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SANTA CRUZ

**AFTER THE 'POST-SIXTIES':  
A CULTURAL HISTORY OF UTOPIA IN THE UNITED STATES**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

**Madeline Lane**

March 2016

The Dissertation of Madeline Lane is  
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# Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	iv
Abstract .....	v
Acknowledgments and Dedication .....	vi
<i>Introduction</i> : Toward a Theory of Utopia at the End of the Post-60s .....	1
Part One: Periodizing Anti-Utopianism .....	26
<i>Chapter One</i> : Failed Utopia and the Post-60s in Boyle’s <i>Drop City</i> .....	31
<i>Chapter Two</i> : “There is no use pretending, now”: Reading Le Guin’s 1970s Critical Utopias Against Anti-Utopianism .....	57
<i>Chapter Three</i> : Finding Utopia in the Dystopian Turn: Punk Literary Utopias in the Long 1980s .....	81
Part Two: Of Utopia and Recuperation: The Cultural and Spatial Imagination of the American Tech Industry .....	130
<i>Chapter Four</i> : “We Owe It All to the Hippies”: Undoing the Post-60s in the Techno-Utopian 1990s .....	136
<i>Chapter Five</i> : False Utopias of Silicon Valley .....	179
Part Three: Utopia as the Idea of Post-Capitalism .....	213
<i>Chapter Six</i> : The End of Capitalism in ‘Post-Occupy’ Dystopian Films ..	220
<i>Chapter Seven</i> : Notes on the Spatial Imagination of Contemporary Struggles .....	261
Conclusion: ‘Utopia’ After Occupy .....	289
Bibliography.....	304

## List of Figures

Figure 1 – Sex Pistols .....	90
Figure 2 – Mad Men 1 .....	131
Figure 3 – Mad Men 2 .....	134
Figure 4 – Floating City Plan .....	184
Figure 5 – Googleplex 1 .....	192
Figure 6 – Googleplex 2 .....	194
Figure 7 – Googleplex 3 .....	198
Figure 8 – Google Bus .....	210
Figure 9 – Dawn of the Planet of the Apes .....	224
Figure 10 – Cosmopolis .....	226
Figure 11 – The Dark Knight 1 .....	231
Figure 12 – The Dark Knight 2 .....	232
Figure 13 – The Dark Knight 3 .....	238
Figure 14 – Snowpiercer 1 .....	244
Figure 15 – Snowpiercer 2 .....	248
Figure 16 – Mad Max: Fury Road 1 .....	250
Figure 17 – Mad Max: Fury Road 2 .....	251
Figure 18 – Mad Max: Fury Road 3 .....	254
Figure 19 – The Road .....	258
Figure 20 – Oakland Commune 1 .....	292
Figure 21 – Oakland Commune 2 .....	297

**Abstract: *After the 'Post-Sixties': A Cultural History in Utopia*, Madeline Lane**

*After the 'Post-Sixties': A Cultural History of Utopia in the United States* is an historical inquiry into the cultures of utopian thought and practice. Consisting of three multi-chapter sections, this cultural history unfolds as an account of utopian, anti-utopian, and dystopian imagination through different periodizations. Each section attempts to extend Fredric Jameson's 1984 essay "Periodizing the 60s" to a history of the present period, developing a historical framework for understanding the politics of utopia. The last section deals with utopia and dystopia as cultural tendencies in the historical imagination of the 2007-2008 financial crisis and the global explosion of social movements and uprisings that extended from the Movement of Squares in the North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of the Mediterranean, to the Occupy Wall Street encampments in the United States. The first section builds toward this account of the contemporary period, through a series of analyses of literature, film, subcultures, music, architectures, and historical phenomena that engage with communalist, feminist, punk, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist articulations of 'utopia.' The second section examines the recuperation of countercultural utopianism in post-1960s history of tech corporations and creative industries in the United States. In constructing a periodization of the *end* of the post-sixties, this cultural history considers various shifts and mutations in the political imaginary of neoliberalism, and takes up utopia as an epistemological problematic of contemporary global capitalism. The project concludes tentatively and with futurity, insisting on the correspondence between utopian imagination, historical experience, and revolutionary possibility.

“NO ONE WAY WORKS, it will take all of us  
shoving at the thing from all sides  
to bring it down.” – Diane DiPrima, Revolutionary Letter #8

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*For Tuli Zinnia & Chitty*

## Introduction

### Toward a Theory of Utopia at the End of the Post-60s

“Sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures accessible to most of us, render much of our imagination inert. We are constantly putting out fires, responding to emergencies, finding temporary refuge, all of which make it difficult to see anything other than the present. . . . When movements have been unable to clear the clouds, it has been the poets – no matter the medium – who have succeeded in imagining the color of the sky, in rendering the kinds of dreams and futures social movements are capable of producing. Knowing the color of the sky is far more important than counting the clouds.” – Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

“The purpose of a thought-experiment [is] not to predict the future. . . . but to describe reality, the present world.” – Ursula K. Le Guin, introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*

The following work draws out a history of ‘utopia,’ as a critical dimension to the cultural imagination since the end of the 1960s. According to a certain periodization of political foreclosure and neoliberal capitalism, the end of the 1960s marks a juncture of waning utopian imagination – an outmoding of utopia that maps onto the end of grand narratives pronounced by Jean-Francois Lyotard as the conditions of postmodernity. The “end of the 60s,” as Fredric Jameson suggests at the height of this foreclosure in 1986, “will be characterized by an effort, on a world scale, to proletarianize all those unbound social forces which gave the 60s their energy, by an extension of class struggle [into] the farthest reaches of the globe,” in addition to “the most minute configurations of local institutions (such as the university system).” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 208) It is through such a critique of the ‘post-60s’ paradigm that the outmoding of utopia may be reassessed and historicized



in terms of the cultural recuperation of the 1960s. However, the political stakes of this periodization have changed in recent years – more specifically, it seems possible to articulate a history of utopia positioned after this ‘end of the 60s.’

The cultural moment of this end of the post-60s – for which the encampments of Occupy Wall Street in 2011 are only a fleeting interlude – represents a shift in utopian imagination stimulated by a juncture of economic crisis and global recession. This is the *long 2011*, stretching from the brink of financial crisis in late 2007 to the insurrections that continue to proliferate on a global scale, in various mutations. In the United States, 2012 was dominated by political confusion and melancholia within radical milieu, as ‘Occupy Wall Street’ became even more clearly what it had always been: a product of social media activism, without a developed enough spatio-temporal imagination to exceed its digital platform. However, in late 2014 and early 2015, another resurgence of anti-capitalist energies emerged with the Ferguson riots and the Black Lives Matter movement. To establish genealogies for these various social movements is a matter for another project. Instead, I want to take up these phenomena in terms of a cultural moment – delineating a set of historical ruptures and transformations in the utopian imagination, from the recuperation and depoliticization of the post-60s paradigm.

“Utopia,” Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “is contemporary with history, and is, at bottom its first effect.” (Nancy 5) As a “historical concept,” utopia refers to “projects for social change that are considered impossible,” according to Marcuse, “In the usual discussion of utopia the impossibility of realizing the project of the new society exists

when the subjective and objective factors of a given social situation stand in the way of the transformation.” (Marcuse, “The End of Utopia”) In this sense, utopia “simultaneously represents the fulfilled signification and this fulfillment as an outside of history, which, nevertheless, also presents itself as the extreme edge and as the subsumption of a historical process,” as Nancy argues, such that utopia can be understood as the “tearing of history and historical meaning,” at once capturing “its glorification, its mobilization, and its paralysis or discredit.” (ibid)

As a historical concept, utopia has been critiqued on the basis of blueprintism – what Marx described as recipes for the “cook-shops of the future.” (Marx, “1873 Afterword” 99) Utopia is often reduced to programmatism – a spatial design for social stasis. Utopianism, by extension, is naïve, uncritical, positivist. “The essential function of utopia,” as Ernst Bloch insists, “is a critique of what is present.” (Bloch and Adorno 8) In Bloch’s formulation, the utopian is “not something like nonsense or absolute fancy,” but rather “it is not *yet* in the sense of a possibility; *that* it could be there if we could only do something for it.” (3) It is in this sense that Bloch argues against the “banalization” of utopia, as a historical tendency not distinct to the post-WWII context, but structural to the function of utopia as a category of the imagination. In treating ‘utopia’ as a mode of critical negation, Theodor Adorno provides a theoretical basis by which to historicize “the utopian consciousness”:

Whatever utopia is, whatever can be imagined as utopia, this is the transformation of the totality... what people have lost subjectively in regard to consciousness is very simply the capability to imagine the totality as something that could be different. Not only could they live without hunger and probably without anxiety, but they could also live as free human beings. At the same time, the social apparatus has

hardened itself against people, and thus, whatever appears before their eyes all over the world as attainable possibility, as the evident possibility of fulfillment, presents itself to them as radically impossible. (3-4)

This conception of utopian consciousness can be elaborated as an ideological critique of historical conditions of possibility and impossibility. By extension, 'utopia' offers a mode of historicization, to the extent that, as Adorno suggests, "there is no single category by which utopia allows itself to be named." (8) Engaging utopia as a means of historicizing "the capability to imagine the totality as something that could be different," this category can be recovered from the banalization of anti-capitalist imagination – instead elaborated as a mode of critique and negation.

In a lecture in July 1967, Marcuse remarks that at this juncture, "we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so." (Marcuse) However, as he suggests, "we also have the capacity to turn it into the opposite of hell," which would entail "the end of utopia, that is, the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities." As Robert Tally suggests, Marcuse's "end of utopia" is a "dialectical double-entendre in acknowledging an 'end of utopia,' then, we see the only 'utopia' that has really come to its end is the one defined exclusively as an impossibility in the first place." (Tally 19) By the 'end of utopia,' in other words, Marcuse critiques the logics of anti-utopia as structural to the history of capitalism, rather than historically distinct to an era of intensified apocalypticism. These are precisely the historical conditions for utopian thought in the post-60s paradigm, presupposing a "break with the historical continuum," in the sense that, as Marcuse elaborates, utopias

“presuppose the qualitative difference between a free society and societies that are still unfree.” The waning of utopia in the post-60s must be thought alongside these conditions – and historicized in terms of the political and ideological foreclosure of alternatives to capitalism, culminated by the end of the Cold War. The dynamics of global capitalism have undergone a series of transformations since the congealment of this neoliberal paradigm of “no alternative,” as Margaret Thatcher would pronounce. Yet through these transformations, the waning of utopian thought and imagination remains consistent with a sense of defeat on the left. More recently, however, with the insurrections of the long 2011, this sense of defeat has mutated into antagonism. As I will suggest, this mounting negativity is precisely the utopian drive of the contemporary period.

In Marcuse, Bloch, and Adorno, we find conceptualizations of ‘utopia’ that help to not only recover utopian dimensions of the current situation, but to historicize anti-utopianism in its present formations, as an ideological output of the post-60s. In this sense, we can approach the 1960s as instead a period of crisis in utopian thought and practice – a crisis which generates a variety of literary and theoretical conceptualizations of ‘utopia’ in the post-60s, against the dominant logics of anti-utopianism and rising dystopian imagination. As Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini suggest, this is not a failure of the imagination – a disappearance of utopia – but rather “a consequence of the intellectual and political conditions of late capitalism.” (Baccolini and Moylan, *Dark Horizons* 15) At this juncture, “anti-

utopianism is a standard weapon in the armory of the status quo,” they explain, while arguing that:

...this doesn't altogether explain the difficulties of imagining the pursuit of visions of an alternative social order... both the 'critical utopia' and the 'critical dystopia' are responses to those challenges, in which Utopia itself becomes more fragmentary, provisional, contested, ambiguous... The critical utopia is, simply, critical. Utopia is not dead, but the kind of utopianism that is holistic, social, future-located, committed, and linked to the present by some identifiable narrative of change [is] culturally problematic. This [is a] shift from structure to process. (ibid)

The shift from program to process describes an important transformation in the utopian imagination of the long 1960s – leading up to the dystopian turn of the 1980s, which I will discuss in my third chapter. In my first and second chapters, I will discuss some of the ways in which this shift can be made useful in our interpretation of utopian and anti-utopian literature that deals with the cultural moment of the “end of the sixties” as a locus of radical and recuperative energies, an ideological mechanism of neoliberal global capitalism, and an organizing principle of the historical imagination of contemporary anti-capitalist struggles.

Jameson argues for a distinction between the “Utopian form and the Utopian wish: between the written text or genre and something like a Utopian impulse detectable in daily life and its practices by a specialized hermeneutic or interpretive method.” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 1) While this distinction has been explored previously in utopian thought, the emphasis on ‘utopia’ as an impulse or unconscious drive emerges from this crisis of the utopian imagination of the long 1960s – a crisis

that compels significant modifications to the concept and politics of 'utopia.' "A definition of utopia in terms of desire," as Ruth Levitas explains, "is analytic rather than descriptive. It generates a method which is primarily hermeneutic but which repeatedly returns us from existential and aesthetic concerns to the social and structural domain." (Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* 4) It is in the post-60s period that, amidst a "mix of radical alterity and impossibilism," it is also important, Levitas argues, "to recognize the utopianism of right-wing politics, both at the level of improvised institutions and especially at the level of the state and the global market." (8) Since most "social practices [and] political programmes embed an idea of the good society and an attempt to implement it," the politics of utopia must be distinguished from the formal questions of utopia – and increasingly placing emphasis on the processual and interpretive dimensions of utopia as a method. Against the false utopia of the free market, there is the need to articulate and further refine a utopianism with which to undermine and antagonize the totality of late capitalism. In this sense, form should not be mistaken for politics – as a concept, utopia must be both historicized and politicized in the present.

The false utopia of the free market – what economist Karl Polanyi describes as a "stark utopia" – was itself constructed as the counterpart and negation of a communist alternative, from a paradigm of utopian imagination constrained by the imposed threat of totalitarianism. (Polanyi 3) At stake in this threat of totalitarianism, as Marcuse argues, is universal revolution in the global capitalist paradigm – "the totalitarian character of" such a revolution "is made necessary by the totalitarian

character of the capitalist relations of production.” (Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* 88) We can trace this development through the course of the post-60s, precisely as a constellation of historical processes: the development of neoliberalism, the eclipse of a communist alternative, the globalization of Third World production and circulation, the cultural turn of financial capitalism, the feminization of labor and recuperation of second-wave feminism, the cooptation of multiculturalism, represent some of the more dominant features of this period of *ending* the world sixties. “The complexity of a culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions,” as Raymond Williams suggests, “but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements,” for which Williams develops the methodological triad of dominant, residual, and emergent historical features. (Williams 121) Utopia can be approached through this consolidation of variabilities, which allows us to think through different temporal registers in our understanding of this crisis in utopian imagination. The false utopia or the critical dystopia are some of many mutations of ‘utopia’ during this period, pointing to the need to develop political frameworks for thinking about the status of utopia after the 1960s. Williams’s attention to residuality also clarifies a set of problems that are encountered in the current situation as an ‘end’ to the post-60s.

Through residuality and emergence, Williams provides a way to complicate periodization as a historiographical method. “[To] those who think that cultural periodization implies some massive kinship and homogeneity or identity within a given period,” Jameson retorts, “it is surely only against a certain conception of what

is historically dominant or hegemonic that the full value of the exceptional... can be assessed.” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 178) Of the long 1960s, Jameson suggests that:

...the ‘period’ in question is understood not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation’s structural limits. (179)

Williams’s categories, in this sense, enable certain possibilities for diachrony, that counteract the homogenizing effect of periodization as a reductionist practice.

‘Utopia,’ as I will suggest, offers a mode of periodization – a way to encounter the dominant, residual, and emergent dynamics of the post-60s, and a way to understand the present situation as fundamentally historical.

#### Periodizing Post-Utopianism

“The so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself, and, since it is only rarely and only under quite specific conditions able to criticize itself – leaving aside, of course, the historical periods which appear to themselves as times of decadence – it always conceives them one-sidedly.” – Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*

The ‘post-60s’ can be elaborated in terms of the dominance of a ‘post-utopian’ imagination, which could describe the postmodern as a historical emergence of late capitalism. The “end” of the long 1960s – the shift at which the countercultural energies and anti-capitalist impulses of the 1970s become recuperated, absorbed into the logics of late capitalism and the free market utopia of neoliberalism – marks a ‘dystopian turn’ in the cultural imagination of postmodernism, as I will discuss in my third chapter. This dystopian turn, however, is prefigured in the ‘post-utopianism’ that Booker attributes to the ‘long 1950s.’ In effect, through Booker’s periodization, the



1960s are over before they even begin. In *The Post-Utopian Imagination*, Booker constructs a periodization that occludes Jameson's periodization of the long 1960s. Booker's conception of post-utopianism, by extension, can be read as a reconfiguration of Jameson's postmodernism – while it is staged as a “much more specific aspect of the phenomenon than [the] broader designation of postmodernism.” (Booker 5) Although Booker is clear to assert that these periodizations are coterminous, the notion of ‘post-utopianism’ fundamentally conflicts with Jameson's assertion of the utopian unconscious of postmodern culture – the ways in which ‘utopia’ persists, in spite of the threat of ideological foreclosure in this period.

Booker's post-utopianism effectively disputes dominant conceptions of the long 1960s, as the last gasp of utopian energies in the end of the twentieth century. In this sense, the idea of ‘post-utopianism’ becomes a mechanism by which to foreclose the radical potentialities of the 1960s in the historical imagination of the post-60s. Daniel Bell's 1962 pronouncement of the “end of ideology” functions as part of this periodization, as he posits an “exhaustion of utopia” through the course of the 1950s. As Bell writes, “The end of ideology is not – should not be – the end of utopia as well,” but rather,

If anything, one can begin anew the discussion of utopia only by being aware of the trap of ideology. The point is that ideologists are “terrible simplifiers.” Ideology makes it unnecessary for people to confront individual issues on their individual merits. One simply turns to the ideological vending machine, and out comes the prepared formulae. And when these beliefs are suffused by apocalyptic fervor, ideas become weapons, and with dreadful results. (Bell 405)

In distinguishing between the end of ideology and the end of utopia, Bell suggests a way to approach utopia as something other than naïve optimism, or as an impossible dream. However, the premise of this “end of ideology” is itself a false utopia, for it fails to conceive of ‘utopia’ itself as a mode of ideological critique. This is utopian in the sense of escapism, rather than in the sense of critical negativity.

Bell’s conception of the status of utopia is integral to Booker’s counter-periodization to Jameson’s long 1960s – in the long 1950s, Booker asserts a ‘post-utopian’ imagination that not only upholds Bell’s 1962 vision, but negates the possibility to locate utopian energies resistant to the cultural logics of postmodernism. Whereas Jameson’s long 1960s helps us to historicize the ideological conditions from which postmodernism arises, Booker’s understanding of the ‘post-utopian’ is always already at work in this emergence. This transposition of the ‘long 1950s’ onto the 1960s actively undermines the utopian energies and the political potentialities of the counterculture – yet it is a history made possible not through a fidelity to Bell’s insights into the 1950s, but by the anti-utopian drives of the post-60s.

The ‘end of utopia,’ for Russell Jacoby, is marked by a disjuncture from the New Left – the status of utopia, in this sense, is integrally bound to the political imagination of the 1960s. Arguing that the “1960s buried the talk of ‘the end of ideology,’” against this revival of Bell in the post-60s, Jacoby asserts that “a new left was emerging that was not afraid to be utopian.” (Jacoby, “*The End of Utopia*” 6) For Jacoby, the politics of the 1960s are ultimately eclipsed by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union:

The events of 1989 mark a decisive shift in the Zeitgeist: History has zigged or zagged. No simple lesson follows, but it is clear that radicalism and the utopian spirit that sustains it have ceased to be major political or even intellectual forces. Nor is this pertinent simply to adherents of the left. The vitality of liberalism rests on its left flank, which operates as its goad and crisis. As the left surrenders a vision, liberalism loses its bearings; it turns flaccid and uncertain. (7-8)

Here, Jacoby's conception of the "end of utopia" – like Bell's conception of the "end of ideology" – could be refined in terms of the residual and emergent dimensions of the status of utopia in this history. While giving an account of the dominant and hegemonic anti-utopianism which culminates with the end of the Cold War paradigm, Jacoby clarifies what is at stake in the post-60s, as a periodization of what I am describing instead as a crisis of the utopian imagination.

As Jacoby argues, this crisis of the utopian imagination must be historicized in relation to anti-utopianism. To this extent, 'anti-utopia' provides a useful framework for thinking about the ideological paradigm of neoliberalism, formed precisely out of the perceived dystopia of totalitarianism – a threat that constrained the politics of utopia through the Cold War:

The anti-utopian ethos has swept all intellectual quarters. Utopia has lost its ties with alluring visions of harmony and has turned into a threat. Conventional and scholarly wisdom associates utopian ideas with violence and dictatorship. The historical validity of this linkage, however, is dubious. Already with [Thomas] More, though, utopianism spawned an angry anti-utopianism. This may be prototypical... Anti-utopianism is not simply a psychological rejoinder, but a political reply to the political project of realizing utopia. (Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect* 81)

Anti-utopia, as Jacoby demonstrates, represents a dominant mode of thought in the post-60s, as a mechanism of ideological foreclosure and anti-capitalist defeatism. The

dissolution of the Cold War – what Joshua Clover describes as the “long 1989” – might also be imagined as a historical process of undoing the post-60s: dulling the political urgency, that is, of a fidelity to the possibility of revolution and alternatives to capitalism.

Clover’s 1989 operates as both category and concept, and both continuity and rupture. (Clover, “1989” 88) By extension, the “long 1989” accounts for the variable dimensions of ‘utopia’ at stake in this project – the dialectical correspondence of utopia with anti-utopia, critical utopia, and dystopia – whereas the “end of utopia” occludes these variabilities and co-presences. As Clover explains, 1989 can be understood as a “container into which can be tossed songs and images and newspaper articles and punctual happenings, anything with a date on it,” as well as a “shorthand for what happened, for the experiential dimension of a capacious swath of history: an index that becomes more impacted, more challenging to unpack, with each passing year.” (5) We can think of the ‘post-60s’ as providing such a shorthand, describing the multiple transformations of ‘utopia’ since the late 1970s – a series of transformations which Clover traces through the cultural imaginary of pop:

It was one of punk’s historical missions to negate the moon-eyed social dream of sixties pop. Grunge, with no intention of recalling such idealisms after the fashion of rave’s Second Summer of Love, nonetheless negates the negation of punk. This spirit of the Summer of Love is the sixties ploughshare that punk had already beaten into a sword, which in turn is the sword that grunge turned on itself. (89)

This unfolding from sixties pop to late 1970s-80s punk to late 1980s-90s grunge maps onto a particular trajectory in the utopian imagination – what emerges as the ‘post-60s’ paradigm of depoliticization and countercultural recuperation becomes, by the

1990s, a paradigm of eradicating the post-60s: a cultural moment compelled by a historical amnesia precipitated by this collapse of the Cold War geo-political imaginary.

