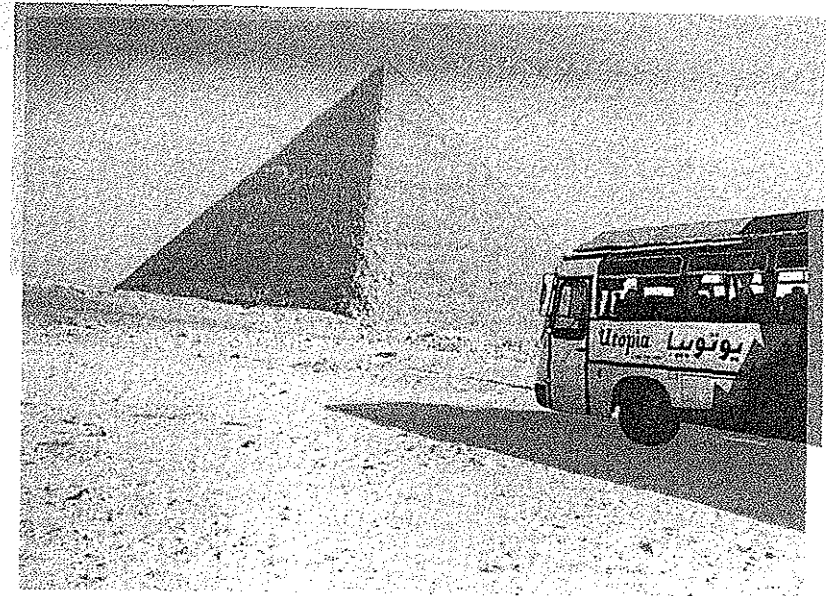


9 783039 109135

EXPLORING THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE Edited by GRIFFIN and MOYLAN

EXPLORING THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE

ESSAYS ON UTOPIAN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE



Edited by
MICHAEL J. GRIFFIN
and
TOM MOYLAN

Ralahine Utopian Studies

Series editors:

Raffaella Baccolini (University of Bologna, at Forlì)

Joachim Fischer (University of Limerick)

Tom Moylan (University of Limerick)

Managing editor:

Michael J. Griffin (University of Limerick)

Volume 2



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

Edited by Michael J. Griffin and Tom Moylan

EXPLORING THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE

ESSAYS ON UTOPIAN
THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

2007



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

MATTHEW BEAUMONT The Party of Utopia: Utopian Fiction and the Politics of Readership, 1880-1900	163
DAN SMITH H.G. Wells's First Utopia: Materiality and Portent	183
MICHAEL G. KELLY Immanence and the Utopian Impulse: On Philippe Jaccottet's Readings of <i>Æ</i> and Robert Musil	207
PHILIP SCHWEIGHAUSER Who's Afraid of Dystopia? William Gibson's <i>Neuromancer</i> and Fredric Jameson's Writing on Utopia and Science Fiction	225
PAULA MURPHY Paradise Lost: The Destruction of Utopia in <i>The Beach</i>	243
MICHAEL J. GRIFFIN AND DARA WALDRON Across Time and Space: The Utopian Impulses of Andrei Tarkovsky's <i>Stalker</i>	257
CAITRÍONA NÍ DHÚILL "One loves the girl for what she is, and the boy for what he promises to be": Gender Discourse in Ernst Bloch's <i>Das Prinzip Hoffnung</i>	273
AIDAN O'MALLEY Rhyming Hope and History in the "Fifth Province"	293
<i>Utopian Politics</i>	
TIMOTHY KEANE The Chartist Land Plan: An English Dream, an Irish Nightmare	313

LUCIAN M. ASHWORTH The League of Nations as a Utopian Project: The Labour Party Advisory Committee on International Questions and the Search for a New World Order	335
JENNY ANDERSSON Beyond Utopia? The Knowledge Society and the Third Way	357
ANDREW J. BROWN Witchcrafting Selves: Remaking Person and Community in a Neo-Pagan Utopian Scene	375
BARRIE WHARTON From Shukri Mustafa to the <i>Ashwaiyat</i> : Utopianism in Egyptian Islamism	397
Notes on Contributors	417
Index	423