While anti-utopia describes the dominant cultural tendencies of the post-60s, this history of ‘utopia’ seeks to bring forth the residual and emergent elements of utopia in this period as well. What left out of the picture in this notion of an “end of utopia” or a “post-utopian” imagination are the ways in which utopia was re-purposed and innovated by radical feminists and anti-colonial thinkers throughout the long 1960s. By foregrounding such elements in this history, I want to suggest a set of counter-periodizations that resist this eradication of the post-60s from the historical imagination of contemporary struggles. Rather than a return to the 1960s, or a nostalgia for the 1960s, this project is future-oriented, and predominantly concerned with the problem of how to make the revolutionary energies of this history useful to the present. At stake in ‘utopia,’ in this sense, is the status of anti-capitalist longing and post-capitalist imagination in the contemporary period. As a historical concept, utopia helps us to understand the conditions of revolutionary possibility in different contexts of struggle – the imaginability of utopia presents a way to periodize the epistemological and ideological terrains of history.

Utopian imagination persists through the course of this “post-utopian” period, taking a different orientation toward the politics of utopia. Yet this remains illegible to this notion of a “post-utopian” postmodernism, which reduces ‘utopia’ to programmatism or idealism. The very premise of this post-utopian periodization is

not only anti-utopian. The “post-utopian” imagination fails to recognize the ways in which ‘utopia’ becomes both feminized and racialized – how this concept becomes reactivated to resist forms of patriarchal and neo-colonial power in the post-60s. To put forth these elements subordinated by the “post-utopian” periodization requires the recovery of utopia from Popper’s assertion that dystopia is the shadow of utopia. Like Bell, Popper wrote of an end of utopia, to the extent that:

The Utopian approach can be saved only by the Platonic belief in one absolute and unchanging ideal, together with two further assumptions, namely a) that there are rational methods to determine once and for all what this ideal is, and b) what the best means of its realization are.  
(Popper 161)

Popper’s conception of rational methods and realization can be read to “simply push the male utopia with its emphasis on stasis and control to its logical conclusion,” as Elaine Baruch suggests, while offering as a point of contrast, “no feminist utopia wants power for its own sake.” (Baruch 222) As Lucy Sargisson argues, “men’s utopias are often women’s dystopias,” while the logic of this critique is inherently at odds with Popper’s deduction of the dystopian basis of any utopia. (Sargisson 24) The banalization and subordination of utopia in the “post-utopian” imagination reflects a certain crisis in this masculinist utopianism that can be found in Popper and Bell in the early 1960s.

What Jacoby’s “end of utopia” leaves out is political. Offering a critique of this “end,” Dunja Mohr argues that “in his eagerness to debunk utopia, Jacoby gazes exclusively at classical and modern utopian texts and never once turns to look at contemporary literary utopia and dystopia, perhaps because the postmodern texts are

to a large extent feminist.” (Mohr 2) Through the course of the 1960s and 1970s, against the pronouncement of an “end of utopia,” we can trace a proliferation of feminist critical utopian literature, as I will discuss in my second chapter. These critical utopias perform an immanent critique to the utopian literary tradition, while remaining committed to the concept of utopia. In the midst of this crisis of masculinist utopianism, anti-colonial utopianism also emerged as a mode of “intellectual decolonization,” as Dohra Ahmad argues, or “defamiliarization or cognitive estrangement.” (Ahmad 5) “It should be obvious from even the most cursory historical reflection,” Ahmad writes, “that anti-colonial politics participates in both categories of utopianism, the practical and the ideological, despite its complete absence from any catalogue of utopian thought.” (ibid) As a dominant periodization of the post-60s, “post-utopianism” participates in this neglect of both feminist and anti-colonial utopianisms, as active elements in the unending sixties. Anti-colonial utopianism contests “the teleological outlook of developmentalism,” as Ahmad suggests, transforming “utopianism into something more useful for anti-colonial emancipation.” (201) In the post-60s “anti-colonial utopianism faced new threats in the period of purported independence,” while “even those who view the path of history with regret recognize how important it is not to allow the constraints of the actual set the limits of the possible.” (ibid) The “post-utopian” imagination neglects such historical transformations and political interventions to the concept of utopia, instead preserving the masculinist-colonial conception of a utopian program. In

failing to think outside of such a framework, the “post-utopian” periodization instead describes the dystopia of the post-60s.

### Utopia Against the Ends of History

Utopia does not end without history. And history is not over. Yet what Francis Fukuyama pronounced as the “end of history” still describes our historical situation: that is, the extent to which history has become unimaginable. The same could be said for utopia. The “end of history” can be understood as culminating the post-60s paradigm – a juncture that at once articulates the collapse of Cold War geopolitics and the global ascendance of neoliberal capitalism, as well as the total recuperation of counter-hegemonic forces from the long 1960s.

In positing an “end of history” in the late 1980s, Fukuyama describes a “pessimism of the present” which not only characterizes the decline in historicity but the ostensible waning of utopian imagination. Fukuyama writes:

The pessimism of the present with regard to the possibility of progress in history was born out of two separate but parallel crises: the crisis of twentieth-century politics, and the intellectual crisis of Western rationalism. The former killed tens of millions of people and forced hundreds of millions to live under new and more brutal forces of slavery; the latter left liberal democracy without the intellectual resources with which to defend itself. The two were interrelated and cannot be understood separately from one another. (Fukuyama, “The End of History” 11)

These are the conditions of what I have described as the crisis of ‘utopia’ in the post-60s – after a burst of utopian and revolutionary cultural energies silence notions of an “end of utopia” that were posed earlier into the Cold War era, as in Popper, or Bell. Like the “end of history,” Fukuyama’s conception of a “pessimism of the present”



provides a useful diagnostic to this project of periodizing ‘utopia’ in the post-60s. Yet Fukuyama’s diagnostic takes a clear agenda, through the false utopia of liberal democracy and the free-market:

... despite the powerful reasons for pessimism given us by our experience in the first half of this century, events in its second half have been pointing in a very different and unexpected direction. As we reach the 1990s, the world as a whole has not revealed new evils, but has gotten better in certain distinct ways. (12)

The “end of history,” in this sense, is yet another articulation of a crisis in the utopian imagination – a crisis which mistakes dystopia for utopia. This is an uncritical utopianism – a positivism that precludes utopian processes of negation. This “end of history” can be understood as what Nicholas Brown critiques as a “positive utopia,” to be distinguished from “the negative version of utopia, only available in genuinely political moments,” which is “utopia stripped down to its naked essence. It is the bare thought, emerging from the nearness of the rift or set of contradictions that characterize social life under capitalism, that things might really be otherwise.” (Brown 22-23) While providing an account of the culmination of the ‘post-60s,’ Fukuyama’s utopianism reflects this crisis in the utopian imagination, in upholding the social totality of global capitalist liberal democracy as the final defeat of anti-capitalist possibility.

Taking up Fukuyama’s “end of history,” Jameson perceives this diagnostic as rather a set of symptoms:

... the notion of the ‘end of history’ [expresses] a blockage of the historical imagination, and we need to see more clearly how that is so, and how it ends up seeming to offer only this particular concept as a viable alternative. It seems to me particularly significant that the

emergence of late capitalism... along with the consequent collapse of the communist systems in the East, coincided with a generalized and planetary ecological disaster... At the moment when the market suffuses the world, in other words, and penetrates the hitherto uncommodified zones of former colonies, further development becomes unthinkable on account of a general (and quite justified) turn away from the old heroic forms of productivity and extraction. At the moment, in other words, when the limits of the globe are reached, notions of intensive development become impossible to contemplate; the end of expansion and old-fashioned imperialism is not accompanied by any viable alternative of internal development. (Jameson, "The End of Art or the End of History?" 91)

To Jameson's question of "the 'end of art' or the 'end of history'," I ask the same of the "end of utopia" described by Jacoby among others of this juncture of the post-Cold War. As Jameson suggests, this is fundamentally an epistemological problem of that which is "impossible to contemplate," an inquiry into the conditions of anti-capitalist thinkability.

When will the 'end of history' be over? While this question describes a political problem posed by the recent years of global uprisings and anti-austerity movements, the Occupy Wall Street movements of 2011 ultimately reinforced the problem of a blockage in the historical imagination – what I want to explore as a crisis in the concept of utopia. Mark Fisher defines this as a paradigm of capitalist realism. "The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history," Fisher observes, elaborating a notion of 'capitalist realism' as a counterpart to Jameson's postmodernism. Unlike Booker's 'post-utopianism,' however, Fisher's periodization remains oriented toward utopian problematics, defining the 'post-60s' paradigm through an anti-capitalist framework, from the historical vantage of 2007-2008:

... a whole generation has passed since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In the 1960s and 1970s, capitalism had to face the problem of how to contain and absorb energies from outside. It now, in fact, has the opposite problem; having all-too successfully incorporated externality, how can it function without an outside it can colonize and appropriate? For most people under twenty in Europe and North America, the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue. Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable. (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* 8)

'Utopia' has always been a figure of this externality under threat by capitalist realism. The possibility of imagining an end of capitalism seems to evaporate through these converging periodizations of postmodernism and capitalist realism – both of which nevertheless offer counterpoints to the notion of a “post-utopian” imagination, or an “end of history” at this juncture. While Fisher here describes the seemingly limitless expansion of this logic of no alternative to capitalism, the economic collapse of 2007-2008 may mark a juncture at which this logic is itself put into crisis.

In 2013, Fisher would reflect on the process of completing his book in the midst of the financial crisis, at a point of uncertainty that might be treated as a rupture from these general tendencies of ahistoricism and anti-utopianism in late capitalism: “it felt as if capitalism might be finished before the book was. As we all now know, capitalism didn't collapse – but it would be a mistake to think that there is any possibility of a return to business as usual.” (Fisher, “Capitalist Realism,” STRIKE!)

The same year, Paul Mason would write of the ending of capitalist realism, as a historical process currently underway. “Up to 2008,” Mason argues, “the left's inability to imagine any alternative to capitalism was like a mirror image of the right's triumphalism... Together, the left and right created a shared fatalism about the

future.” (Mason, *Why’s It Still Kicking off Everywhere* 30) In response to the global financial crisis as a constellation of historical processes, Mason attempts to periodize capitalist realism by positioning 2008 as a critical turning point in what I want to describe as the utopian imagination of contemporary anti-capitalist struggles. Mason explains that “From late 2008, events began to happen in which the new predominated over the old; in which the forces that would defy fatalism began to flex their limbs.” (32) The status of utopia can be understood through a correspondence with this defiance of fatalism – a process that continues to transform in the years to follow.

Mason’s periodization of capitalist realism remains a tentative one, and this vision of a turning point in 2008 itself reflects the utopian problematics of what I will elaborate as a long 2011 in the third part of this dissertation. Chapters six and seven will both consider the ways in which the financial crisis marks a rupture from the process of *ending* the post-60s – the ‘end of history’ that I have critiqued as a paradigm of anti-utopianism. While these final chapters will take this period as its focus, the first and second part of this cultural history can be understood as situated in this juncture of transformation and increasing antagonism. These represent elements of a historical orientation toward the ‘post-60s’ that is specific to these conditions of revolutionary fluctuation and capitalist crisis – what I will describe as a shift in the utopian imagination of this period. While this may not mark the end of capitalist realism, I want to argue that this ‘long 2011’ delineates an end of the post-60s, as a process that coincides with these various ideological paradigms of eliminating a

horizon of possibility outside global capitalism – a futurity and revolutionary impulse that characterize a crisis in the historical imagination of contemporary capitalism.

### Overview

“Not the least unexpected thing about the 1960s was its reinvention of the question of utopia,” as Jameson writes in 1977. (Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches” 75) The first part of this project attempts to historicize ‘utopia’ precisely in this manner – as a reinvented question, for which the post-60s articulates a particular historicity. Entitled “Periodizing Anti-Utopianism,” it works against this notion of an “end of utopia” or a “post-utopian” paradigm, in order to develop a set of counter-periodizations. My first chapter will discuss the problematic of utopian ‘failure’ as a trope of the post-60s banalization of utopian imagination, looking particularly at the ways in which this trope is mobilized in T.C. Boyle’s 2003 novel *Drop City*, a satire of the New Communalist phenomenon of the American counterculture in the long 1960s. In my reading of the novel, I will ultimately ask of the historicity of Boyle’s anti-utopianism, in an attempt to situate the specific dynamics of countercultural recuperation and utopian foreclosure in the narrative’s satirical rendering of the ‘hip’ communes. My second chapter provides a reading of Ursula K. Le Guin’s 1972 *The Word For World is Forest*, as a ‘critical utopia’ that offers an immanent critique of ‘utopia’ as a product of the colonial imagination of capitalism. As I will discuss of Le Guin’s critical utopianism more generally, this emphasis on critique and negation also helps us to repurpose the concept of utopia from the Cold War era threat of totalitarianism, and develop different variations on utopian thought against the

dominant logics of anti-utopianism in this period. My third chapter takes up the ‘dystopian turn’ of the 1980s, not as a culmination of anti-utopianism in the post-60s, but as a mode of anti-capitalist longing and imagination that endures in resistance to the neoliberal paradigm of “no alternative.” In recovering a utopian hermeneutics of the punk literary imaginaries conjured by William S. Burroughs’s *Cities of the Red Night* and Kathy Acker’s *Pussy: King of Pirates*, this third chapter will re-engage with the epistemological stakes of postmodernism and the “end of history.”

“Of Utopia and Recuperation: The Cultural and Spatial Imagination of the American Tech Industry,” is the second part of this dissertation, which takes up ‘utopia’ as a site of contradiction and reactionism in the 1990s and 2000s. Both my fourth and fifth chapters discuss ways in which the American tech industry has mobilized ‘utopia’ as part of a broader absorption of the counterculture into the market logics of the New Economy. In my fourth chapter, I examine how the historical imagination of the tech industry reflects the recuperation of the counterculture, offering a periodization of the ‘global 1990s’ as the ‘undoing of the post-60s’: a period of un-imagining both Cold War geopolitics and revolutionary possibilities, structured by the fixed horizon of liberal democracy and a globally-expansive capitalist future. This chapter focuses on the status of a ‘utopian sixties’ in the popular imagination of the industry, drawing predominantly from mass cultural texts such as biographies, journalism, films, television, and advertisements. My fifth chapter considers this recuperation of ‘utopia’ in the spatial imagination of the ‘creative economy,’ focusing on the utopian blueprintism of corporate campuses as a

model for the tech industry's productivism in a 24/7 market designed for a global infrastructure of non-stop labor and consumption. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to understand the expansive territory of 'Silicon Valley' from the epicenter of Mountain View, California, interrogating these 'utopian workspaces,' several collective living spaces, and the tech industry 'seafaring' phenomenon, as elements of a dystopian regime of immaterial labor, accelerated gentrification, and libertarian fantasy that have generated antagonism throughout the Bay Area for over a decade.

The final part, entitled "Utopia as the Idea of Post-Capitalism," attempts to periodize the 'long 2011' by positing a historical imagination situated "after the post-60s" – a periodization that can be thought alongside Mason's attempt to periodize capitalist realism with the crisis point of the 2007-2008 financial crash. In responding to the discourse of "the idea of communism" which circulated in 2009-2010, this discussion of the "idea of post-capitalism" will take utopia as its orientation, in thinking through the various dynamics of cultural and political antagonism in this period. My sixth chapter returns to Jameson's famous pronouncement of our contemporary dystopia – for which the end of the world becomes more imaginable than the end of capitalism – in considering the politics of recent 'post-Occupy' dystopian mass culture. While taking up several films as 'post-Occupy' allegories, this chapter will dispute the populist fantasy of a 'cinema of the 99%,' while tracing out critical impulses toward post-capitalist speculation that shifts out of the anti-utopian logic of apocalypticism. My seventh chapter will put forth a set of observations about the spatial imagination of contemporary anti-capitalism, seeking

to make use of variations of ‘utopia’ as modes of critique in the increasingly complex spatial infrastructure of global capital. Rather than a naïve impossibility or a tyrannical social program, these variations on ‘utopia’ provide an epistemological framework for the development of anti-capitalist social and spatial practices.

My conclusion examines the historical imaginary conjured by the 2009-2010 anti-privatization movements that featured numerous university occupations, the 2011-2012 encampments of Occupy Wall Street, and the 2014-2015 riots and blockades of Black Lives Matter, as key junctures of this ‘long 2011’ which illuminate certain mutations and transformations in the utopian problematics of this period. At stake in each of these explosions of struggle and antagonism is precisely the imaginability of a post-capitalist future, while this is importantly explored through forms of anti-capitalist antagonism and critical negativity grounded in the present situation as one of uncertainty and rupture. That the future will be qualitatively better seems unlikely in this situation, while the struggle to survive collectively remains active and oriented toward possibilities outside the logics of reproductive futurity. This is a situation for which destruction and apocalypse take on a utopian quality in the cultural imagination – a time at which these impulses critically align ‘utopia’ with the idea of post-capitalism. More than ever, it is a time to take seriously these utopian problematics, and to resist the ideological foreclosure of utopia as an epistemology of revolutionary possibility.

## Part One



## Periodizing Anti-Utopianism

“... living outside of history – the sensation of the ‘end of history’ peculiar to the dominant class’s loss of perspectives in advanced industrial society – constitutes a utopia of sorts, however negative.” – Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*

“... we live today in dystopia as well as in anti-utopia – perhaps because the dystopia is an anti-utopia.” – Darko Suvin, “Where Are We? How Did We Get Here? Is There Any Way Out? Or, News from the Novum”

The following three chapters represent aspects of a larger cultural project of periodizing the ‘post-60s’ paradigm. The stakes of such a project are put forth by Fredric Jameson’s 1986 essay, “Periodizing the 60s,” which approaches the 1960s as a “momentous transformational period [of] systemic restructuring... on a global scale,” which nevertheless “led, in the worldwide economic crisis, to powerful restorations of the social order and a renewal of the repressive power of the various state apparatuses.” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 207-208) As Jameson continues, “the forces these must now confront, contain and control are new ones, on which the older methods do not necessarily work.” (ibid) Written from the “hindsight of the 80s,” Jameson’s essay provides a critical framework that demands continual adaptation and reinvention. By extension, this project begins from the hindsight of the post-60s.

The post-60s describes a period of anti-futurity, which might also be elaborated in terms of the ‘spatial turn’ – specifically as a way of developing counter-historiographical modes to the “end of history.” Edward Soja would complicate the terms of the ‘spatial turn,’ defining historicism “as an overdeveloped historical contextualization of social life and social theory that actively submerges and

peripheralizes the geographical or spatial imagination.” (Soja 15) With this “additional twist” to the debate over historicism, Soja’s definition “does not deny the extraordinary power and importance of historiography as a mode of emancipatory insight, but identifies historicism with the creation of a critical silence,” which is necessarily understood in terms of the “subordination of space to time that obscures geographical interpretations of the changeability of the social world and intrudes upon every level of theoretical discourse.” (ibid) In conceiving of ‘postmodern geography’ as an opportunity to further develop the spatial dimensions of historiography, Soja’s methodology is an important influence on this project, which also clarifies a set of distinctions between this postmodern paradigm of *ending* the 1960s, and the current situation as a point of closure to this process.

The following chapters will explore the relation between this ‘post-60s’ periodization and the dominant logic of anti-utopianism. “The leaner and meaner world of the 1980s and 1990s was,” Tom Moylan writes, “marked by anti-utopian deprivation rather than utopian achievement.” (Moylan, “Scraps” 103) Kathi Weeks describes an “official anti-utopianism,” that can be understood as a dynamic of liberalism – an anti-utopianism “fueled by a sense of liberalism under threat and one born of a sense of its dominance.” (Weeks 181) Weeks summarizes the “echoes of these two modes of critique” as the “insistence that there should be no alternative and the conclusion that there is no alternative,” which is not distinct to neoliberal anti-utopianism, but can “also be found in Left brands of anti-utopianism” in this period. (ibid) By the 2000s, if there is “an ineradicable utopian core to neoliberalism,” Mark

Fisher argues, “then this reveals the differences between capitalist realism and neoliberalism,” as I discuss in the introduction. As Fisher elaborates:

Neoliberalism has succeeded because it was capable of subordinating the left to capitalist realism, but the two tendencies are not identical. Where capitalist realism is anti-utopian, neoliberalism does have a utopian dimension. One of the puzzling things about neoliberal ideologues is to what extent they actually believe this utopianism, or whether it is just a mask for ruling-class self-interest... One lesson we can draw from the persistence of the utopian is that a purely pragmatic, “realistic” politics is not actually possible. There will never come a point at which capital will unmask and say without qualification, “OK, capitalism is necessarily exploitative and rapacious, live with it.” There are elements of this with capitalist realism, but they are offset by the utopian claims of neoliberalism. (Fisher, “We Can’t Afford to Be Realists” 35)

By distinguishing free-market utopianism from anti-capitalist impulses in the neoliberal paradigm, Fisher posits an alternate utopian epistemology by which to critique capitalist realism in this period. The false utopia of neoliberal capitalism – a totality for which any horizon of anti-capitalist possibility becomes subsumed under the market logics of ‘realism,’ as Fisher argues – demands a counter-utopianism grounded in an anti-capitalist politics.

Through the course of the post-60s, anti-utopianism mutates from a totalitarian imaginary of anti-communism produced out of Cold War era geopolitics, to a reaction against the free market utopianism of the “end of history” with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Of the Orwellian paradigm of the utopian imagination – for which totalitarianism is the dominant threat – Jameson asks, “can separate anti-utopianism [from] anti-communism?” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 281) As Lucy Sargisson explains,

“Anti-utopianism articulates deep fears. These include the fear that utopia will lead to the end of history, politics and change. Or that it will lead to mob rule and mass violence, or perhaps the imposition of one person’s (or one group’s) dreams on the world. Or genocide. Lurking at the root of these fears is a set of associations between utopianism and perfection. This is complicated. And it is important. Exponents of this view believe that utopianism is, at some essential and definitional level, perfection-seeking, authoritarian and intolerant of dissent.” (Sargisson 21)

The following section works out of this reductive association between utopianism and perfection, beginning with the problem of utopian failure. The fixation on totalitarianism in the utopian imaginary can be understood as a corollary problem to that of perfection – which is not, as Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan suggest, “a failure of the imagination so much as a consequence of the intellectual and political conditions of late capitalism,” for which “the term utopia itself has been tarnished by association with totalitarianism.” (Baccolini and Moylan, “Dystopias and History” 13) Ultimately what is at stake is the totalitarianism of late capitalism – and we can differentiate an ideological critique operative in the category of utopia: as Louis Marin suggests, “utopia as ideology is a totality; and when political power seizes it, it becomes a totalitarian whole.” (Marin 413) While the post-60s has been dominantly perceived as a paradigm of anti-utopianism, however, there are counter-narratives to be recovered for which the status of utopia can be further complicated and politicized. Against the waning of utopianism in this period, this section engages the utopian drives and impulses otherwise occluded by this sense of dominant anti-utopianism.

This cultural history of the ‘post-60s’ does not begin with the end of the 1960s, but with the idea of this end as it is mobilized in the early 2000s. In T.C.

Boyle's novel *Drop City*, the focus of my first chapter, we encounter the logic of anti-utopianism, through the historical imagination of 1960s radical failure that is distinct to the ideological foreclosure of post-9/11 era U.S. neo-imperialism. "The failure of utopia has been, of course," as Krishan Kumar writes, "anti-utopia's opportunity." (Kumar 422) This anti-utopian / anti-sixties is produced out of the cultural moment of the 'end of history.' My second chapter will look at the convergence of the 'post-60s' and what Jameson describes as the long 1960s – the sustained energies of revolutionary possibility which remain active through the 1970s. The 'critical utopia,' in this sense, provides the basis for a counter-history to this anti-utopianism, as I will discuss in some of Ursula K. Le Guin's work from this period. My third chapter will proceed to think through the 'dystopian turn' of the 1980s, as at once an articulation of anti-utopianism in the post-60s, the gradual disintegration of the Cold War dystopian imaginary of totalitarianism, and a utopian resistance to capitalist recuperation. In my reading of two punk literary utopias, I will develop a counter-periodization through which to trace this utopian resistance, in William S. Burroughs's 1981 novel *Cities of the Red Night*, which he wrote through the course of the 1970s, and Kathy Acker's last published work, the 1996 novel *Pussy: King of Pirates*. In the 'long 1980s,' this third chapter will explore the ways that punk and postmodern literature deploys this dystopian imaginary while developing a utopian hermeneutics that resists the logics of capitalist realism.

"Articulating the past historically means recognizing those elements of the past which come together in the constellation of a single moment," writes Walter

Benjamin, “Historical knowledge is possible only within the historical moment. But knowledge within the historical moment is always knowledge of a moment.”

(Benjamin 403) By extension, the periodization that I develop of anti-utopianism in the post-60s is produced out of the conditions of possibility and historical imaginability of this past in the present – the study of utopia, in this sense, like any historical periodization, always already functions as a history of the present.

## Chapter One

### Failed Utopia and the Post-60s in Boyle’s *Drop City*

#### Of ‘Failed Utopias,’ or, Anti-Utopianism

T.C. Boyle’s 2003 novel *Drop City* draws deeply from the historical imaginary of the “end of the sixties,” as a narrative of radical contradiction and foreclosure in the American counterculture. Set in 1970, *Drop City* satirizes the New Communalist phenomenon, taking its name from the community of ‘Droppers’ in Trinidad, Colorado. More than a direct account of the Drop City commune, the novel should be read as a pastiche of various ‘hip’ communes from the period, focusing on two fictionalized spaces that illustrate a movement further into the rural imagination of this countercultural phenomenon – beginning in Sonoma county, and ending in an Alaskan homestead.

In its historical engagement with the American counterculture, the novel depicts this proliferation of hippie communes through a set of narrative tropes that

have pervaded historiographies of the post-60s. From the outset, *Drop City* frames itself as a narrative of failure – reflecting the dominant tendencies of the ‘post-60s,’ as a period of waning anti-capitalist imagination. While conceived as a gritty exposition of the dystopian underbelly of the hip communes, the novel more clearly expresses the anti-utopian tendencies of the paradigm from which this narrative of failure becomes imaginable.

The novel takes place in 1970, at the height of the New Communalist phenomenon. Scholarship consistently estimates more than 2,000 communes existed simultaneously in the late 1960s, with around one million inhabitants. Another conservative estimate states that there were over 10,000 communes between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. In the historical landscape of the novel, this field of pluralization and explosion of synchronicities is nowhere to be found – instead, the communes are fortified interiorities of a more or less homologous emergence. To an extent, the novel captures an important element of insularity – as communes historian Timothy Miller explains, by the mid-1960s, “even as independent clusters of communes were emerging in California, on the East coast, and in Colorado and New Mexico, other communal groups were quietly doing the same thing in a good many other places, largely unaware of each other.” (Miller, *The 60s Communes* 65) Without such a vantage on the phenomenon either – despite its inflections of historical hindsight – the novel reflects the reduction of New Communalism in the post-60s popular imagination, in failing to account for the heterogeneities among these projects.

In articulating a utopian impulse of the American 1960s, New Communalism is interpolated by the dominant rubric of ‘failure’ in histories of the New Left. Particularly in the United States, as George Katsiaficas writes, the “youthfulness and immaturity of the activists, the weakness of a continuous radical tradition, and the genocidal war against Indochina combined to produce a desperate and unreliable movement.” (Katsiaficas 193) In his analysis of 1960s global social movements, Katsiaficas argues that “despite its fundamental righteousness, the New Left included many of the worst characteristics of the society it opposed,” including “Middle-class authoritarianism and elitism, racism and male domination, competition, gangsterism, [and] anti-intellectualism.” (ibid) While foregrounding this critique of the New Left, Katsiaficas nevertheless pursues a utopian conception of the social movement, claiming that “Because the ideas and substance of the movement did not culminate in a revolution, its promise of a new and qualitatively better society continues to exist in the imagination of it.” (193) In this utopian conception of the New Left as a potentiality, emphasis is placed on the imagination, precisely as a corrective to the rather unimaginative and positivist conception of leftist ‘failure’ which pervades histories of this period.

In *Drop City*, the trope of failure offers a mode of critique within the narrative, particularly in its re-imagining of ‘free love.’ The narrative recovers elements of the woman’s experience of free love as a communalist practice, as in the central character of Star, of whom the narrator explains:

She’d stocked up on birth control pills -- they all had, Reba’s idea, her obsession, actually -- but she’d come to the end of them weeks ago.



When she and Marco made love it was cautious love now, restrained love, with the threat of repercussions hanging over the act, and he always pulled out of her at the crucial moment -- coitus interruptus -- as if that could forestall the inevitable, and how many of the girls she'd gone to Catholic school with were on their second or third child already? She'd kill herself. She'd have an abortion. But where? How? Somebody told her the Indian women knew a way, some root they boiled into a tea, or maybe they made it into a poultice that drew out the fetus like pus from an infection. (Boyle 84)

This notion of restrained love contrasts with the freedoms imagined in polyamory. The sexual liberation of the 'hip' communes is here depicted as a non-alternative to the inevitabilities of a suburban, middle-class existence figured in the nuclear family or couple form. While conceived by the characters as sites of radical disjuncture from the suburbs, the communes are conceived by the novel as failed projects of re-imagining the social conditions of suburban life. Star's imagined aborted fetus, or impending suicide, can be understood metaphorically as articulations of this utopian failure and non-futurity.

The rural 'hip' communes invoke a particular mythology of social exodus, utopian retreatism, and leftist failure within dominant historiographies of the 1960s American counterculture, with which Boyle's narrative aligns in its anti-utopian satire. After peaking at over 2,000 communes in 1969, the New Communalist phenomenon now operates as a mechanism of periodization to the larger cultural narrative of the "end of the sixties." As a figure of this narrative, the hip commune features the dynamics of "nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the 60s" and the "abject public confession of the decade's many failures and missed opportunities," that Fredric Jameson takes up in his prognostic essay from 1984, "Periodizing the

60s.” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 178) In his critique of this periodization, Jameson argues that the post-60s marks a juncture of crisis in historical representation, for which the solution “does not consist in abandoning historiography altogether, as an impossible aim and an ideological category all at once,” but rather in “reorganizing [historiography’s] traditional procedures on a different level.” (180) While critiques of retreatism, voluntarism, and failure may provide insight into the political stakes of countercultural communalism, the anti-utopian logics of these critiques must be historicized.

The trope of failure takes naivety as its counterpart throughout *Drop City*, as a narrative reflecting the conventions of anti-utopianism which Kathi Weeks defines as alternating between the basic options of “an anti-utopianism fueled by a sense of liberalism under threat and one born of a sense of its dominance.” As Weeks explains, “While liberalism continues to mutate into new forms, its case against utopia continues to revolve around a fairly stable set of indictments... between the rationalist and realist rebukes, between the claim that there should be no alternative and the assurance that there is no alternative.” From the perspective of this classic anti-utopian ontology and epistemology of rationalist and realist rebukes, Weeks argues, “speculation about alternative futures is... at best naive and at worst dangerous.” (Weeks 181) In its various character studies, the novel consistently draws on naivety as a defining feature of the hippie communalist phenomenon -- describing the characters as:

...so starry-eyed and simplistic, filled right up to the eyeballs with crack-brained notions about everything from the origins of the

universe to the brotherhood of man and how to live the vegetarian ideal. They were like children, utterly confident and utterly ignorant... They should have known better. All of them. (Boyle 224)

Such passages provide an almost anthropological perspective on the novel's subjects, out of an anti-utopian critique made possible by historical distance. And yet, this critical distance from the communes might also be read as articulating a particular anxiety in the text about the waning of utopian imagination -- which is how I want to take up the question of cynicism in the text.

The historical distance of Boyle's narration develops through certain cynical inflections, which contribute to the novel's anti-utopian conception of the communes. The beginning of the novel establishes this anti-utopianism, through a persistent cynicism:

Eating wasn't a private act -- nothing was private at Drop City -- but there were no dorm mothers here, no social directors or parents or bosses... Grooving, right? Wasn't that what this was all about? The California sun on your face, no games, no plastic society -- just freedom and like minds, brothers and sisters all? (78)

The utopic elements of *Drop City* are immediately put into crisis -- as in these questions posed in the opening sequence, which work through Star's skepticism as a kind of hermeneutic code for the narration. Here, I want to understand this cynical and conjectural distance in the narration as more particularly articulating an intersection between anti-utopianism and the "end of the sixties," as modes of ideological foreclosure and dehistoricization directly thematized in the novel.

Many contemporary accounts of the hip communes place emphasis on communal life as an alternative to suburban culture in the 1960s-70s. While the hip

commune is often theorized in terms of a rural utopianism of anti-urbanism, this distinction from social conditions of suburban life is occluded by a certain mytho-history of urban exodus. Yet the basis of this mytho-history is precisely an exodus from the suburbs – as imagined by Joan Didion’s “Slouching Toward Bethlehem,” in its famous apocalyptic rendering of the Haight-Ashbury district as a site where “the social hemorrhaging was showing up” – where “the missing children were gathering and calling themselves ‘hippies.’” (Didion 5) Didion’s dystopian Haight-Ashbury captures the key thematics of this mytho-history of exodus: “we were seeing something important,” as Didion writes,

We were seeing the attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community in a social vacuum. Once we had seen these children, we could no longer overlook the vacuum, no longer pretend that the society's atomization could be reversed. This was not a traditional generational rebellion. At some point between 1945 and 1967 we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be playing. Maybe we had stopped believing in the rules ourselves, maybe we were having a failure of nerve about the game. Maybe there were just too few people around to do the telling. These were children who grew up cut loose from the web of cousins and great-aunts and family doctors and lifelong neighbors who had traditionally suggested and enforced the society's values. They are children who have moved around a lot, *San Jose, Chula Vista, here*. They are less in rebellion against the society than ignorant of it, able only to feed back certain of its most publicized self-doubts, *Vietnam, Saran-Wrap, diet pills, the Bomb*. (31)

As Didion mourns the loss of “society’s values,” this loss is mapped onto a movement out of suburban life.

At stake in this movement out of the suburbs is the counterculture’s radical departure from the family as a form of social order. In Didion’s narrative, the dissolution of the family provides the ideological basis of a cautionary tale against

countercultural experimentation. Didion describes young children taking drugs, and irresponsible mothers such as Sue Ann, whose three-year old son Michael accidentally started a fire – “which is probably why Sue Ann was so jumpy when she happened to see him chewing on an electric cord. ‘You’ll fry like rice,’ she screamed.” (34) While Didion’s emphasis is on the mother’s irresponsibility, a feminist counter-history necessarily diverges from this critique of transgressive motherhood. What is altogether absent from Didion’s account is Sue Ann’s precarity as a single-mother. To the contrary, Sue Ann’s irresponsibility is instrumental to Didion’s nostalgia for the suburban, nuclear family.

In undermining the utopianism of ‘free love,’ Boyle’s novel consistently foregrounds the gendered problematics of the communalist lifestyle -- lending insight into what is predominantly absent from the post-60s historiographies of the ‘hip’ communes. The female experience of ‘free love’ is divulged in such moments, while the narrative remains distant and critical -- rendering all of its subjects somehow complicit: “Lydia was there, Merry, Maya, all looking on with washed-out smiles. They were the chicks, and they were serving breakfast. Tomorrow it would be somebody else’s turn, another group of chicks.” A provocative intervention emerges from this sardonic narration, which illuminates the contours of ideological contradiction in the commune -- the becoming suburban of the commune as anti-suburb. “At home out here no matter what the conditions,” reflects one of the communards, Marco, “taking what the land gives you, living small and a million light-years from the suburbs.” (Boyle 260)

The sexual division of labor in the rural hip communes indicates the extent to which the conventions of suburban life were reproduced through forms of patriarchy and feminized labor. The communes and the suburbs provide social maps of domestic relations, marginalized by and from the productive sphere through what Dorte Kuhlmann describes as spatial “mechanisms of separation.” (Kuhlmann 188) Like the private, suburban home, the commune is a feminized spatiality – an interiority structured by the domestication and subordination of women. To this extent, the rural commune mirrors the spatial logics of the suburban household, compromising the social dynamics of the utopian project.

While *Drop City* foregrounds these problematics and contradictions of the sexual division of labor, this is not in the service of a feminist critique so much as an anti-utopianism that decapitates the ‘realism’ of any possible feminist interventions. Rather than conceive this historical landscape as one of conflictual and dialectical processes, the narrative depicts women in the communes as non-agential. “She went out into the night, shouting for him, but the shouts died in her throat,” Boyle describes of Star, as she processes the disbandment of the commune: “...he wasn’t coming back, nobody was coming back, Marco was dead, Drop City was dead, and she might as well have been dead herself.” Here, she is depicted as “freezing” and “helpless” – “there was nothing she could do.” The sequence continues:

Then she was in her cabin, laying wood on the fire. She had the place to herself, at least for the moment, because everybody else was in the meeting hall, debating, shouting, glutting themselves on the bad vibes and negativity, and the people who hadn’t been there for dinner were there now – she’d seen the hurrying dark forms huddled against the snow, panic time, oh yes indeed. She tried to steady herself. Tried to

talk herself down from the ledge she'd stepped out on here. What she needed most of all was to be calm, to think things through in a slow, orderly fashion... *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold*. She saw herself as a Drop City widow... peeling potatoes, hauling frozen buckets of human waste out to the refuse heap, living day by day through the slow deterioration of everything she cared about, everything she'd built and fought for, and... the whole impossible naïve idealistic hippie tripe she'd been on ever since she left home. (Boyle 273)

Here, she comes to embody utopian failure – internalizing these contradictions, as well as the anti-utopian refrain that Boyle borrows from Didion, that “things falls apart; the centre cannot hold.” Peeling potatoes and hauling buckets of feces, she has no way out of the inevitability of failure, and comes to think of herself through the logics of impossibility, naivety, and idealism. She has no place in the meeting hall, she shouts in the woods at night with no one there to listen – and even then, she hardly has a voice.

In 1974, a selection of women from different communes published an anonymous editorial in *Communities*, which argues that “especially for women who are coming from nuclear family situations, the freedom of communal living is immensely rewarding on a very practical level.” (“*Communities* No. 7, 1974”) To an extent, they explain, basic chores are shared in most communes, and yet “work in communes other than the necessary everyday chores often still reflects the conditioning we have all gone through.” (ibid) This conditioning is reflected throughout contemporary accounts of the communes, such as journalist Richard Fairfield's travelogue, which includes the following interview with an unnamed male communal “leader”:

It's really unbelievable what those chicks have learned to do over a fire that's nothing more than a hole in the ground. I think we're really lucky and I've been in a lot of communes before this, three of them before we got together. If the chicks aren't making it, if the chicks don't have any energy and don't want to do anything, like be chicks, you know, wash dishes, cook, then you're in for trouble because there's nothing worse than not getting your food, having all the dishes stacked up. (Fairfield 107)

In Fairfield's account, this chauvinism is hardly interrogated, while there are several retrospective accounts of communal life that help bring visibility to the experience of the "chicks." Of her experience in the initial months of a twelve-person commune in 1969, Kit Leder recalls the extent to which the gender roles of the commune compromised the group's attempt to function outside of societally-enforced structures of inequality: "Even though there was no society-dictated division of labor, even though we had complete freedom to determine the division of labor ourselves, a well-known pattern emerged immediately," as Leder reflects. She explains that "Women did most of the cooking, all of the cleaning up, and, of course, the washing. They also worked in the fields all day – so that after the farm work was finished, the men could be found sitting around talking and taking naps while the women prepared supper." (T. Miller, *The Hippies* 96)

Based on his research of the communes in the 1970s, sociologist Benjamin Zablocki argues "Communal living provides females with an opportunity to 'catch up' with males in diversity of sexual experience." (Zablocki 341) However, based on Zablocki's comparative assessments of numerous communes during the period, there is also a clear pattern of exploitation: "Women spend more than double the amount of time than men do each week (12.3 hours versus 5.7 hours) on cleaning, cooking, and



dishwashing,” Zablocki explains, adding that “the imbalance is even greater with respect to minding other members' children and doing laundry (2.6 versus 1.1).” (318) Along with the cleaning, cooking, dishwashing, laundry, and child-rearing, what should be incorporated into Zablocki’s assessment is a more explicit ideological critique of ‘free love’ as a component of this division of labor. As Zablocki writes, “In some of the communes some of the women came to be defined as either mothers or females, but not both,” continuing that one woman complained in an interview that she had to leave because, as the only ‘female’ in the house, she was expected to be “free, loose, and sexually available” at all times.

‘Free love’ has come to mean, in large part since the late 1970s, a naïve and unsustainable sexual practice of the American counterculture. The contradictions of free love that are thematized by *Drop City* are part of a broader caricature of this historical period – a certain parody that has been repeated throughout the popular imaginary of the “end of the sixties,” as a cultural narrative of political failure and revolutionary foreclosure that coincides with the dominance and expansion of neoliberal capital on a global scale. The impossibility of a life outside capital is precisely at stake in Boyle’s unforgiving satiricism – this can be read through the novel’s geographical imaginary of the communes, in its movement from the suburbs onto, eventually, the displaced rural wilderness of the homestead, where the characters find themselves lost in their own ‘idealism.’ As contemporary accounts from feminist communards reveal, free love entailed ideologically liberating aspects, while the lifestyle also reproduced oppressive dynamics of patriarchy within the

communes. There were radical interventions, and significant transgressions, which the novel precludes entirely in its slippage between anti-utopianism and anti-feminist fantasy. Illustrating the problems of the sexual division of labor only goes so far in Boyle's narrative, which ultimately undermines the ways in which this division was combatted and modified in many contexts, which are left off the map.

### New Communalism and Post-Work Imagination

“Perhaps Utopia can never be realized without destroying itself. If so, then this profoundly affects how any utopianism of spatial form can function as a practical social force within political-economic life.” – David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*

Setting aside the post-60s logics of failure, ‘contradiction’ provides a useful rubric for interrogating the sexual division of labor in the rural hip communes, precisely as utopian experiments of living outside the wage system. Many of these communities began as attempts to re-imagine social life through autonomy from the productive sphere. In communes such as Twin Oaks – which remains a vital community in Louisa County, Virginia – disbandment was avoided through systems of compulsory labor. As a trope of post-60s historiographies, failure has been an operative mode of narrativizing the unsustainability of these projects, rather than the conditions of their disbandment. Here, I will work through a different analysis of these conditions, in terms of the intersection of two processes: the structural impossibility of autonomy from the labor force imposed by the state, and the inexorability of a division of labor in the reproductive sphere. To pursue a history of these communities through a utopian methodology entails re-directing the account of

disbandment toward an analysis at the disjunction between, as Weeks suggests, antiwork critique and post-work possibility. (Weeks 102) The communes are necessarily approached as articulations of what Weeks calls a “post-work imaginary” – a “logic of imagination” that “conceives of the relation between the refusal of work and its abolition,” and which marks this disjunction between critique and possibility rather than serving as “a blueprint, [or] even precisely as content.” (ibid)

As sites of critique and anti-work experimentalism, the hip communes represent attempts to un-imagine the relationship between social life and the division of labor. Many communes began from a vision of mutual aid and communal responsibility, contingent on a degree of autonomy from external conditions of capitalism. In a 1968 interview, poet and co-founder of the New Buffalo commune Max Finstein elaborates the ways in which dependency steadily compromised this initial vision of autonomy from the labor economy and consumer capitalism:

Well, if you're burning wood and building with some wood, you have to use some kind of vehicle to bring the wood down and then you're hung on a gasoline economy. You've got to go 40 or 50 miles to get gas. You can't just carry it on your back. Throw the tractor away and use horses, but that requires a whole adjustment in your thinking. I especially don't know how you do it in the fact of this landscape. If you're going to carry all your wood by horse and wagon, it means you've got to go away for a few days. It's hard to get a man to go out and grow a field of corn or something, which he knows is just barely enough to keep him alive, when he can go to the Safeway. I mean, why go hunt a bear, take chances with your life, when you can just go to the Safeway and get some hamburgers? And at a place like The Buffalo you have to work things out in terms of: do enough people agree to do this? (Miller 64)

As Finstein's account expatiates, putting the antiwork critique into practice entails a great deal of work – mandating a certain work ethic among the communards. How

can such a work ethic develop without modeling itself after the ‘work ethic’ of the capitalist labor force?

As projects of putting antiwork critique into practice, the communes are gestures toward post-work possibility, which also illuminate the limits of possibility in un-imagining the logics of ‘work’ as a system of exploitation. This is precisely the contradiction of the sexual division of labor that predominantly emerged among the communes – although there are many inconsistencies and heterogeneities to account for among these projects, this division remains an extensively homogenizing force. As a utopian concept, ‘post-work possibility’ does not necessitate a vision of life without work, but rather, life without work as a mode of oppression. However, many communities disbanded due to an inability to reconceive of the reproductive sphere. The notion of ‘post-work possibility’ is in this sense necessarily pursued as a feminist issue.

While approaching the phenomenon as essentially varied and pluralistic in his sociological studies of New Communalism, Zablocki found that within these communities, many of which were premised upon a politics of equality, it was the “informal power distinctions and male/female status distinction that proved most difficult to eradicate... None of the communes in our sample were fully able to eradicate hierarchical stratification.” (Zablocki 291) Consistently, this hierarchism was expressed in terms of communal systems of labor – as Zablocki reports, “We did not find a single example of a commune without a power hierarchy or of one in which the men did as much of what has traditionally been called ‘woman’s work’ as did the

women.” (320) In addition to the various chores that were performed exclusively by women in many communes – cooking, dishes, laundry, child-rearing – the practice of ‘free love’ should be incorporated into this observation of hierarchism in the communes. Some communes featured a hierarchical system among women, divided between ‘mothers’ or ‘females’ – the latter meaning “free, loose, and sexually available.” (319) As Zablocki recalls in one interview, a woman “complained [about] the negative sexual orientation of her former communal house as being chauvinistic. She said that she had to leave because she had become the only ‘female’ in the house,” adding that there were two other women in the house who were not ‘female,’ “one because she was married and had a child... and another because she was having psychological problems.” (ibid) ‘Sexually available,’ in this case, corresponds with compulsory labor – a form of oppression that is problematically marginalized by accounts of disbandment, as well as anti-utopian dismissals of ‘free love.’

Failure, as Ruth Levitas argues, is an “inevitable part of the process of trying to think utopia itself.” (Levitas, “For Utopia” 39) And disbandment is beside the point. The conditions of disbandment are instead the issue – the terms of ‘success’ against which ‘failure’ becomes imagined. The inevitability of failure, as Levitas suggests, is structural to the idea of utopia. ‘Utopia’ instead helps us to elaborate the conditions of possibility for a counter-culture – precisely as a process of active antagonism, and critical negation. The attempt to construct a life within a wageless system cannot be critiqued on the premise of a social blueprint, but in terms of a set of practices and tactics that were put into effect as ways to mitigate the contradictions

and deal with the realities of living under the totalizing scope of capitalism. The conditions of disbandment reflect the lived experience of contradiction in the communes – while the ‘defeat’ ascribed to this process, however, is anti-utopian. Yet what is most problematic in this notion of failure is that it conceives of disbandment primarily in terms of internal conditions, without consideration of the ways in which these conditions, too, were structured by the seeming externalities of the state and the market. By the early 1970s, the communes were extensively criminalized. Many were under threat of closure for health-code violations from the state authorities, or because compromised reliance on federal aid such as food stamps.

A useful counterpart to the post-work imagination that can be read into the ‘hip’ communes is the 1970s Italian feminist movement Wages For Housework, for which the demand for a wage brings visibility to the domestic sphere – and for which there is no ‘outside’ to capital, and hence, no outside to the wage. By contrast, we see how the wageless system of the rural communes in the U.S. only further invisibilize domestic labor. Silvia Federici, co-founder of Wages For Housework, argues that housework had to be “transformed into a natural attribute rather than be recognized as a social contract because from the beginning of capital’s scheme for women this work was destined to be unwaged.” Because of the naturalization of housework as feminized labor, Federici explains that “the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon of reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it.” (Federici 2) In the wageless commune and the Wages For Housework movement, we find

different utopian impulses to imagine beyond the wage system at the precipice of postindustrial capitalism – while for the Wages For Housework movement, this was more explicitly a feminist “revolutionary strategy.” (Cox and Federici 14) As a revolutionary strategy, Wages For Housework also rejects the utopian strategy of autonomy from the wage system – what ultimately structures the ‘failure’ of the hip communes.

### Of Anti-Utopia and Satire

More than an account of the communes in the long 1960s, *Drop City* provides an account of the “end of the sixties” which is particular to the cultural moment of the early 2000s – the post-9/11 paradigm of reactionary satire. The periodicity of the novel, in this sense, can be understood in terms of the re-articulation of the “end of the sixties” as a mechanism of ideological control and political foreclosure, conjured precisely in the post-9/11 era of a rejuvenated “end of history.” “There is no remedy for this extreme situation,” as Jean Baudrillard writes in his controversial essay “The Spirit of Terrorism,” continuing that “war is certainly not a solution, since it merely offers a rehash of the past, with the same deluge of military forces, bogus information, senseless bombardment, emotive and deceitful language, technological deployment and brainwashing.” Baudrillard describes the collapse of the twin towers as a “non-event, an event that does not really take place,” like the Gulf War. (Baudrillard 34) As Ted Gournelos and Viveca Greene suggest, it is possible to characterize the post-9/11 era as “much by dissent – often in the form of ironic or humorous expression – as by acceptance of simplified notions of good and evil and of

amplified state power.” (Gournelos and Greene xi) In the case of Boyle’s narrative, ‘utopia’ becomes a way of sorting out this distinction between dissent and radical critique and oversimplification, and Gramscian ‘common sense.’

Satire has always been a representational strategy for utopian literature and thought. For both Plato and More, satire provides a tone and narrative parameters of speculation, which enable the necessary suspension of conditions of possibility for the interpretation of different critiques of ‘impossibility.’ The utopian genre, in this sense, has relied on satire as a way to disrupt conventions of truth-value in factual and fictional genres. In More’s *Utopia*, the travelogue and the Platonic dialogue become elements of the text’s satire. While satire has been an instrumental representational strategy throughout utopian literature, “when satire is not confined to real society, and is aimed at the imagined society,” as Fatima Vieira suggests, “when the satirical tone becomes dominant and supersedes pedagogy, satire ceases to be a means and becomes an end – and we are then pushed out of the realm of utopian literature.” (Vieira 8) It is precisely this shift that can be traced in Boyle’s novel, to the register of anti-utopia. The satire is turned onto the utopia itself, rather than the world that rendered its failures inevitable.

Throughout *Drop City*, Star foresees the conditions of disbandment, while actively resisting her own ideological construction of ‘failure.’ What is ultimately most anti-utopian about the novel is its satirization of Star’s utopian impulses, which are interrogated through prophetic flashes of dystopian deterioration:

Star had a vision of the future... of the winter, music-less, dull as paste, everybody crowded into a couple of half-finished cabins with no



running water and no toilets and getting on each other's nerves while the snow fell and the ice thickened and the wind came in over the treetops like the end of everything. She held it a moment and then shook it out of her head. (Boyle 308)

Occasionally quite cruel, the narration portrays the turmoil of Star's interior experience, vacillating between naivety and a reflexivity that fixates on her own "foolishness." The anti-futurity already at work in the utopian projects described in *Drop City* conveys the periodicity of the novel – the extent to which this articulation of the "end of the sixties," as an operative trope of neoliberalism, is reconfigured in the early 2000s as the anti-1960s. Written against the backdrop of another Vietnam, and published the year of the invasion of Iraq, this return to the end of the sixties symptomatizes a certain loss of innocence for which satire appears as the necessary antidote. Like 'Drop City,' the sixties are over before they start – the novel is framed entirely by the dissociation with the revolutionary and utopian energies of the American counterculture.

Lauren Groff's 2012 novel *Arcadia* takes a similar premise, as a vague approximation of another existing 'hip' commune, which focuses on the troubled dynamics and inevitable catastrophes of a community in upstate New York based on The Farm. The narration takes its focus on the five-year-old Bit, the first child born into this fictionalized commune. From this standpoint of innocence, the narrative develops an extensive condemnation of countercultural lifestyles. Eventually, *Arcadia* aligns with the cautionary tale of Didion's Haight-Ashbury – unfolding the tragic recklessness of adults in the community, from an endangered perspective free from complicity. The moral tone of the novel provides a point of contrast with the satirical

tone of *Drop City*, which is amoral in the sense of cultivating complacency. *Arcadia* attempts to get outside of an anti-utopian logic, but the result of this attempt is dystopian – rather than, as in *Drop City*, a retreat into anti-utopian irony.

*Arcadia* ends in a speculative future, when Bit is nostalgic for the friendships of his childhood in the commune. It is 2018 and Bit lives an urban life, with an ambivalent relationship to technology. He reads poetry, “finding in its fragmentation the proper echo of the disintegrating world.” (Groff 224) This is a dystopic 2018:

The monster is peering in the window. The ice caps have melted, the glaciers are nearly gone; the interiors of the continents becoming unlivable, the coasts so storm-battered people are fleeing by the millions. New Orleans and the Florida Keys are being abandoned. The hot land-bound places are being given for lost; Phoenix and Denver becoming ghost towns. Every day, refugees show up in the city. A family takes shelter in the lee of Bit’s front steps, parents with two small children, silent and watchful... He leaves food for them in a cooler. It is all he can do. As ever, his kind is frozen by the magnitude of the problem; the intentionally ignorant still deny that there is a problem. (ibid)

Unlike *Drop City*, *Arcadia*’s representation of failure in the communes is part of a larger framework of systemic struggle and contradiction. Bit’s daughter is missing in this treacherous landscape. Contrasting this landscape with the communes, the novel does not, however, escape the binary of failure or nostalgia, which Jameson describes as the fundamental underpinnings of the ‘sixties’ in the post-60s era. The future, as the novel suggests, will get worse – and it is this dystopian orientation that enables, only through hindsight, a utopian orientation toward the 1960s communes.

In both *Arcadia* and *Drop City*, we encounter a degraded counterculture whose defeat and recuperation in the post-60s stages the already apparent

contradictions at work in the communes as utopian projects. Between these narratives, however, we can delineate a certain trajectory, out of the anti-utopianism of the early 2000s and the beginning of the Iraq War, and the dystopianism that gradually congeals in the years to follow. *Arcadia* describes a dystopia of the post-financial crisis – a terrain of infinite contradictions, as opposed to the seemingly contained contradictions of the commune in Bit’s childhood. This is a horizon of foreclosed utopianism, but it is also future-oriented. Using strategies of utopian representation – unlike *Drop City* – *Arcadia* takes a cautionary tone, producing what Darko Suvin calls a “polemic nightmare.” (Suvin 189)

#### Excavating Drop City

The co-founders of the real Drop City approached communalism explicitly as an extension of their art practice of ‘dropping’ -- as Alastair Gordon writes, Drop City was “an ongoing collaborative performance [of] living spontaneously and intuitively,” in which “Art, life, and politics would merge into an all-for-one web of synergy.” None of this synergy is retained in the novel *Drop City*. Whereas Boyle’s communards are looking for permanence against the inevitability of disbandment – and the inevitability of the “end of the sixties” – the “droppers” were oriented toward utopian processes of disalienation. Conceived “as rural ‘decompression chambers,’” as William Hedgepeth writes, Drop City in many ways reflects the experimental energies and creative impulses of New Communalist utopianism.

Located outside of Trinidad, Colorado, the communes was built on a six-acre goat pasture, and brought together, as Timothy Miller writes:

...most of the themes that had been developing in other recent communities – anarchy, pacifism, sexual freedom, rural isolation, interest in drugs, art – and wrapped them flamboyantly into a commune not quite like any that had gone before. Drop City thus represents the point at which a new type of commune-building had definitively arrived. It was defiantly outrageous, proclaiming itself a whole new civilization, its members rejecting paid employment and creating wildly original funky architecture. It pioneered what soon became a widespread hippie love of integrated arts, creating multimedia extravaganzas, using color profusely, employing trash as source material, blending art with everything else in life. It gave its inhabitants new names, rejected all kinds of social conventions, and became a pilgrimage site for those seeking new cultural horizons. (Miller, *The 60s Communes* 31-32)

When the commune began in May of 1965, its founders Clark Richert and Gene and Joann Bernofsky were inspired by the architectural designs of Buckminster Fuller and Steve Baer, in their vision of the dome as an ideal dwelling. The dome, as Mark Matthews explains, was designed “[to] function independent of power lines, waterlines, and sewers – like ships and aircraft[s].” (Matthews 65) Ultimately, the commune was comprised of 17 inhabited dome structures. These colorful, eccentric structures are the focus of many contemporary accounts of the commune's otherworldly scenery. In images and film footage of the commune, it appears as if a cosmic imaginary had dropped onto the stark prairie landscape. The architectural vision of the commune is perhaps one of the only consistent elements in the history of Drop City. As Erin Elder explains of the commune's co-founders, the “Droppers” imagined their architectural vision as a counterpart to the suburban communities “exploding across America in rigid configurations of tract homes and strip malls, and by young people yielding to the pressure of mundane jobs, families, and a routine existence.” (Elder 9) “The domes of Drop City came to represent a collective symbol

of anti-bourgeois freedom, an attitude vis-a-vis recuperated materials and construction based on a stimulating mathematical principle,” writes Caroline Maniaque Benton. (Benton, *French Encounters* 31) In 1967, the commune would receive Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion award for innovative and economic housing construction. While many historians place emphasis on problems in Drop City's community infrastructure, the commune's creative engagement with architectural design marks a significant achievement.

Besides its utopian conception of dome architecture, the Drop City commune was also fundamentally committed to the aesthetics of “Drop Art.” While art students in Kansas City, Richert and the Bronowski's “put on a series of 'Droppings' in which various objects – furniture, painted rocks, water balloons – were pushed out of windows or off the roofs of buildings,” as Alastair Gordon describes, distinguishing between 'Droppings' and contemporaneous New York avant-garde 'happenings':

Drop City was a continuation, and expansion of those early pieces... but unlike the Kaprow-style happenings that had been loosely scripted and staged for a certain time and place, Drop City would be a nonstop, round-the-clock happening or dropping that kept going, 365 days a year... The Droppers adopted new ideas in communal living, making it up as they went along. Money and possessions were shared. Lovers and everyday chores were shared. Members of the community would take part in an ongoing collaborative performance by living spontaneously and intuitively. Art, life, and politics would merge into an all-for-one web of synergy. (Gordon 47)

In this sense, the commune was imagined as a performative space – a site for experimentation and collaboration, structured only by spontaneity. Soon after its formation, as journalist Richard Fairfield writes in 1973, “The Drop City people were

the avant-garde of American society and they invited everyone to come visit. They even pulled off a big art festival, which attracted young hip types from all over the country.” (Fairfield 203)

The decline of Drop City could be easily incorporated into the anti-utopian recuperation of New Communalism – a process that marks the inevitable failure, and the naïve impossibility of such projects reaching a point of sustainability. As I have discussed in this chapter, sustainability has been a problematic premise for thinking about the projects of these communes – providing the basis for an anti-utopian critique that itself reflects far more about the ideological foreclosure that seeks to delegitimize utopia in the post-60s.

A site of exile from the suburbs, the commune had an open door policy that, as Fairfield describes, “resulted in an inundation by hordes of teenage runaways, thrill seekers, sightseers, and miscellaneous dropouts – mostly of the irresponsible variety.” (204) Of his visit to Drop City in 1969, Fairfield recalls:

I did find the answers, but Drop City had been through many changes in its four-year history. It was still changing and would continue to change, so for each answer to a question, there is another question – and another answer, and so forth. They took their meals together in the giant double-dome today. But tomorrow? Decisions in a group of this size were by consensus, but what will happen when more people arrive? Income comes mainly from food stamps, outside help, and barter of commune-made products. .. But how long will these simple economics last; how will they change? The answers are not structured... The essence of Drop City is change. In this respect it is a microcosm of American society, which has moved into an era of accelerated change – indeed so much so that America, perhaps more than any other country in the world, is sinking deeper and deeper into the quagmire of affluence. (207)

The story of Drop City is often told as a failure, and more specifically, as the dissolution of the commune's American idealism – of that which posed an alternative to the suburbs – into what Robert P. Sutton describes as “a communal slum”:

The garden started by the first Droppers became an arid patch of pigweed. There were no work assignments, so all tasks were done voluntarily, most not at all. There was no communal leadership, although two older men... and a 35-year old working-class mother [assumed] sporadic roles as directors. The kitchen, [ransacked], was infested with transients. There was not enough money to purchase soap, and everyone was filthy. Food stamps lasted only halfway through the month and then they went to Trinidad to scavenge food from outdoor trash containers. The single outhouse overflowed and there was no lime to clean it. Hepatitis spread through the colony. They stopped admitting visitors. (Sutton 136)

The overflowing outhouse of Drop City could symbolize the eventual collapse of New Communalism by the mid-1970s, and the disorder of the American counterculture more generally. Such a symbol of imminent failure could be located in the overwhelming majority of hip communes from this period. Everywhere there are signs of ephemerality and instability that are only accentuated by the conditions of the present moment, a generation later, when it is perhaps already difficult not to perceive these communes as mere relics.

Drop City, in this sense, is an object of periodicity, from which many of the thematic elements of the 'post-60s' can be delineated and extracted. The story of the commune's dissolution performs such a periodization: as Erin Elder writes,

In the end Drop City was rumored to host a methamphetamine factory, a vicious round of hepatitis, and possibly even a murder. Drop City was shut down in 1973 by the local health department; the remaining inhabitants were evicted and the land was sold to finance other projects. This brand of kaleidoscopic ruin was not an uncommon ending for the rash of communes that broke out across the Southwest and may account

for the ways in which their legacy has been ignored or oversimplified.  
(Elder 13)

Often emphasized in the post-60s era are not only the failures of 1960s radicalism, but also the contradictions that reveal the potentiality – or perhaps, the inevitability – of that failure. However, the reduction of New Communalism to such a narrative of imminent failure vastly oversimplifies, as Elder suggests, the complex landscape of radical experimentation during this period. The ruins of Drop City seem far more symbolically charged than the commune's overflowing outhouse – eradicated from history, the ruins are among many sites of cultural suppression which describe so much of the 1960s as a period with political stakes in the contemporary moment. The domes of Drop City gradually decayed. Today, sitting on the land of A. Blasi and Sons Trucking Company, the remains of Drop City have mostly given in to gravity, leaving barely a trace of the land's previous vibrancy and utopic force.

## Chapter Two

### “There is no use pretending, now”: Reading Le Guin’s 1970s Critical Utopias Against Anti-Utopianism

“Still, this is the advantage of the new direction, that we do not anticipate the world dogmatically but that we first try to discover the new world from a critique of the old one... If the construction and preparation of the future is not our business, then it is more certain what we do have to consummate -- I mean the ruthless criticism of all that exists, ruthless also in the sense that criticism does not fear its results and even less so a struggle with the existing powers.” -- Karl Marx, “Letter to Arnold Ruge”

In 1982, Ursula K. Le Guin describes a “non-euclidean” utopianism that would not be European or masculinist. She explains that what she is “trying to



suggest, in an evasive, distrustful, untrustworthy fashion, and as obscurely as [possible],” is that “our final loss of faith in that radiant sandcastle may enable our eyes to adjust to a dimmer light and in its perceive another kind of utopia.” (Le Guin, “A Non-Euclidean View” 86) In this “final loss of faith” of the post-60s paradigm of anti-utopianism, Le Guin instead approaches the “end” of utopia as a site of opportunity – an impetus to both critique and historicize the cultural tendencies of utopianism, as a product of western expansionism. The ostensible “end” of utopia, for Le Guin, is rather point of radical disjuncture, from which to rework and undo the colonial imaginary of the utopian genre.

The “transition from the 60s to the 70s,” as Jameson reflects in 1977, “was a passage from spontaneous practice to renewed theoretical reflection, and this is as true in the realm of Utopian discourse as it is elsewhere,” adding that “it is therefore no surprise that after the reawakening of the Utopian impulse in the previous decade, we should begin to witness the maturation of a whole new generation of literary Utopias.” (Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches” 77) Through the course of the 1970s, alongside the discourse of waning utopianism and the congealment of what would become articulable as the post-60s later on, the ‘critical utopia’ proliferated as a sub-genre explored especially by feminists like Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Octavia Butler, Joanna Russ, Dorothy Bryant, Doris Lessing, among others. A critical utopia is fundamentally, as Lyman Tower Sargent suggests, “a critical view of the utopian genre.” (Sargent, “Introduction” 2) For this emergent tradition of critical utopias, Ruth Levitas explains, “utopia is not dead, but the kind of utopianism that is holistic,

social, future-located, committed, and linked to the present by some identifiable narrative of change.” (Levitas and Sargisson 15) The critical utopia may be interpreted, by extension, as an analogy to the present – no different from Thomas More’s 1516 text, as an indirect critique of private property in contemporary England. While a ‘critical utopia’ might in this sense seem redundant – pointing to the already operative modes of social critique featured in western utopian literature – it also reflects a historically specific crisis in the idea of utopia, which emerges from the ideological paradigm of the ‘post-60s.’ As Levitas argues, critical utopias “disrupt the ideological closure of the present,” beyond providing an analogy. (16) The critical utopia develops from the “deep conflicts of the 1960s,” as Moylan explains, “rooted in an affluence that hinted at the end of scarcity and in an experience of the repression of exploitation of nature and humanity needed to achieve such affluence,” such that a “subversive utopianism” was awakened. (Moylan, “Demand the Impossible” 10) As a formation of the post-60s, this emergent sub-genre reflects this sense of closure as a historical condition for utopian imagination. Many critical utopias pose direct interventions to the conventions of the genre – specifically, to the colonality of ‘utopia’ as a genre of western empire.

Le Guin’s 1972 novel *The Word for World is Forest* can be read through this disjuncture, in its exploration of competing utopianisms through a multiplicity of narrative perspectives. The novel represents a ‘critical utopia’ in the sense that it puts into crisis the politics of various tropes and conventions of utopian literature, as a genre which proliferates alongside the history of capitalism, fixated on the notion of

an outside to processes of primitive accumulation. In the case of Le Guin's novel, this critical analogy becomes a way to interrogate U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

The critique of *The Word for World is Forest* comes forth most of all in the character Captain Don Davidson, a colonist who has established a military base called 'New Tahiti' on the planet Athshe. As the novel begins, the humans are in the process of expropriating the land from the indigenous Athsheans, an alien species with green fur and humanoid features whom the humans call 'creechies.' From Davidson's perspective:

...this world, New Tahiti, was literally made for men. Cleaned up and cleaned out, the dark forests cut down for open fields of grain, the primeval murk and savagery and ignorance wiped out, it would be a paradise, a real Eden. A better world than worn-out Earth. And it would be his world. For that's what Don Davidson was, way down deep inside him: a world-tamer. (Le Guin, *The Word For World* 11-12)

Le Guin uses utopian tactics of satire to undermine Davidson's authority as one of the text's multiple narrative perspectives. Whatever insight the reader gains into Davidson's psyche is always implicitly critiqued. As a 'world-tamer,' Davidson is not only the villain of the novel, but a caricature of the racist masculinism of utopian heroism – he is the anti-Robinson Crusoe, who imparts to the reader the fallacy of his own utopianism.

What drives Davidson's 'utopianism' are a set of ideological problematics which become central to the polemics of Le Guin's narrative, as a critical utopia concerned with not only historicizing the conditions of colonialism from which the sixteenth and seventeenth century utopias were imagined, but with reasserting an

alternate conception of utopia that works against the ways in which conditions of colonialism persist in the post-60s. Through its analogy to the early 1970s, the narrative calls into question the neo-coloniality of Cold War geopolitics and the presiding logic of expansion in the Vietnam War. “They’re going to get rubbed out sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner,” as Davidson explains to one of his soldiers, “It’s just how things happen to be. Primitive races always have to give way to civilized ones. Or be assimilated. But we sure as hell can’t assimilate a lot of green monkeys.” (21) Here, the analogy to the early seventies emerges as a cautionary tale, as Davidson tries to recall the name of “those big monkeys who used to live in Africa,” which have implicitly gone extinct on “worn-out earth” in this speculative future. (12) “Gorillas,” his soldier reminds him. “Right. We’ll get on better without creechies here, just like we get on better without gorillas in Africa.” (21) Through Davidson, the analogic narrative operates always indirectly – inhabiting his perspective, the narration produces meaning by interrogating and falsifying his conception of utopia.

#### No More Blueprints: False Utopianism and Critical Utopias

False utopianism is a dominant trope of the critical utopian tradition. “A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition,” as Tom Moylan suggests, “so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream.” (Moylan, “Demand the Impossible” 10) The false utopia of *The Word for World is Forest* is this version of blueprintist utopianism,

epitomized by Davidson and other human colonists, who attempt to map out and enact a human colony on the planet, through expropriation and deforestation. This false utopianism of colonization is contrasted with the utopian practice of the Athsheans – whose cultural practices comprise both ‘world-time’ and ‘dream-time.’ Dreams and dreaming are integral to the Athshean culture, and what distinguishes their utopian practice from the false utopianism crystallized in Davidson. Rather than as a blueprint, the dream-time operates as a utopia from which to continually transform and act collectively in the world. This is not innate to the Athsheans, but cultural. As the Athshean Torber explains, it is possible to train humans to dream: “Sometimes they talk of their dreams, the healers try to use them in healing, but none of them are trained, or have any skill in dreaming.” (Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest* 45) Of the human Lyubov, Torber recalls that that “[he] understood me when I showed him how to dream, and yet even so he called the world-time ‘real’ and the dream-time ‘unreal,’ as if that were the difference between them.” (45) What is fundamental to the Athshean utopian conception of dream-time is a critique of the ‘realism’ in human culture – the extent to which this false utopianism reflects and reproduces the logics of colonialism.

While featuring competing utopianisms, *The Word for World is Forest* constructs a contrast between these conceptions of ‘utopia’ as an object of representation. More specifically, as an object of representation, utopia is treated as a problem of narrative – which can be traced through this opposition between Davidson, the colonist, and Selver, the revolutionary who mobilizes the Athsheans

against the human colonizers. Through Davidson, the text problematizes the progress narrative, as a mode of utopian imagination:

... when they came here there had been nothing. Trees. A dark huddle and jumble and tangle of trees, endless, meaningless. A sluggish river overhung and choked by trees, a few creechie-warrens hidden among the trees, some red deer, hairy monkeys, birds. And trees. Roots, boles, branches, twigs, leaves, leaves overhead and underfoot and in your face and in your eyes, endless leaves on endless trees... But the men were here now to end the darkness, and turn the tree-jumble into clean sawn planks, more prized on Earth than gold... New Tahiti was intended for humans to take over. (15-16)

It is precisely this ‘utopia’ of colonial progress that renders this planet of such bountiful life and endless trees and leaves into “nothing.” To the contrary, this is a blank space – including the indigenous species – on which to transpose a utopia based on ‘realism.’ As Davidson narrates, “The theories about Atlantis were a lot more realistic, and this might well be a lost Atlantean colony.” (17) In this notion of progress, the utopian narrative is a teleological construction – a temporal orientation grounded in actually existing spatial and material conditions. To this extent, as Fatima Vieira and Marinela Freitas suggest, we must remember that “utopia is part of the Western agenda and that it cannot be generalized as a universal ‘non-place,’” and that the historical context of utopia “implies the wishful aspiration for some kind of consensus, without necessarily making the naïve assumption that the consensus is the result of the free will of all participants.” (Vieira and Freitas 261)

In contrast with the utopian progress narrative of the human colonizers, the Athshean conception of dream-time demonstrates an alternate utopianism in the text, which takes up narrative as a problem of representation fundamental to utopia – that

is, how to make thinkable and perceptible what cannot be represented. As soon as a concept of utopia becomes narrated, it becomes historical. “Utopia is a historical concept,” as Herbert Marcuse suggests, “it refers to projects for social change that are considered impossible.” (Marcuse, “The End of Utopia”) For the Athsheans, dream-time transforms alongside and in relation to world-time – there is a dynamic relationship between these temporalities, which takes spatial form. Through the course of the novel, as Selver becomes more exposed to the logics and practices of colonialism and human culture, he loses his ability to dream – he no longer maintains contact with this concept of utopia, without the collectivity of Athsheans who continue to access dream-time. After killing all of the female humans, Selver confronts a human named Gosse, outside the gates of the colony: “We killed them to sterilize you. I know what a realist is, Mr. Gosse. Lyubov and I have talked about these words. A realist is a man who knows both the world and his own dreams,” Selver explains, revealing insight into his own insanity as a result of his influence from human culture. (Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest* 142) “You’re not sane: there’s not one man in a thousand who knows how to dream,” he continues, “you sleep, you wake and forget your dreams, you sleep again and wake again, and so you spend your whole lives, and you think that is being, life, reality!... Now go back and talk about reality with the other insane men.” (142-143) Selver’s notion of ‘realism’ as insanity is counterposed with a relation to world-time that does not suppress but brings into action the thoughts and concepts of dream-time. This suppression of dreams is a version of anti-utopianism that Le Guin distinguishes from ‘realism.’

For the Athsheans, utopia is a process of the imagination, which consists of cultural practices of narration and translation, and makes possible a collective consciousness through the skills of dreaming and interpretation. Here, utopia is conceived as a hermeneutics through which to rework the colonial imaginary of utopian literature. While mobilizing some of the dominant conventions and tropes of western utopias, the text develops these features of its narrative through a process of immanent critique.

Selver, in his lost ability to dream, is a locus of this critique, as he ultimately comes to figure the historical problematic of re-imagining ‘utopia’ from colonial modalities. “Sometimes a god comes,” Selver explains to the colonist Lepennon:

He brings a new way to do a thing, or a new thing to be done. A new kind of singing, or a new kind of death. He brings this across the bridge between the dream-time and the world-time. When he has done this, it is done. You cannot take things that exist in the world and try to drive them back into the dream, to hold them inside the dream with walls and pretenses. That is insanity. What is, is. There is no use pretending, now, that we do not know how to kill one another.” (188-189)

Here, Selver illustrates the impossibility of un-imagining colonialism – and moreover, the impossibility of incubating ‘utopia’ as a site exempt from history. There is no way for the Athsheans to return to life before the humans colonized the planet, even when the humans evacuate – leaving behind only Davidson, as a captive. In the end, Davidson’s fate is unclear. While for Selver, there is “no use pretending” to still exist in a world without murder, he remains aware of his own insanity – his own inability to dream.



As a critical utopia, *The Word for World is Forest* takes as its primary focus the question of how to represent utopianism – how to mediate this concept through language. In this sense, the text is concerned with both narrative and non-narrative conceptions of utopia, which is a contrast at work in this distinction between the colonial and indigenous variations of utopian belief, practice, and imagination. This contrast shows the ways that “the European ideas of freedom and practice, taught to the colonized, demonstrated the disjunction between belief and practice, and provided independence movements with the intellectual tools needed to confront their masters,” as Lyman Tower Sargent writes of postcolonial utopianism. (Sargent, “Colonial and postcolonial utopias” 212) For Selver, it is precisely his insight into the human notion of ‘realism’ that enables him to sabotage the false utopia of the colonists. While the humans ascribe to a utopianism structured by an ideological narrative of progress and civilization, the Athsheans approach utopia as a process of mediation. Dream-time and world-time, in this sense, can be understood as non-narrative and narrative articulations of this utopian process.

The novel thematizes language as an elaboration this process – as a way to think about mediation as a practice of translation, and inquire into the problem of how to represent a concept of utopia. Among the Athsheans, “there were more languages than lands, and each with a different dialect for every town that spoke it; there were infinite ramifications of manners, morals, customs, crafts.” (Le Guin, “*The Word For World*” 47) To deal with this plurality and decentralization, the Athsheans have a common sexual division of labor of dreamers and interpreters.

In all the Forty Lands, women ran the cities and towns, and almost every town had a Men's Lodge. Within the Lodges the Dreamers spoke an old tongue, and this varied little from land to land. It was rarely learned by women or by men who remained hunters, fishers, weavers, builders, those who dreamed only small dreams outside the Lodge. As most writing was in this Lodge-tongue, when headwomen sent fleet girls carrying messages, the letters went from Lodge to Lodge, and so were interpreted by the Dreamers to the Old Women, as were other documents, rumors, problems, myths, and dreams. But it was always the Old Women's choice whether to believe or not. (47-48)

Rather than render the feminized interpreter subordinate and passive, the Athsheans hold the interpreter in a position of power – as it is always a matter of their choices of interpretation. As opposed to the contemporary dynamics of anti-utopianism, the social role of dreaming is not feminized, but rather integrated into the practice of dreaming among men. The dream is generated prenarratively – it appears in non-narrative form, only to become narrated through a process of translation from the Lodge-tongue, and interpretation by the Old Women.

It is impossible, as the text suggests, to think about utopia as something other than a process of mediation. This arises from the disjuncture between language and meaning. It is no coincidence that, for this poly-lingual culture, the word for “god” also means “translator.”

Were the two meanings connected? Often they were, yet not so often as to constitute a rule. If a god was a translator, what did he translate? Selver was indeed a gifted interpreter, but that gift had found expression only through the fortuity of a truly foreign language having been brought into his world. Was a sha'ab one who translated the language of dream and philosophy, the Men's Tongue, into the everyday speech/ But all Dreamers could do that. Might he then be one who could translate into waking life the central experience of vision: one serving as a link between the two realities, considered by the Athsheans as equal, the dream-time and the world-time, whose

connections, though vital, are obscure. A link: one who could speak aloud the perceptions of the subconscious. To 'speak' that tongue is to act. To do a new thing. (123)

Rather than perceive 'utopia' as that which must remain impossibly represented, the Athshean's emphasis on language and the multiplicity of meanings orients the reader toward an alternate utopianism, compelled by the process of translating and interpreting – the practice of narration, which links the non-narrativity of utopian dreaming to the narrative logics of world-time.

As a 'no-place,' the concept of utopia, as Fredric Jameson suggests, can be understood as "mostly non-narrative," often somehow "without a subject-position." (Jameson, "Antinomies of Postmodernity" 55) The problem this no-place poses is that it must be made imaginable. In this sense, utopian texts often "focus on description over plot," as Holly White explains, describing a "mundane nature" of the genre. (White 61) As a "blueprint or roadmap," these descriptive texts are nonnarrative in the sense that they attempt to represent a space of non-conflictuality – a space resistant, in its very social conditions, to narrativization. Yet this is a structural impossibility – "Even when we look at something as static and completely spatial as a picture," as H. Porter Abbott writes, "narrative consciousness comes into play." (Porter 6) While "mostly non-narrative," Jameson explains, "a tourist-observer flickers through" the pages of a utopian text "and more than a few anecdotes are disengaged." (Jameson, "Antinomies of Postmodernity" 56)

As a sub-genre, the critical utopia takes up these problems of representation, without abandoning narrativity altogether, in the spirit of much postmodern literature.

As novels focused on conflict, as Tom Moylan suggests, critical utopias “focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives.” (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 11) Rather than an object of description, utopia is conceived as an impulse or drive active within the text, mobilizing its narrative through conflict. “Something must be lost or absent in any narrative for it to unfold,” as Terry Eagleton explains, “if everything stayed in place there would be no story to tell.” (Eagleton 161) As what Ernst Bloch describes as the “missing link,” utopia becomes narrativized as an object of desire. Of this absence in the narrative, Eagleton continues:

This loss is distressing, but exciting as well: desire is stimulated by what we cannot quite possess, and this is one source of narrative satisfaction. If we could never possess it, however, our excitation might become intolerable and turn into unpleasure; so we must know that the object will be finally restored to us. (ibid)

In the critical utopia, this loss is precisely that of utopian imaginability, which becomes problematized through historical analogy. Through this structure of an analogy to the present, the problem of imaginability is engaged through the work of narrative interpretation.

In *The Word for World is Forest*, narrative interpretation is a critical social process – the way in which knowledge is produced and circulated from dream-time to world-time. What makes interpretation crucial to this production of narrative knowledge is the plurality of meaning in language.

Many words of the Women’s Tongue, the everyday speech of the Athsheans, came from the Men’s Tongue that was the same in all communities, and these words often were not only two-syllabled, but

two-sided. They were coins, obverse and reverse. (Le Guin, “*The Word For World*” 122-123)

Interpretation requires the translation from the Men’s Tongue to the everyday speech of the Athsheans, and also the negotiation between the dual-meanings produced through language. This duality becomes a way to understand the dynamic between dream and world:

Once you have learned to do your dreaming wide awake, to balance your sanity not on the razor’s edge of reason but on the double support, the fine balance, of reason and dream; once you have learned that, you cannot unlearn it any more than you can unlearn to think. (116)

Just as colonialism cannot be un-imagined, as Selver ultimately argues, it is likewise impossible to un-imagine this “double support” and “fine balance” between these temporalities. This doubleness can be extended to an account of the status of utopia in the narrative more generally.

The critical utopia, as Christopher S. Ferns writes, offers “a narrative model... that evolved to articulate a particular sociopolitical vision in a specific historical context” and continues to be “deployed in very different historical circumstances, and even in the service of a vision whose ideological implications are in many cases virtually antithetical.” (Ferns 14) The utopian drive of a critical utopian narrative, in other words, is often framed antithetically to the described society. It is only through this antithetical conception that utopia can be properly engaged in these texts – otherwise, perhaps, the ‘critical utopia’ is indistinct from anti-utopianism. Operating antithetically, the critical utopia uses modes of indirect mediation – implications, allusions, satiricism – to construct an analogy of political critique. The critical utopia

is an antagonistic sub-genre, subverting and mutating various conventions of utopian literature to illuminate the limits of the utopian imagination as an epistemological and revolutionary problem.

### Critical Utopianism Against Anti-Utopianism

“...but I wish I could describe it better. I wish I could convince you.” – Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walked From Omelas”

Le Guin’s 1974 novel *The Dispossessed* begins with the self-description of an “ambiguous utopia.” This ambiguity can be traced throughout her work. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Le Guin wrote several ambiguous utopias. The ‘critical utopia’ lends a mode of interpretation for the Hainish Cycle – *Rocannon’s World*, *Planet of Exile*, *City of Illusions*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, as well as *The Dispossessed* and *The Word for World is Forest*. These texts describe a vast intergalactic and historical imaginary, saturated with ambiguities that illuminate the convergence between utopia and dystopia. Such convergences are defining features of the critical utopia, but precisely as a critique of the logic articulated by Karl Popper – who argues that “the Utopian attempt to realize an ideal state, using a blueprint of society as a whole, is one which demands a strong centralized rule of a few, and which therefore is likely to lead to a dictatorship.” (Popper 173) While engaging in a critique of blueprintism as colonialism, Le Guin’s texts do not operate under the logic, like Popper, that utopia is structurally dystopian.

To disregard ‘utopia’ as programmatist, or totalitarianism, would be to mistake form for politics. Instead, as Le Guin elaborates, ‘utopia’ can be

conceptualized as a practice that engages directly with the problem of representation so as not to be mistaken for it. What Le Guin calls ‘ambiguity’ in *The Dispossessed* describes a tactic that repoliticizes and redirects the concept of utopia, as an object of history that through various representational strategies facilitates forms of social critique.

Through narrative strategies of representation, Le Guin’s critical utopias of the 1970s interrogate the anti-utopianism of the post-60s paradigm through a sustained ideological critique – what must be interpreted through analogy, and often antithetically. *The Word for World is Forest* illuminates a juncture of crisis in the utopian imaginary of western literature – a point at which ‘utopia’ must be re-imagined from the history of European colonialism and the logic of expansion. For Le Guin’s Hainish series, the critical utopia offers a mode of interpreting the ambiguity proposed in *The Dispossessed*, responding to what Jameson describes as the return “to a more formalistic examination of precisely those narrative constraints or limits likely to arouse negative political reactions along with aesthetic ones,” which are “capable of stimulating that very anti-Utopianism which is the deepest enemy of this peculiar form.” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 203) While these narratives should be read as critiques of contemporary anti-utopianism – as a way to periodize, as I have suggested, the post-60s – they also call into question the very premise of waning utopianism during this period, as we examine this literature forty years later.

Of *The Dispossessed*, Krishan Kumar argues that “in the end, utopia and anti-utopia both find a place... but the line is blurred. Utopia is qualified by a wariness, a

caution and a questioning, that is a far reflection of its condition today.” (Kumar 414)

While reading into the utopian dynamics of the novel effectively, Kumar’s conception of Urras as an “anti-utopia” could be refined as a false utopia – precisely as a function of the critical utopia. Shevek, the protagonist who comes from the utopian planet Anarres, ultimately describes Urras in these false utopian terms:

Because there is nothing, nothing on Urras that we Anarresti need! We left with empty hands, a hundred and seventy years ago, and we were right. We took nothing. Because there is nothing here but States and their weapons, the rich and their lies, and the poor and their misery. There is no way to act rightly, with a clear heart, on Urras. There is nothing you can do that profit does not enter in, and fear of loss, and the wish for power... There is no freedom. It is a box – Urras is a box, a package, with all the beautiful wrapping of a blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities... I have been in Hell at last.. Hell is Urras. (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* 286)

What is most hellish about Urras, however, is not its anti-utopianism, but its false utopianism – its foreclosure of possibility, premised on an ideology of ‘human nature.’

The notion of “waning utopianism” is an iteration of what M. Keith Booker calls the ‘post-utopian imagination.’ Booker locates the “ultimate collapse of the American utopian imagination in the long 1950s,” which was the “culmination of a long history, the ironic consummation of the dreams of abundance experienced by America’s first European invaders.” (Booker 10) Booker’s periodization of the long 1950s can be understood as the counterpart to Jameson’s long 1960s – a conception of the 1960s as being essentially over before they ever began. Yet it is likewise possible to read against Booker’s periodization, as an extension of Jameson’s critique



in “Periodizing the 60s” – in this case, as Booker illustrates, this periodization is always already at work.

In “waning utopianism,” “post-utopianism,” and “anti-utopianism,” we find attempts to periodize utopia in the post-60s, which illustrate the historical complexities of this juncture of synchronous transformations – in which “the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new force,” as Jameson argues, including “the ethnic forces of black and ‘minority’ or third world movements everywhere, regionalisms, the development of new and militant bearers of ‘surplus consciousness’ in the student and women’s movements, as well as in a host of struggles of other kinds.” (Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s” 208) Each of these attempts to capture the periodicity of utopian imagination in the post-60s fails to account for both strains of feminist and postcolonial utopianism that can be found throughout Le Guin’s Hainish Cycle. These periodizations, moreover, fail to theorize the critical utopia, as a sub-genre that Le Guin and other feminist and postcolonial utopian writers use to further complicate the concept of ‘utopia’ from the problem of totalitarianism intrinsic to Cold War geopolitics.

It now seems possible to historicize the reactionary tendencies of anti-utopianism and post-utopianism, which conceive of ‘utopia’ and ‘dystopia’ synonymously, while being constrained by the structural threat of totalitarianism. To this extent, as Jameson argues in relation to Orwell, we must ask, “can we separate anti-Utopianism... from anti-communism?” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 201) The case

against totalitarianism as the logic of utopia, by this point, can be understood as a product of the Cold War paradigm of anti-utopianism – an inability to recognize the ways in which utopia, as a concept, was being nuanced from programmatism. The critical utopia represents such an endeavor to reconceptualize utopia, which emerges from these conditions of a crisis in utopian imagination. What all these competing periodizations make clear is precisely this: the post-60s must be understood not through the foreclosure of utopia but through the crisis of utopian imaginability.

In her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, written in 1969, Le Guin conceives of the critical utopia as a thought-experiment, explaining that “the purpose of a thought-experiment... is not to predict the future... but to describe reality, the present world.” In this sense, “science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive.” (Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* 3) In the critical utopia, as Susan Bernardo and Graham Murphy argue, “readers can see the tensions, contradictions, and frictions of utopian societies as they struggle to articulate social dreaming.” (Bernardo and Murphy 60) Yet this critical utopianism remains subordinated, and illegible to these periodizations of anti-utopianism and post-utopianism, which describe the reactionary tendencies of the post-60s, as a paradigm of political foreclosure and radical failure. What these periodizations leave out is the way in which the utopian genre remains a feminist strategy, as Tatiana Teslenko argues, “[empowering] women to counteract the symbolic violence of patriarchal discourse.” (Teslenko 161) The critical utopia, in this sense, is a feminized subgenre, which performs a set of theoretical interventions to the generic conventions of utopian literature.

In overlooking these feminist and postcolonial tendencies of the critical utopia, these periodizations of anti-utopianism and post-utopianism articulate not only, as Jameson suggests, anti-communist reactionism, but the white patriarchal fantasy of a return to domination – a fantasy formed out of fear and anxiety, as predominant affective modes of the 1970s, and mechanisms of political foreclosure in the post-60s. Le Guin’s critical utopias can be read as a sustained attack of these logics of utopia, which treat utopia as foremost a historical analogy. It is during the 1970s that the utopia of decolonization blurs with the dystopia of globalization, and the struggles of feminism blur with the feminization of labor – just as the critical utopia blurs the utopian and dystopian modes of narrative representation.

As an analogy to the present, Le Guin’s critical utopias function both as a direct engagement with the contemporary neo-colonialism of global capitalism, and as an indirect account of historical processes which have come to describe the post-60s. This includes the “feminization of the industrial proletariat and [an] unusual pattern of women’s employment characterized by a growing incidence of manufacturing rather than clerical and service jobs as ‘development’ proceeds,” as Saskia Sassen explains of the feminization of labor as a key historical process of the 1950s-70s. (Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital* 109) The emergence – or at least, the articulation – of the ‘critical utopia’ reflects this absorption of Third World countries into capitalist production and circulation, as well as the feminization of labor that obfuscates the politics and struggles of post-60s feminism. For many of Le Guin’s critical utopias, what remains consistent – rather than analogic – in relation to

the contemporary period are the dynamics of capital that must not only be historicized, but somehow exorcised from the utopian imagination. Rather than as limits to the generic possibilities of ‘utopia,’ as a mode of representation, these capitalist dynamics indicate the extent to which ‘utopia’ offers insight into the ideological conditions of anti-capitalist imaginability.

### Critical Negativity and False Utopia in Global Capitalism

“Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on.” – Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

In *The Word for World is Forest*, the coloniality of western utopianism is thematized in the problem of slavery, discussed throughout the narrative among the colonists themselves. “In that Applied History course I took in training,” says one of the colonists, “it said that slavery never worked. It was uneconomical.” To this, Davidson replies, “Right, but this isn’t slavery... Slaves are humans. When you raise cows, you call that slavery? No. And it works.” (Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest* 18) What determines the humanity of slaves, however, is entirely economic. Here, Le Guin captures the ways in which the historical conception of slavery – like the historical conception of utopia – is in fact structured by the logics of capitalism, for which colonialism must be reinvented in order to meet the demands of capitalist expansion. As Gosse explains to other colonists, “We have very limited personnel to accomplish our tasks here and we need workers and use all we can get, but on any kind of basis that could be called a slavery basis, certainly not.” (76) Yet to be called slavery is distinct from the reproduction of enslavement and forms of servitude at

stake in the novel's historical analogy. Colonialism is not ended but outmoded by the globalization of capitalist production, eclipsing the 'independence' of decolonization and postcolonial longing. Through the Athsheans, Le Guin problematizes the ways in which these historical processes reproduce dynamics of domination and unfreedom. Whereas Davidson's utopianism operates through the assertion that non-humans cannot be enslaved, the non-humanness of the Athsheans is continually questioned through the novel, but most powerfully through the theme of rape.

The corollary to the question of whether the Athsheans can be slaves is whether they can be raped – in each case, this is premised on their status as non-human. The colonists “had all agreed with Davidson beforehand that it was too damn near perversity. Homosexuality was with other humans, it was normal,” whereas “these things might be built like human women but they weren't human, and it was better to get your kicks from killing them, and stay *clean*.” (100-101) Yet to this logic, Davidson is transgressive – having raped and killed Selver's wife. At one point, a Colonel asks Davidson, “do you consider the native hilfs human, or not?” -- to which he responds that he doesn't know. “But you had sexual intercourse with one – this Selver's wife,” the Colonel responds, “Would you have sexual intercourse with a female animal?” (77) While making an explicit critique of this contradiction in Davidson – what the Colonel describes as his failure to “think things through” – this passage also illuminates, through the text's varying narrative perspectives, the ways in which this act of violence is described as “sexual intercourse.” Regardless of whether the colonists conceive of the Athsheans in human terms, this account of rape

as “sexual intercourse” at its basis dehumanizes the female. This dehumanization of the female runs across species, and can be read into the colonists’ discussions of the human women as well. As the novel begins a “fresh batch” of women are shipped to the planet for the pleasure of the men at the military base.

The constructed colony of ‘New Tahiti’ is positioned, in the narrative, as a false utopia – the falsity of which becomes contrasted with the utopianism modeled in the Athshean culture. For the Athsheans, ‘slavery’ is to be without self-understanding – a state at which one will be “driven, enslaved,” and without dreams. (144) As the Athshean Heben explains, “The yumens poison themselves in order to dream... But they couldn’t call the dreams, nor control them, nor weave nor shape nor cease to dream; they were driven, overpowered. They did not know what was within them at all.” (ibid) Such unfreedom and false dreaming describes the enslavement of the human culture in the novel, whereas the Athsheans demonstrate a practicable utopianism. The status of utopia in the Athshean culture is not compromised by language, but developed through language. The word for “world” among the Athshean languages, as the title of the novel indicates, is “forest” – and the word for “dream” is “root.” Of the lush, tree-covered planet, Lyubov reflects, “Only if you listened intently could you hear the rain, too multitudinous a music for one mind to grasp, a single endless chord played on the entire forest.” (113) This ability to hear the forest is what distinguishes Lyubov from the other humans, who do not see the ‘creechies’ as slaves.

Yet Lyubov's drive to hear the forest – what we might describe as a practice of listening for utopia – is obstructed not by his 'human nature,' or the Athshean's innate capacity to listen, but by his own naturalization of the narrative of progress at work in the human culture's false utopia. What is important, to Lyubov, is that "the slaves [are freed]. Wrongs done could not be righted; but at least they were not still being done," while he insists that the Athsheans "could start over: the natives without that painful, unanswerable wonder as to why the 'yumens' treated men like animals; and he without the burden of explanation and the gnawing of irremediable guilt." (106-107) Among the humans, Lyubov has the closest proximity to the social critique developed through the narration, while this critical distinction leaves him, in the Athsheans' understanding, enslaved to the logics of false utopianism. Until his death, Lyubov remains naively committed to this fantasy of "starting over," a fantasy so deeply entrenched in the narrative's critical engagement with the recolonizing dynamics of global capitalist development.

"If utopia is a place that does not exist," Le Guin writes in the early 1980s, then "the way to get there is by the way that is not a way. And in the same vein, the nature of the utopia I am trying to describe is such that if it is to come, it must exist already." (Le Guin, "A Non-Euclidean View" 93) The critical utopia, in this sense, insists upon such an orientation, for which utopia is not relegated to the 'no-place' of the past, future, or elsewhere, but made present and operative in the actually existing dystopia of the contemporary world. To the crisis of utopia that describes the cultural tendencies of the post-60s, Le Guin retorts with an amplified fidelity to the concept of

utopia. Yet, as she explains, “Perhaps the utopist should heed this unsettling news” of the crisis in utopian thought at last. Rather than pose an anti-utopian or post-utopian orientation toward this crisis as an extension of historical experience, “[the] utopist would do well to lose the plan, throw away the map, get off the motorcycle,” she suggests:

I don't think we're ever going to get to utopia again by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways; because we're in a rational dilemma, an either/or situation as perceived by the binary computer mentality, and neither the either nor the or is a place where people can live. Increasingly often in these increasingly hard time I am asked by people I respect and admire, “Are you going to write books about the terrible injustice and misery of our world, or are you going to write escapist and consolatory fantasies?” I am urged by some to do one – by some to do the other. I am offered the Grand Inquisitor's choice. Will you choose freedom without happiness, or happiness without freedom? The only answer one can make, I think, is: No. (98)

## Chapter Three

### Finding Utopia in the Dystopian Turn: Punk Literary Utopias of the Long 1980s

“The utopian impulse [calls] for a hermeneutic, for the detective work of a decipherment and a reading of utopian clues and traces in the landscape of the real; a theorization and interpretation of unconscious utopian investments in realities large or small, which may be far from utopian.” – Fredric Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future”

#### Periodizing the Dystopian Turn

In their genealogy of the dystopian genre, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan trace recurrences of a dystopian structure of feeling “in one form or another



since the onset of twentieth-century capitalism,” beginning with the “monopoly and imperialist phase, taking another form in the 1940s and 1950s, and yet another in the 1980s and 1990s[.]” (Baccolini and Moylan 4) This history provides a useful framework for theorizing the waning of the utopian imagination of the post-60s era, as explored in the previous chapters. The waning of the utopian imagination in the late twentieth century has been productively explored as a dystopian turn in the cultural imaginary of the “end of the sixties” historical paradigm. Here, I want to explore this later dystopian juncture of the 1980s and 1990s as negotiating between two counteracting periodizations of the end of the 1960s and the end of the Cold War.

This dystopian turn of the 1980s and 1990s, as I will argue, emerges from the “end of the sixties” paradigm, but also collapses the Cold War polarity at work in previous conceptions of dystopia – what might be articulated as the Orwellian conventions of the dystopian genre. The new paradigm of dystopianism featured in this period consists of different strains of cyberpunk, neo-noir, and post-apocalyptic speculative fiction. Ridley Scott’s 1982 *Blade Runner* features this distinct periodicity, as a film that modifies Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* to conjure a near-future of 1980s global capitalism, which re-imagines Los Angeles as a replication of Tokyo. Scott’s adaptation brings out the emergent qualities of this dystopian turn, for which the terrain of possibility is both post-revolutionary – premised on an end of the 1960s – and globally totalizing, in a spatial imaginary that Rob Wilson describes as a “region of *dematerialized cyberspace* linking the Pacific coast of California to Hong Kong and Japan,”

elaborating an “intensified permeability of any locale in the age of [global] economy” in which “production has been globally mystified” and “the colonial dynamics of global capital remain intact and rising.” (R. Wilson 313-314) The global totality is a key feature in the dystopian turn of the long 1980s, as a periodization that prefigures the end of the Cold War era, and works against the conservative logics of what Christopher Connery describes as the ‘global nineties.’ Before further developing these periodizations, however, I would like to attend to a set of ambiguities concerning the concept of dystopia.

As a generic concept, dystopia can more broadly be examined as the cultural logic of late capitalism – as Moylan suggests, “the contemporary moment [is] one in which a critical position is necessarily dystopian.” (Moylan, “Scraps” 187) The following chapter will engage, more specifically, with a particular dynamic between the dystopian genre and the utopian impulse, as articulations of the historical imaginary of what I will be framing as the ‘long 1980s.’ It is from the vantage of a more recent recurrence of this dystopian structure of feeling that the cultural moment of the long 1980s can be re-evaluated as the basis of what Fredric Jameson describes as “the massive dystopian horizon of our collective [and] individual praxis.” (Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” 35) The ‘dystopian turn’ in this sense provides a way to historicize the cultural production of this period – a mode of interrogating the historical imaginary of what would soon become enveloped in the cultural moment of the end of the Cold War, and the paradigm of Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history.” On the one hand, the dystopian turn appears complicit in this

historical moment of revolutionary foreclosure – an epistemological break from the world 1960s – this turn may be interrogated, on the other hand, as the articulation of a utopian impulse of this cultural imaginary. To pursue this latter approach will require distinguishing between the dystopian turn of the long 1980s and the anti-utopianism of the post-60s.

As Baccolini and Moylan argue, the utopian tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s “came to an abrupt end” in the 1980s, when, “in the face of economic restructuring, right-wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism and commodification, sf writers revived and reformulated the dystopian genre.” (Baccolini and Moylan 3-4) To this extent, the dystopian turn of the long 1980s maps onto the anti-utopian cultural logic of the post-60s – as a period marked not only by the waning of utopian impulses, but by the denunciation and ridicule of utopianism.

As genres, ‘dystopia’ and ‘anti-utopia’ are often used interchangeably – while it seems more productive to work through their contrast. Dohra Ahmad offers a useful distinction of anti-utopia as an “entirely new subgenre,” insisting that dystopia refers to “a fictional representation of a place that, from the point of view of the narrator, is patently bad. Its inhabitants have never consented to any sort of social contract justifying its shortcomings, but rather find their behavior regulated by the threat of violence.” Ahmad claims that an anti-utopia, to the contrary, “portrays a place that is not bad per se but functions exactly as it should, a place where most people are content with the utopian compromise to which they have implicitly consented.”

(Ahmad 210) As Peter Fitting suggests, whereas the “critique of contemporary society expressed [in] dystopia implies (or asserts) the need for change,” the anti-utopia is “explicitly or implicitly a defence of the status quo.” (Fitting 141) Although conflated as synonyms for the opposite of utopia, this oppositional framework is ultimately quite limiting in terms of the kinds of methodologies deployed to analyze the dystopian turn of the 1980s. While in one sense, this turn to dystopia signals a crisis in utopian thought – in another sense, this turn articulates a continuation of the utopian impulse counteracting the dominantly anti-utopian logics of this historical moment.

Whereas anti-utopianism represents a key element of the long 1980s historical imaginary, the correlation between this anti-utopianism and the proliferation of a dystopian structure of feeling needs to be further complicated from that of a seamless alignment. An obstacle in uncoupling dystopia and anti-utopia is the misperception of a shared orientation against utopianism. As generic concepts, however, dystopia and utopia do not correspond as opposites, but rather through a dialectical correspondence. “The borders of utopia and dystopia as genres are not rigid, but permeable; these forms absorb the characteristics of other genres,” Jane Donawerth explains, adding that the dystopia has a radicalizing capacity in its coincidence with other literary forms: “Conservative forms,” she writes, “are transformed by merging with dystopia, a merge that forces political reconsideration, and traditionally conservative forms can progressively transform the dystopian genre so that its pessimism shifts from being resigned to being militant.” (Donawerth 29) To this

extent, it is possible to read for utopia in the dystopian turn – to trace out the utopian drives of this emergent dystopianism in a period of vast revolutionary foreclosure and neoliberal restructuring.

Through these generic concepts of anti-utopia and dystopia, this chapter will work through coterminous periodizations of the long 1980s. The dystopian turn articulates, to a certain extent, the anti-utopian dynamics of the post-60s – what can be located, aside from the long duree offered by Baccolini and Moylan, within a trajectory of anti-utopianism that “alternates between [the] basic options [of] an anti-utopianism fueled by a sense of liberalism under threat and one born of a sense of its dominance,” as Kathi Weeks suggests. (Weeks 181) The dystopian turn coincides with an anti-utopianism formed out of neoliberalism, as the political paradigm of the post-60s. As I explore in my first chapter, the post-60s periodizes a certain trajectory of anti-utopianism, which forecloses the conditions of possibility of the New Left by depoliticizing the utopian dimensions of the American counterculture. While the dystopian turn of the long 1980s can be understood as an emergence from this break from the utopian 1960s, it is also imperative to salvage an alternate history to the waning of utopian imagination, so ingrained in the “end of the sixties” as a post-revolutionary juncture – a paradigm strongly characterized by the loss of anti-capitalist possibility. As I will explore in this chapter, the dystopian turn of this period can bring legibility to the utopian dynamics of the long 1980s, as a period of countercultural transformation and what I will pursue as a politics of negation.

“What takes itself to be utopia,” Adorno writes, “remains the negation of what exists and is obedient to it.” (Adorno 44) It is in this sense that a politics of negation is always already a utopian mode of critique – what Adorno attributes to art, which “holds fast to the promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled” and expresses the “true consciousness of an age in which the real possibility of utopia – that given the level of productive forces the earth could here and now be paradise – converges with the possibility of total catastrophe.” (45) The convergence of utopia and catastrophe describes the pre-condition for the dystopian turn of the post-WWII era, as the period of global-scale apocalypticism at stake in Adorno’s conception of utopian negation. Such a convergence could also be traced through the dystopian turn of the post-60s era – for which a contiguous narrative of utopian drives in the long 1980s seems increasingly important to the contemporary moment. Over the past several years there has been a resurgence in the dystopian imaginary which I will take up more extensively in my fourth chapter – but which, for now, I would like to engage as a new opportunity to historicize this dystopian turn in the long 1980s, as a counter-history to the post-60s paradigm of political foreclosure. To engage with this opportunity, however, requires a more defined approach to the notion of a politics of negation, as more specifically the critical potentiality of the period’s utopian imagination.

In further elaborating this notion of a politics of negation, I want to begin with a discussion of punk literature as a countercultural output of the long 1980s, precisely as a historical trajectory resistant to the anti-utopianism at work in the post-60s era of

neoliberal restructuring. Ultimately, however, punk literature will be engaged as a model for articulating the political unconscious of this dystopian turn as distinctly utopian. From there, I will draw out the stakes of this politics of negation, as a rejection of anti-utopianism in an era in which, as Margaret Thatcher would argue, “There is nothing to be said for trying to create heaven on earth.”

### ‘No Future’ Against the ‘End of History’

“Who needs lobotomy when you’ve got the ITV?  
Who needs ECT when there’s good old BBC?  
Switch on the set, light up the screen  
Fantasise and dream about what you might have been...  
Softly, softly, into your life, you’re held in its brilliant glow  
Softly, softly, feeding itself on the you you’ll never know  
Your life’s reduced to nothing, but an empty media game  
Big Brother ain’t watching you mate, you’re fucking watching him.”  
-- Crass, “Nineteen-Eighty Bore”

“It was one of punk’s historical missions,” Joshua Clover writes, “to negate the moon-eyed social dream of sixties pop.” (Clover, “1989” 90) “Punk as a form of theory,” according to Nicholas Rombes, “is rooted in the very generation it sought to disavow – for the utopianism of the sixties contained [its own] dystopia.” (Rombes 298) “The sheer weight of ‘issues’ had become too much,” Rombes continues, “the utopian idealism of the sixties had been drained off, leaving a bitter residue of guilt, narcissism, and boredom – a vacuum that punk filled.” (ibid) Besides the end of the sixties, however, punk also prefigures the cultural moment pronounced by Francis Fukuyama as the “end of history”:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of

history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama, "The End of History" 1)

While for Fukuyama, this "end of history" articulates the foreclosure of the Cold War era, the foreclosure at stake in punk is precisely the foreclosure of the 1960s counterculture – the "no future" envisioned in the Sex Pistols' anti-anthem, "God Save the Queen":

God save the queen / She ain't no human being / There is no future / In  
England's dreaming  
Don't be told what you want / Don't be told what you need / There's  
no future, no future / No future for you [...]  
Oh God save history / God save your mad parade / Oh Lord God have  
mercy / All crimes are paid  
When there's no future / How can there be sin / We're the flowers in  
the dustbin...

This is a "no future" which anticipates the dissolution of the Cold War historical imaginary, while being firmly situated at the end of the 1960s, as a juncture of recuperationism and the absorption of countercultural energies into the logics of neoliberal capitalism.



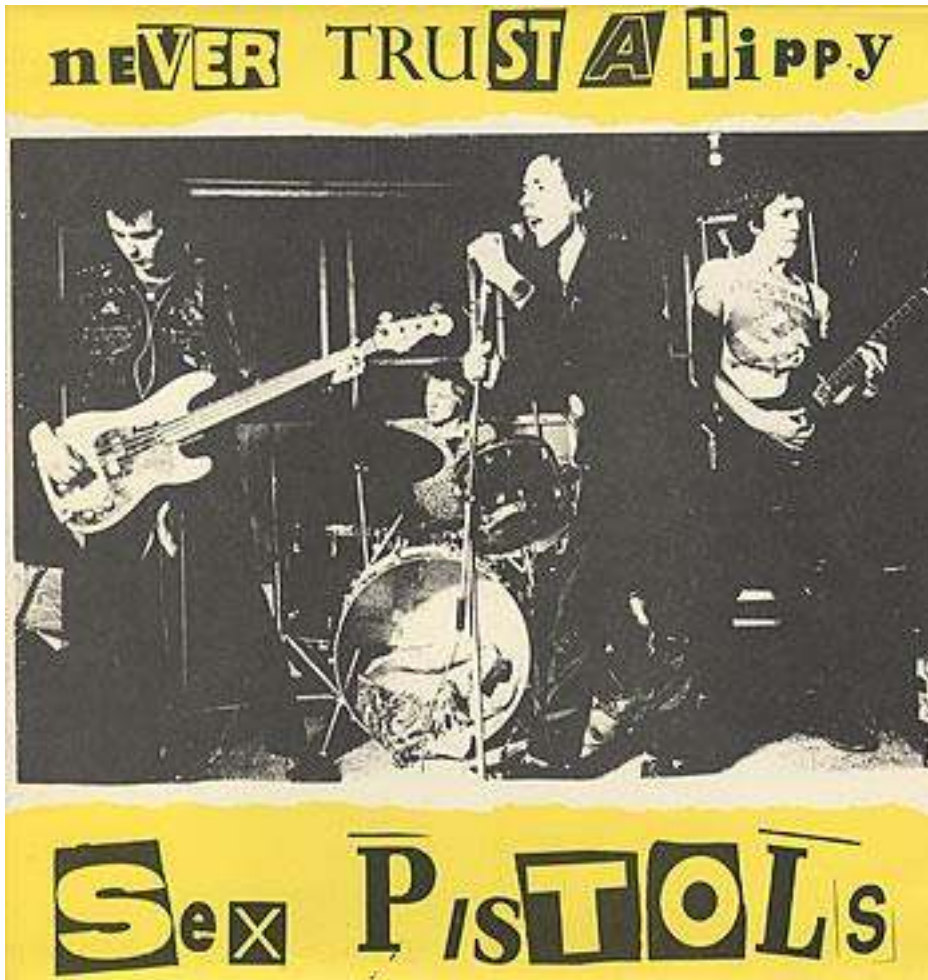


Figure 1 - Sex Pistols

Reading “God Save the Queen” as the denunciation of “England’s dream of its glorious past, as represented by the Queen, the ‘moron,’ the nation’s basic tourist attraction, linchpin of an economy based on nothing,” Greil Marcus offers a history of punk through different genealogies to Dadaist and Situationist aesthetics. (Marcus 10) Key to this denunciation is the temporality posed by this anti-anthem of punk as an anti- youth movement – as Marcus adds, “every youth movement presents itself as a loan to the future, and tries to call in its lien in advance, but when there is no future all loans are canceled.” (ibid) In this sense, the pronouncement of “no future” can be

engaged prefiguratively as the negation of an “end of history.” This pronouncement, Cyrus Shahan argues, provides the basis of a punk history that is “ultimately a rejection of a unified, utopic present now or in the future – resolutely positioned [against] such delusions of progress.” (Shahan 4) “No future” may be read as such a denunciation of utopianism, along these terms of progress. However, this statement against ‘progress’ as the utopia of universal liberalism – the pre-condition of Fukuyama’s later pronouncement – should not be conflated with the utopian futurity of history, as a site of struggle and resistance. “No future,” in other words, counterposes the “end of history,” prefiguring the political stakes of a post-Cold War phase of global capital. In its own historical moment, however, “no future” also transforms the utopian dimensions of the 1960s counterculture into this dystopian turn of the long 1980s.

While it seems productive to engage with punk as a cultural emergence resistant to neoliberal utopianism, punk must also be historicized as a phenomenon wholly distinct from the anti-utopian dimensions of the post-60s. This is because the utopianism of the post-60s era was predominantly conservative – and this utopianism of the right thrived from leftist anti-utopianism and pessimism. Jameson describes this as a “specific postmodern antinomy whereby what is anti-Utopian turns out to be Utopian in its most fundamental significance,” adding that these antitheses “turn out to be, somehow, ‘the same.’” (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 7) The shift toward pessimism on the left, as Christopher Connery writes, “has altered our sense of the future, from Fukuyama’s prediction of a world that is unchanging, and uninteresting, to one that is

simply changing for the worse.” (Connery 79) As opposed to the utopian stasis of an end to historical change, the punk temporality of “no future” could easily be incorporated into this more dominant tendency toward catastrophe and crisis in the left’s historical imagination. To a critical extent, however, this punk temporality also negates these elements of catastrophe and crisis – offering a nevertheless utopian framework.

As I will suggest, it is the anti-sixties historicity of punk that regenerates the utopian dynamics of the counterculture, against the anti-utopian tendencies of the post-60s neoliberal paradigm. Punk rather articulates the negation of the 1960s as a refutation of countercultural recuperation. “The problem with sixties,” as Marcus describes in relation to punk culture, “was that people had come to take their leisure and humanity as rights; the Thatcherist and Reaganist project was to turn those things back into privileges.” (G. Marcus 125) While negating elements of ‘hip’ – the cultural utopianism of the American 1960s that I take up in my first chapter – ‘punk’ also draws out continuities with the utopian dimensions of the world sixties, linked to a history of struggle. As opposed to the global sixties, this worldedness describes a periodization of “links [and] co-presence,” as Christopher Connery writes of a “worlded claim for periodization, and a periodization with global stakes: the awakening sense of global possibility, of a different future.” (Connery 78) It would be a mistake to perceive the punk temporality of “no future” as simply rejecting this sixties futurity altogether. Under the impossible demand for “no future / In England’s dreaming,” punk nevertheless articulates a certain dream – what should be more

specifically engaged as a utopian demand. Utopian demands are often critiqued for the wrong reasons – as Kathi Weeks writes, “the utopian demand does not so much express the interests or desires of an already existing subject as it serves as one of the many mechanisms of its formation.” (Weeks 222)

Taken as such a demand, “no future” opens the possibility for counter-historiographies to the historical processes of political foreclosure at work in the “end of history.” For this to be possible, however, the concept of utopia must be further refined from an abstract notion of idealism or romanticism, and provide a basis for a counter-hegemonic epistemology of different historical moments, including that of punk. This antinomy of possibility and impossibility is critical to punk as not only a musical genre but as a cultural moment. Punk means “anti-authority, independent, tricky, independent, unsentimental, dirty, quick, subversive, guiltless,” explains Richard Hell of the Voidoids. “It means not accepting the ordinary terms of behavior. It also means resisting classification, which is a good paradox, since of course ‘punk’ is a classification.”

Like hip culture, punk was short-lived – at least according to certain purist historiographies. As in my treatment of hip culture in the previous chapter, I want to elaborate a set of microperiodizations that treat punk as a cultural emergence exceeding its original moment. “Did the loss of the original punk moment,” as Cyrus Shahan asks, “which may or may not have lasted past 1978, signal the death of punk? Punk, after all, had declared its death with its first breath.” (Shahan 98) While punk has been historicized as a key cultural emergence of the 1970s – beginning in 1976,

according to the dominant historiography – it seems likewise critical to pursue punk as a continuing process, through which to trace the historical trajectory of a long 1980s that transforms the conditions of possibility of the post-60s.

The “end of punk” enables a set of counter-periodizations to the global trajectories of the post-60s and post-Cold War era, in this notion of a long 1980s that works against the cultural logics of a “global nineties,” as Christopher Connery describes. “Nineties globalization,” Connery writes, “has been Janus-faced: globalization for capital, separation and anti-globalization for humanity.” (Connery 81) In my third chapter, I will further develop this “1990s worldedness” as historical and cultural processes of “undoing the post-60s,” beginning, as Connery suggests, “as a victory for the right.” (78) The long 1980s, in this sense, is not a totalizing, but a partial periodization by which to narrativize different dynamics of political struggle. Here, the long 1980s will provide a framework for understanding these dynamics of struggle in relation to conditions of possibility for utopian thought and imagination. Whereas the post-60s and post-Cold War era provide frameworks for understanding the anti-utopian dynamics of this period, these frameworks do not ultimately challenge this victory for the right – an anti-utopianism born out of the ostensible universalization of western liberal democracy.

The long 1980s takes as its necessary counterpart a periodization of the long 1960s – the latter of which “ran from 1963 until 1977,” as cultural historian Barry Miles delineates, “from the Beatles until the end of punk. It’s not as convenient as a nice, easy, even-numbered decade but it encompasses the growth and collapse of a

movement.” (Miles “*The Seventies*” vii) The end of punk, in this sense, is the locus of possibility for the long 1980s, as a transformation of punk into various cultural imaginaries. Beyond its status as a musical genre, Marcus argues, ‘punk’ refers to a moment “that took shape as a language anticipating its own destruction, and thus sometimes seeking it, seeking the statement of what could be said with neither words nor chords.” (Marcus 82) He claims that this moment of punk was “not history,” but rather “a chance to create ephemeral events that would serve as judgments on whatever came next.” (ibid)

In literature, the transformation of punk – after the “end of punk” around 1978 – is most clearly apparent in the cyberpunk genre. The relation between punk and cyberpunk is far more complicated than a clear-cut lineage. While most cyberpunk authors of this era were not punks themselves, the genre itself, as Maren Hartmann argues, is very much informed by punk culture: “punk is never far away in cyberpunk. Punk is the attitude implicit in the cyberpunk [genre].” (Hartmann 190) In criticism of the cyberpunk genre, as George McKay observes, most attention has been paid “to the *cyber* in cyberpunk,” while the punk elements of the genre have remained under-theorized. (McKay 49) By extension, McKay argues, “There is a frequent impulse by cyberpunk critics to heroise punk rock,” in the place of theorization. (McKay 56) This heroism fails “to focus [on] transformative or negative possibilities,” of punk, and instead maintains a “perceived authenticity and vibrancy [that] will in turn contribute to cyberpunk’s stock.” (ibid) The punk elements of the cyberpunk genre might be further complicated through utopian dynamics of the

dystopian turn. Cyberpunk, along with neo-noir, apocalyptic fiction, and other genres, comprise this ‘dystopian turn’ as a larger cultural phenomenon and set of aesthetic movements. However, to restore the punk elements of this literary form requires a utopian methodology.

### Toward a Punk Utopian Literature of the Long 1980s

“In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.” – Michel Foucault

“In my world people don’t even remember their names, they aren’t sure of their sexuality, they aren’t sure if they can define their genders.” – Kathy Acker

Working through this historical constellation of punk literature, the dystopian turn, and the long 1980s, I want to take up the question of how to read for utopia in two novels – William S. Burroughs’s *Cities of the Red Night* and Kathy Acker’s *Pussy, King of Pirates*. Not only do these novels exemplify the cultural intersection between punk and dystopianism, but they also provide a tentative periodization for thinking the long 1980s – between 1981 and 1996 – specific to these cultural dynamics. Here, I want to treat the long 1980s as a set of coinciding periodizations, including that of punk / post-punk and the dystopian turn. What seems most significant to each of these texts is precisely the notion of a punk historiography of the “end of history”: both novels develop alternate historical imaginaries of the long 1980s as a period of increased apocalypticism and global catastrophe, providing a counter-historiography to the dystopian turn as the cultural output of the “end of history.”

Acker and Burroughs both work through this dystopian structure of feeling to revisit genealogies of ‘utopia’ as an enclosed island space in the literary imaginary of western expansionism. Acker’s novel is a punk-feminist adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1881 *Treasure Island*, while Burroughs’s novel brings together tropological elements of the undiscovered island genre and colonial sea power narratives. Piracy, in each novel, offers a pre-history to the punk imaginary explored in the present, as the narratives negotiate between multiple temporalities and historical landscapes. These temporalities and counter-histories destabilize each narrative’s representation of the present, and provide the basis for a ‘long 1980s’ that resists the hegemonic currents of post-60s political foreclosure and the horizon of post-Cold War era globalization.

Arguing that “it was in the eighties that Burroughs's influence on literature began to show,” Beat historian Barry Miles identifies Burroughs as a pioneer of cyberpunk. (Miles “*William Burroughs*” 19) *Cities of the Red Night* is the first installment of Burroughs’s Red Night Trilogy, marking a critical threshold in Burroughs’s works. In his earlier novels *Naked Lunch* (1957), *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964), Burroughs certainly foregrounds thematic and formal questions which would be taken up by cyberpunk novelist William Gibson in the early 1980s. With the Red Night Trilogy, however, Burroughs refines a punk historiography from what he had previously described as an attempt “to create a new mythology for the space age” – of which he elaborates in a 1964 interview:



A Russian scientist has said that we will travel, not only in space, but in time as well, that is, to travel in space is to travel in time, and if writers are to travel in space-time and explore the areas opened by the space age, I think they must develop techniques quite as new and definite as the technique of physical space travel. (Hibbard, 11-14)

The technique he was exploring at the time – the “cut-up method” which he developed with painter Brion Gysin – can be examined in the Nova Trilogy, which reads more as a long experimental poem intersecting between various possibilities for narrative cohesion. What is developed as a narratology in the Nova Trilogy becomes reconceptualized as a historiography in the Red Night Trilogy. *Cities* is followed by *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983), set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century American west, and *The Western Lands* (1987), a meditation on the after-death state, densely populated by non-real, hallucinatory spaces. Each of these texts can be read as part of a larger project of regenerating historical experience through forms of postmodern experimentation and denarrativization.

There are three plots in *Cities*, each of which is entangled in the others, while maintaining a certain degree of autonomy as a distinct genre: a maritime adventure, science fiction, and detective story. What brings continuity to the stories is the Red Fever, Virus B-23 – a disease that is radioactive and sexually transmitted between homosexuals. While the novel could easily be read today as a precursor of the ‘dystopian turn,’ it is more constructively read as a utopian intervention, in its anticipation of global catastrophe which displaces the geo-imaginary of Cold War era bipolarity.

The foreword to *Cities of the Red Night* – entitled “Fore!” – describes a possible history of the present through the framework of a “retroactive utopia.” (xiv)

The site of the novel's utopic vision is Libertatia, an island colony and pirate commune that sought to expand a Republic under the Articles of Captain Mission in the early eighteenth century. Paraphrasing the Articles, the foreword states:

... all decisions with regard to the colony to be submitted to vote by the colonists; the abolition of slavery for any reason including debt; the abolition of the death penalty; and freedom to follow any religious beliefs or practices without sanction or molestation. Captain Mission's colony, which numbered about three hundred, was wiped out by a surprise attack from the natives, and Captain Mission was killed shortly afterwards in a sea battle. There were other such colonies in the West Indies and in Central and South America, but they were not able to maintain themselves since they were not sufficiently populous to withstand attack. Had they been able to do so, the history of the world could have been altered. Imagine a number of such fortified positions all through South America and the West Indies, stretching from Africa to Madagascar and Malaya and the East Indies, all offering refuge to fugitives from slavery and oppression. “Come to us and live under the Articles.” (Burroughs “*Cities*” xii-xiii)

In the Articles, the foreword locates a different trajectory to colonialism, in a vision rooted in the conditions of decolonization in the mid-twentieth century. The “end” marked by Captain Mission's death corresponds with the novel's conception of the present as a globalized context, in which the possibility of the Articles has decisively concluded. What is at stake in its “retroactive utopia” is precisely the novel's renegotiation between the possible futures of Libertatia and the apocalyptic conditions of this present.

In the larger narrative of *Cities*, the temporality of the present resists the eschatology staged by “Fore!”, which states, “Your right to live where you want, with

companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission.” (xv) The foreword continues:

The chance was there. The chance was missed. The principles of the French and American revolutions became windy lies in the mouths of politicians. The liberal revolutions of 1848 created the so-called republics of Central and South America, with a dreary history of dictatorship, oppression, graft, and bureaucracy, thus closing this vast, underpopulated continent to any possibility of communes along the lines set forth by Captain Mission. (xiv-xv)

From this historical outlook, the notion of “retroactive utopia” becomes fixed on an imaginary of pirate colonies and the messianic Captain Mission.

It is from the horizon of an “end of the 1960s” that the Articles may be approached as a utopian project. And yet, the novel produces a representation of eighteenth century piracy with the materials of a post-60s dystopian imaginary of globalism and apocalypticism. Libertatia is the site of erotic primitivism and drug experimentation that extends throughout the various geographies of the novel as a kind of historical homology. In the novel, Libertatia is based on the pirate island “Libertalia,” described in the second volume of *A General History of Pyrates*, a text published anonymously – though generally attributed to Daniel Defoe. Of the island's factuality, Marcus Rediker writes,

Was [Libertalia] fiction? Since a man named Mission and a place named Libertalia apparently never existed, the literal answer must be yes. But in a deeper historical and political sense Mission and Libertalia were not simply fictions... Libertalia was a fictive expression of living traditions, practices and dreams of an Atlantic working class, many of which observed, synthesized and translated into discourse by the author of *A General History of Pyrates*. A mosaic assembled from the specific utopian practices of the early eighteenth-century pirate ship, Libertalia had objective bases in historical fact. (Rediker 41-42)

Rather than the island's factuality, Rediker emphasizes the historicity of Libertalia, disengaging from the utopian problematic of impossibility. As a “mosaic,” Libertalia is not so much a reality as a possibility that generates a historical truth and re-structures the present. What mobilizes the conception of history in *Cities* is a utopian vision that exists in a past undetermined by rigid distinctions of historical fact and fiction – this past is instead a density of contingent futures, an expansion of possibility that ripples through the historical imaginary of colonialism.

Like Burroughs, Acker draws from the western literary tradition of the utopian genre, while foregrounding the generic concept’s colonial history of sea power and primitive accumulation. As a “loose” analogue to Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, *Pussy* revises the utopian genre of western literature through a shared set of problematics to Burroughs’s novel, while re-imagining the “end of history” as both the end of the “white world” and patriarchy. The novel describes the “end of the world” as the decrease and eventual disappearance of “the separation between private and public property... and then [the] passing away of the memory [of] patriarchy.” (Burroughs, *Cities* 40) As the narrative progresses in episodic and epistolary form, the protagonist, O, moves in and out of dreams and into a series of creation myths. Whereas *Cities* takes the conceptual framework of the ‘retroactive utopia,’ *Pussy* elaborates a punk historiography through a vastly mythological framework – as Acker writes, “the punks were one beginning of a new world.” (Acker 40)

Crucial to both novels is an attempt to decolonize the utopian genre, through a punk re-conceptualization of the utopian literary historical imaginary. In Acker’s

novel, the idea of the 'post-colonial' expands into a labyrinthian dream-world of de-westernization. In the novel's adaptation of *Treasure Island*, this antagonism toward western literature is a compelling force of the narrative – which begins with two women in a brothel, who decide to embark on a journey: “Let's go to Europe.” / “No way. I don't want to go to Europe. Europe's dead.” / “We'll just go back to Europe to steal.” / “Okay.” (56) Burroughs's novel – distinct from some of his previous works such as *Naked Lunch* – is oriented toward a vision of Third World uprising, and tricontinental liberation. This vision proliferates in the narrative as Virus B-23, which has as its potentiality the global eradication of the white race: “At [the time of its origin] the newly conceived white race was fighting for its biological continuity, so the virus served a most useful purpose,” explains specialist Doctor Pierson, involved in government experimentation with the virus. When the text first introduces Pierson in 1923, he cautions against the re-introduction of this virus into contemporary America and Europe – “Even though it might quiet the uh silent majority, who are admittedly becoming uh awkward,” he explains, “we must consider the biologic consequences of exposing genetic material already damaged beyond repair to such an agent, leaving a wake of unimaginably unfavorable mutations.” (Burroughs, *Cities* 21) Thereafter, the present in the novel transforms as mutations become increasingly visible and are brought to the surface of the plot. This mutational force is the resurrection of a past with a vengeance – as the foreword ends, “Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it.” (xv)

Both novels can be read as attempts to decolonize various tropes of the utopian genre through the mobilization of punk cultural elements in a historical imaginary of piracy. In *Cities*, this punk historiography proposes that the “liberal principles embodied in the French and American revolutions and later in the liberal revolutions of 1848 had already been codified and put into practice by pirate communes a hundred years earlier.” (xi) Acker’s punk historiography – likewise positioned against the “end of history” paradigm of the long 1980s – inhabits a dream-space within the diegetic world of the narrative: “vast memories of sacred cities have become lands in themselves... strewn across deserts most of whose shifting grounds no human will ever touch... traces where there were once no traces... these are dreams.” (Acker 112-113) Through different narrative approaches, each text produces a cartography of un-imagining and de-materializing the history of western expansion. This is a worlding of the world, in the sense that Rob Wilson conceives a process that does not “world the world empire... [but] de-world[s] and estrange[s] its will to domination and subsumption.” (R. Wilson 212)

Deploying similar thematic elements to describe a historical imaginary of the present, each novel elaborates a punk historiography with distinct spatio-temporal dimensions and conditions of possibility. These dimensions should be further distinguished, as well as historically situated within this periodization of the long 1980s – formulating a utopian dialectics that “integrates social process and spatial form,” as David Harvey discusses of the capacity for cultural forms “to articulate an alternative spatiotemporal dynamics” of utopian imagination. (Harvey, *Spaces of*

*Hope* 190) This process of integration between the social and the spatial, in each novel, involves a conception of historical time actively resistant to the post-revolutionary landscape of the “end of sixties” and the dissolution of the Cold War geo-imaginary – precisely as elements of the broader trends that Fredric Jameson describes as “history’s breakdown, an ominous perpetual present in which no one knows what’s coming... and indeed no one knows whether anything is coming at all.” (Jameson, “On the Power of the Negative”)

The spatial imaginary of *Cities of the Red Night* draws deeply from a New Worldist geo-imaginary in its production of an alternate set of possible histories to European colonization. At stake in the novel’s imaginary of de-westernization is the transformation of analogous periods of globalization, explored in the eighteenth century and post-WWI contexts, as well as the post-60s: “The white man is retroactively relieved of his burden. Whites will be welcomed as workers, settlers, teachers, and technicians, but not as colonists or masters.” (Burroughs, *Cities* xiv) The text poses this explicitly as a process of counter-globalization – as Burroughs writes, “Imagine such a movement on a world-scale. Faced by the actual practice of freedom... The disastrous results of uncontrolled industrialization would [be] curtailed,” as well as:

...the escalation of mass productions and concentration of population in urban areas... for who would work in their factories and buy their products when he could live from the fields and the sea and the lakes and the rivers in areas of unbelievable plenty? And living from the land, he would be motivated to preserve its resources. (ibid)

To this extent, the novel engages with the historical moment of global capitalism – the emergent geo-imaginary of the ‘long 1980s’ – as a distinct situation, while also working comparatively through different historical conceptions of the ‘global.’ By extension, the novel’s conception of the ‘global’ develops out of a spatiotemporal contrast with the notion of a ‘retroactive utopia.’ As Burroughs writes, “The chance was there. The chance was missed,” adding that “Your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century.” (xv) The temporality posed by this ‘retroactive utopia’ both articulates the ideological paradigm of the “end of history,” symptomatizing this foreclosure in futurity with its relegation of utopia to the past. And yet, throughout the novel, the past re-animates utopian possibilities in the present, transforming the material conditions of this waning of futurity in post-60s era global capitalism.

At work in Burroughs’s conception of a retroactive utopia is what Carl Schmitt describes as a “global image” of the New World. As Schmitt writes,

No sooner had the contours of the earth emerged as a real globe – not just sensed as myth, but apprehensible as fact and measurable as space – than there arose a wholly new and hitherto unimaginable problem: the spatial ordering of the earth in terms of international law. The new global image, resulting from the circumnavigation of the earth and the great discoveries of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, required a new spatial order. Thus began the epoch of modern international law that lasted until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Schmitt 86)

Following Magellan's circumnavigation of 1519-1522, this “new global image” was that of finitude – the measurability, and representability of a globe – and this was precisely the juncture from which the utopian genre emerged and proliferated in western literature, beginning with Thomas More’s *Utopia* in 1516. More’s utopian



island can be read as a negative analogy – or mirror opposite – of both England and this “new global image” of Schmitt’s account of the history of international law. The island of Utopia is crescent-shaped – an enclosed geography of a mountainous periphery and a still-water center. More’s utopian enclave is at once fortified from the external logics of this emergent global paradigm, while being structured as an inversion of these logics – most crucially, that of private property. Burroughs’s text renders this dynamic between utopian and global space as a temporal dynamic, a spatio-temporal dialectic that insists upon the retroactivity of a utopian past in a present of “no future.”

Part of the retroactivity of Burroughs’s *Libertalia* is precisely the re-assertion of the island as a site of utopian possibility. Writing of Mercier's *L'an 2440* (1770), Reinhart Koselleck describes the process by which the island became outmoded as a trope of literary utopias:

Cook had just explored the east coast of Australia, and the European voyages of discovery did not have very much left to reconnoiter. The finiteness of the surface of the earth left hardly a strip of coast between land and sea unexplored. Human beings have, as Rousseau once said, stretched themselves out across the globe with every fiber of their bodies, like polyps. Therefore, the authors of “nowheres” had for some time already switched over to the moon or the stars or descended below the surface of the earth. Once recognized, the spatial possibilities for establishing a utopia on our earth's finite surface were exhausted. The utopian spaces had been surpassed by experience. (Koselleck 86)

As Koselleck suggests, it is in the second half of the eighteenth century that the utopian imaginary “shifted into the future. Finally the additional space into which fantasies could stream in was available, and infinitely reproducible, like time itself...

And with this, the status of utopia changed.” (ibid) Remarking on the transposition of the wishland into the future, Ernst Bloch writes,

With Thomas More the wishland was still ready, on a distant island, but I am not there. On the other hand, when it is transposed into the future, not only am I not there, but utopia itself is also not with itself. This island does not even exist. But it is not something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not yet in the sense of a possibility; that it could be there if we could only do something for it. (Bloch and Adorno, 17)

While this shift into the future marks what Koselleck describes as “the metamorphosis of utopia into the philosophy of history,” it also points to the limit of possibility for utopian thought in the long 1980s paradigm of “no future.” (Koselleck 85) To this extent, Burroughs’s retroactive utopia symptomatizes the utopian waning of this period – but it likewise insists upon “no future” as a locus of historicity, with the potential to not only regenerate historical experience but to transform material conditions and epistemological constructs.

Whereas Burroughs’s text is framed in terms of the spatio-temporal utopian dialectics of retroactivity, Acker’s text can be interpreted through the spatialization of an “end of the world” into a multiverse of dream-worlds. *Pussy, King of the Pirates* imagines the end of the world through processes of detemporalization: “Those who live in graveyards don’t know time” (Acker 70); “It’s all over. The world’s stopped” (38). *Pussy, King of the Pirates* conjures a more coherent sense of New Worldism and emergent conditions of possibility, specifically in the intersection of utopian literary traditions and the punk cultural imaginary – “the punks were one beginning of a new world.” (40) Grounded in the present, the novel does not temporalize utopia. The

utopic emerges from the interpenetration of the narrative's real and dream worlds, through a fluctuation between spatial modes of reality and dream – producing “a world without men... a world punctured by dreams.” (50) While the temporality of retroactivity is organized around the trope of the utopian island in *Cities*, the detemporalization of utopia in *Pussy* draws from another set of tropes, generating a different spatiotemporal imaginary of an infinite process of re-worlding the “end of the world.”

As a counter-imaginary to the “end of history,” Acker's text shares elements of the New World spatial tropology explored in *Cities* – such as islands and ships – while engaging these tropes through an attempt to un-imagine the globalism at work in the utopian genre. Whereas *Cities* elaborates the spatial analogies of island and globe as modes of enclosure and totality, *Pussy* takes up the trope of the island as a way to de-center the global as a mode of totalization. In this sense, Acker's text bares certain resonances with Margaret Cavendish's 1666 utopian text *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-World*. As opposed to the island enclave, Cavendish's utopia unfolds beyond the scope of the globe – a spatial imaginary exceeding the totality of the global, a universe for which the globe is decentered and rendered finite. Beginning, like many other utopian texts of the period, with a shipwreck, *The Blazing World* tells the story of the remaining survivor – a young Lady who, “by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth,” is “not only driven to the very end or point of the Pole of that world, but even to another Pole of another world, which joined close to it.” (Cavendish 126) Within this alternate cosmology,

the narrative's utopia is an inversion of patriarchy, as another world in which the heroine becomes an Empress of a Kingdom of animals. For Acker's text, likewise, the end of the world is a site of possibility, rather than a limit of totality.

Cavendish's text has a fundamentally different conception of the 'global' from that of Thomas More's text – a difference that illuminates the development of what Schmitt terms "global linear thought." In the 150 years between these texts, the conditions of possibility for utopian imagination changed significantly. With the expansion of the world market through European sea power, the horizon of impossible islands foreclosed alongside the emergence of global consciousness – a foreclosure that is likewise at work in the post-60s, with the saturation of the Third World by global capitalism. Between Burroughs's conception of retroactive utopia and Acker's spatial imaginary of dream-worlds, a parallel contrast could be developed in terms of the particular spatiotemporal dialectics available to utopian thought in this period of the long 1980s.

In *Cities*, the temporality of retroactivity instigates a counter-narrative to the "end of the sixties" as the horizon of what would be articulated as the "end of history." Instead, the punk temporality of "no future" generates what I want to describe as a counter-modernity in the text. According to this counter-modernity the post-60s is not the end of history or the end of utopia, but a juncture for which the conditions of utopian thought and historical experience have fundamentally changed with the material conditions of global capitalism. While articulating the continuation of utopian imagination in the dystopian turn, *Cities* also symptomatizes the

epistemological limits of this period – the anxiety at work in the “end of history” – through a nostalgic mode that reflects the waning futurity of this period.

As opposed to nostalgia and retroactivity, Acker’s “no future” utopia is intensely presentist, elaborating what Gerard Granel calls the “large now” – a site of both temporal expansion and retention. In *Pussy*, this spatiotemporality is elaborated through psychic unfoldings, navigating between dreams and memories, as well as myth and history. The novel consists of a multiplicity of liminal and convergent spaces. The novel puts forth a detemporalized conception of utopia as a virtuality – what Lefebvre describes as “already present [that] will absorb and metamorphose [various] topoi.” (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 131) As a spatial conception of utopia, ‘virtuality’ accounts for differential space – which “retains particularities,” as Lefebvre writes, “experienced through the filter of homogenous space.” (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 132) In the novel’s disruptions between psychic landscapes, different possibilities are retained, and different impossibilities are renegotiated. By extension, *Pussy* can be read as an antidote to the dystopian impulse of this period, putting forth a utopian epistemology that refutes the apocalyptic tendencies of the global nineties.

As a dystopia, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* quickly withdraws from an apocalyptic vision of global crisis, and instead derives a utopian imaginary from a world which will not end. The refusal of apocalypse is allegorized by the foreclosure of the protagonist’s innocence: “Childhood ended when Pussy learned that she was pregnant.” (Acker 72) The punk heroine’s abortion elaborates this allegory as

moreover an ending of the post-60s – the periodization so fundamental to

Burroughs's *Cities*. Entitled "Turning into a Criminal," the section begins:

Pussy met her gynecologist for the first time on the day of the abortion. Since he was sporting a ponytail, she decided that he must have once been a hippy. She was high on the pills that they had fed her.

They blabbed for an unknown amount of time about the nature of poetry and then Pussy asked when her abortion was going to begin.

The hippy answered that it would soon be over. She felt a twinge which was almost painful.

The abortion was over. Just before the end of this world, Pussy hadn't known a thing.

There is no master narrative nor realist perspective to provide a background of social and historical facts.

Two weeks after the abortion, Pussy returned to the clinic for her routine checkup. A nurse-practitioner [informed her] that she was still pregnant. (79-80)

"...it's... hiding," explains the nurse-practitioner. Pussy's failed abortion reflects the non-ending of the world, but also a process that I will further elaborate in the fourth chapter, of undoing the political stakes of the 'post-60s' – as a periodization with urgency, articulating a particular crisis of historical thought and political possibility. Futurity persists, as in the unabortable fetus, but within the temporal stasis of an expansionary present that bursts through the totalization of global space. The hippy abortion doctor at once symbolizes the recuperation of the counterculture – the negation of the 'hip' 60s at the basis of punk – and the resurgence of possibility inherent to what Christopher Connery calls "sixties time." The countercultural imaginary reactivates various historical trajectories, as in Burroughs's conception of multiple temporalities, while proliferating different contingencies of what I am terming a counter-modernity.

Robert Young develops this periodization of a 'counter-modernity' in his history of 'post'-colonialism – for which “The 'post' marks the many remarkable victories that should not be allowed to fade into the amnesia of history.” (R. Young 60) 'Counter-modernity,' which Young develops from Gandhi's critique of western modernity, is a way of revising the position of 'anti-modernity,' which “[depends] on the resources of a modernity whose technology [remains] largely invisible.” (329) Through this language of the 'counter,' Young proposes a “dialectic of Marxisms,” while also insisting on a radicalization of poststructuralism – particularly as an iteration of the 'postmodern,' or eurocentrism. To the contrary, Young argues that “the theoretical origins of what became known as structuralism and poststructuralism were themselves closely entangled in forms of resistance to western domination.” (384) Both *Cities of the Red Night* and *Pussy, King of the Pirates* construct utopian imaginaries for which such a counter-modernity develops against the hegemonic tendencies of the “end of history.” For each, likewise, the utopian impulse is mobilized by the cultural imaginaries of punk, as a mode of radicalizing the dystopian turn of this period: “While the world cracks open,” Acker writes, “and all the rich men die... We come crawling through these cracks, orphans, labotomies.” (Acker 211-212) Both novels take up the possibility of de-westernization through a tricontinentalist revolutionary imaginary of riots and uprisings in the present.

In *Cities*, the utopic dimensions of this de-westernized imaginary are complicated by the eroticization and ritualization of death – what can perhaps be

understood as attempts to contain and manage the dialectic of historical endings and beginnings. Describing the social customs of the ancient cities – from which the longer history of the virus emerges – the novel conceives of a class division between an elite minority called the Transmigrants and a majority called the Receptacles. The class system of the ancient cities reflects an aspect of the novel's utopian project of re-imagining human time in relation to historical transformation: Burroughs writes,

To show the system in operation: Here is an old Transmigrant on his deathbed. He has selected his future Receptacle parents, who are summoned to the death chamber. The parents then copulate, achieving organs just as the old Transmigrant dies so that his spirit enters the womb to be reborn... Many Transmigrants preferred not to wait for the infirmities of age and the ravages of illness... These hardy Transmigrants, in the full vigor of maturity, after rigorous training in concentration and astral projection, would select two death guides to kill them in front of the copulating parents. The methods of death most commonly employed were hanging and strangulation, the Transmigrant dying in orgasm, which was considered the most reliable method of ensuring a successful transfer [of their spirit]... In time, death by natural causes became a rare and rather discreditable occurrence as the age for transmigration dropped. The Eternal Youths, a Transmigrant sect, were hanged at the age of eighteen to spare themselves the coarsening experience of middle age and the deterioration of senescence, living their youth again and again. (Burroughs, *Cities* 154-155)

In this process of reincarnation, death acquires the erotics of reproduction – in a society structured by pleasure, even to the extent of its class division. It is from a world historical standpoint of global overpopulation, scarcity, atomic warfare, and genocide that such a system becomes available in the utopian imaginary.

This erotogenic temporality in *Cities* extends to a vision of reincarnation – part of the restorational project of the narrative at large – with a different conception of historical time to that of the novel's initial, post-revolutionary standpoint of an



irretrievable past. Rather, it is in this reproductive ideation of death that the novel pursues a critique of periodization, and more specifically, its own historical ethos of the post-60s.

Whether death is feared as constant threat, or glorified as supreme sacrifice, or accepted as fate, the education for consent to death introduces an element of surrender into life from the beginning – surrender and submission. It stifles “utopian” efforts. The powers that be have a deep affinity to death; death is a token of unfreedom, of defeat... Death can become a token of freedom. The necessity of death does not refute the possibility of final liberation. Like the other necessities, it can be made rational – painless. (Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* 236)

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse imagines a fulfilled life, in which one could die of their own volition. And yet, he explains, “even the ultimate advent of freedom cannot redeem those who died in pain. It is the remembrance of them, and the accumulated guilt of mankind against its victims, that darken the prospect of a civilization without repression.” (237) Such a prospect is absent in *Cities of the Red Night*. The attempt to make contact with a civilization without repression is relegated to counter-temporalities – latent potentialities of a resurrecting past – articulating a future liberated from “the accumulated guilt of mankind,” as in the project of undoing the coloniality of the utopian island.

Acker’s text extends many elements of Burroughs’s utopian imaginary, and between these texts it seems possible – from the contemporary moment – to engage with these elements as part of a historical imaginary of counter-modernity, which is particularly resistant to the postmodern turn. Postmodernity provides another account for the dystopian turn of the long 1980s, by way of an epistemological and

historiographical framework. While punk culture – like the dystopian turn – has been frequently theorized in terms of postmodern aesthetics, it would be productive to also think through this broader historical constellation as articulating a counter-modernity that can be made useful to current struggles to think and make possible a life outside of late capitalism. At stake in counter-modernity, as I will go on to develop in the following section, are the epistemological limits of a post-capitalist imagination – the particular horizon of utopian thought toward which the larger project of this cultural history takes an orientation.

#### Utopian Epistemologies of the ‘Dystopian Turn’ as Counter-Modernity

“Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into utopia by the established reality principle, fantasy insists that it must and can become real, that behind the illusions lies *knowledge*.” – Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (149)

Against the dominant aesthetic analysis of punk as a countercultural output of postmodernism, my reading of these punk literary imaginaries is an attempt to foreground the utopian drives at work in the dystopian turn of the ‘postmodern’ period, as another historical framework for engaging with the trajectory of the long 1980s being developed in this chapter. So far in this chapter, I have pursued the notion of a punk historiography – a ‘no future’ that is nevertheless the negation of an “end of history” – as the basis for what I will here pose as the utopian epistemology of a counter-modernity at work in the dystopian turn.

A dominant periodization of postmodernity begins with the end of the 1960s, posing the hegemony of 'French Theory' as symptomatic of a politically reactionary turn following May 1968. Post-structuralism is conceived as a post-revolutionary structure of thought, the eschatological impetus of what would later be articulated as an end of history, which also signaled a crisis in Marxist thought. The congealing point of this 'postmodern' paradigm comes with Jean Francois Lyotard's pronouncement of an "end of grand narratives" – reverberating throughout this period of the long 1980s, as various iterations of waning historical thought and experience. In 1979, Lyotard defines the postmodern era in terms of a transition from modes of narrative knowledge to scientific knowledge, such that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility... regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation." (Lyotard 39) Formulated as a scientism, 'postmodernity' is nevertheless reducible to narrative elements. The grand narrative is thus an epistemological limit of this postmodern paradigm, which is itself made legible through narrativity. Rather than engage this paradigm through the narrative of an epistemological break, I want to think through the possibility of a counter-modernity. Instead of locating a break or ending, counter-modernity describes a juncture of transformation – a periodization that remains porous, not-yet-activated in the present.

Within this cultural history of utopia, what is at stake in Lyotard's observation of a decline in narrative knowledge is the decline in utopian thought. However, as a spatial modality, 'utopia' has often been theorized as non-narrative – what gives utopic thought narrativity is the historical process of temporalizing utopia described

in the previous section. As a corollary of the post-60s paradigm, the ‘postmodern’ period has been dominantly anti-utopian. The “end of utopia” has been part of a broader postmodern eschatology, from which this turn to dystopia in the post-60s becomes another mode of foreclosing the possibilities for utopian thought and practice. And yet, as I have begun to discuss here, there are other ways of engaging with this set of historical dynamics, which are especially important to foreground in the present moment.

Taking up the postmodern as a “post-utopian” framework, M. Keith Booker gives an alternate history of the ‘long 1950s’ – which erases the potentialities of the world 60s from the very start. “That so many observers would seem to locate the beginnings of post-modernism in or after the 1960s is largely a matter of terminology,” Booker argues, continuing that:

It is at the end of the 1960s that postmodernism becomes hegemonic in the West, but it is well before that time that postmodernism becomes an emergent phenomenon. The weakness of utopian vision in American culture in the long 1950s is, I think, one of the clearest signs of this emergence. After all, sweeping cultural and historical phenomena do not appear (or disappear) overnight... Thus, if postmodernism was a cultural dominant at the beginning of the 1970s, then it surely must have been an emergent cultural phenomenon for some time before that. (Booker 193)

Taking up Raymond Williams’s historical phenomena of emergent, dominant, and residual, Booker develops an analysis of postmodernism as a “reaction against capitalism,” claiming that “Jameson’s argument that postmodernism is best understood as the cultural logic of late capitalism in no way implies that postmodernism cannot contain certain anti-capitalist impulses.” (194-195) And yet, in

taking up these anti-capitalist impulses as “post-utopian,” Booker contributes to this process that I will further elaborate in the next chapter, of undoing the post-60s.

Through this periodization of the long 1950s, Booker brings out continuities with the global 90s, for which the end of the Cold War is always already operative in this post-utopian imaginary. By extension, the dystopian turn of the long 1980s could be understood as a continuation of the post-WWII dystopian turn – collapsing a distinction proposed by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, between the historicity of the dystopian form in the 1940s and 1950s, and later in the 1980s and 1990s. (Baccolini and Moylan 4) Whereas Booker’s periodization places the dystopian turn as epitomizing this “post-utopian imagination,” I want to continue developing an alternate history, for which the dystopian turn also makes available certain utopian impulses after the “end of the 1960s.”

While agreeing that elements of what would be articulated as “postmodern” pre-date the importation of “French Theory” in the late 1970s, Robert Young’s proposal of a counter-modernity locates a tricontinentalist epistemology in the 1950s -- as Young writes, “If so-called 'so-called poststructuralism' is the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968 but rather the Algerian War of Independence – no doubt itself both a symptom and a product.” (R. Young 412) The development of a tricontinentalist poststructuralism is integral to Young's historiography, especially in terms of what he calls the “theoretical creole” of postcolonialism – the production of a “curiously fragmented and hybrid theoretical language that mirrors and repeats the changing forms of a central object of its analytic

experience: conflictual cultural interaction.” (69) For Young, postcolonial theory is “always concerned with the positive and negative effects of the mixing of peoples and cultures [and its] own language that it uses to analyse these phenomena is similarly mixed” – he adds that, “This heterogeneity and conceptual fluidity notwithstanding, the overall political project of postcolonial critique remains coherent and urgent.” (ibid) Counter-modernity provides a framework for understanding these latent political elements of the post-colonial, as a periodization symptomatic of the historical foreclosure of the postmodern era. The “amnesia of history” in this period, as Young argues, is radically reframed by the question of “how to rewrite history when the very model of history was so much a product of the history I wanted to rewrite[.]” (412) The same question should be asked of the idea of utopia – of how to re-imagine utopian thought, as at once produced by and resistant to the historical dynamics of neo-colonialism at work in the late capitalist period.

As a periodization resistant to the ‘post-60s,’ counter-modernity makes available certain continuities of anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism in this alternate periodization of the long 1980s. These continuities can find legibility in the historical imagination of the present moment. From the vantage of after the post-60s, we might gain critical perspective on such a counter-imaginary of postmodernity as a set of historical phenomena. In this sense, counter-modernity brings forth the utopian unconscious of the dystopian turn. While it would seem that, as an extension of the post-60s historical imaginary of postmodernity, the dystopian turn expresses a post-

utopian impulse in this period of the long 1980s, it seems likewise possible to unhinge the dystopian turn from a distinctly post-utopian paradigm.

As a cultural phenomenon, punk is mobilized by these residual energies of a utopian 1960s in the post-60s, through what I have engaged as a counter-periodization of the long 1980s. Key to this residuality is the principle of negation. “So the power of the negative turns out to be postmodernity after all,” as Fredric Jameson recently reflects, elaborating that “it is history’s breakdown, an ominous perpetual present in which no one knows what’s coming (the ‘thing we didn’t see’) and indeed no one knows whether anything is coming at all.” Of this perpetual present – what so clearly defines the spatiotemporality imagined in Acker’s text, for instance – Jameson explains that “no one can remember what the catastrophe was,” and that “there can be no thematic argument about where we are now, and certainly no plausible forecast about futures, except to the degree that in that sense we don’t have one.” (Jameson, “On The Power Of The Negative”)

It is precisely out of this moment of detemporalization that the task of a utopian epistemology is to address the problem which Jameson describes “of making a present visible in the absence of its past and future.” (ibid) The punk temporality of “no future,” as I have argued, should be understood in terms of such a project of making visible the present, precisely through the power of the negative. Describing punk’s negative aesthetic of “sublime fear,” Johanna Isaacson writes of the punk as a figure of moral panic in this post-60s era: “In the eighties a wave of talk shows and sensational news depicted punk as a dangerous subversion,” Isaacson explains,

adding that “the publicity surrounding the punk scare drew in disaffected youth even if they did not have access to punk scenes.” (J. Isaacson, 112) In Isaacson’s lineage of expressive negation through punk, a set of counter-histories emerge from what might otherwise remain dominated by the anti-utopian logics of the postmodern period, for which ‘punk’ articulates a kind of nihilism symptomatic of a period of waning historicity and revolutionary energies.

Here, I want to extend this re-imagining of punk historiography – a “no future” against the “end of history” – as a utopian epistemology that can be re-worked from the cultural moment of postmodern “French Theory.” At stake in this discussion of punk historiography is the epistemological concept of the virtual. While the virtual has been, through the course of the long 1980s, enveloped in the case against postmodern thought as an anti-Marxist ideology, I want to draw out a different set of lineages from this theoretical category. In this sense, I will be pursuing the virtual as the premise of a counter-modernity.

Lefebvre begins to use the ‘virtual’ as part of an “epistemological and methodological approach” in his 1971 text *The Urban Revolution* – his second post-68 text, following *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution*. Whereas Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari develop the ‘virtual’ as an ontological category, Lefebvre’s distinction of epistemology and methodology marks a juncture of potentiality for this attempt to delineate a counter-modernist conception of the virtual as a utopian construct. As Lefebvre writes, elaborating this epistemological category, “Knowledge is not necessarily a copy or reflection, a simulacrum or simulation of an



object that is already real.” (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 3) Lefebvre describes a “theory of the object,” which is more specifically, as I want to suggest, a utopian object:

In my approach, the object is included in the hypothesis; the hypothesis comprehends the object. Even though the “object” is located outside any (empirical) fact, it is not fictional. We can assume the existence of a virtual object... that is, a possible object, whose growth and development can be analyzed in relation to a process and a praxis (practical activity). (ibid)

As a virtuality, the object is not yet narrativized – an epistemology of historical change and experience that illuminates a distinction between the decline of narrative knowledge and the “end of history.”

Before adopting this language of the virtual, Lefebvre presents an earlier iteration of this concept in the metaphor of a void. In *The Explosion*, Lefebvre writes of a “void that is vast as a world,” that is at once “an ideological and social void, an official void vaster than the Place de la Concorde” and a “stratosphere” from which “the spontaneity of the movement has drawn and propelled.” (Lefebvre, *The Explosion* 51) This void is both the precipice of “managing capitalist accumulation at a planetary level,” as Lefebvre would later write, and the matrix of revolutionary energies from which alternate futures enter into the blind field of new conditions of possibility: “Drawn in by the void, spontaneity begins to fill it,” he explains, “It merges dissociations, overcomes separations... spontaneity needs an orientation. It requires a kind of thought which can understand it, which can guide it without stifling it.” (51-52) The virtual later provides such an epistemology, as “the luminous course” of knowledge that “projects a beam of light, that illuminates elsewhere.” (Lefebvre,

*The Urban Revolution* 31) Lefebvre describes an impending topography of spatialities that are “not merely dark and uncertain, poorly explored, but blind in the sense that there is a blind spot on the retina, the center – and negation – of vision. A paradox. The eye doesn’t see; it needs a mirror.” (29)

As an “illuminating virtuality,” utopia exists both “everywhere and nowhere,”

Lefebvre explains:

The transcendence of desire and power, the immanence of the people, the omnipresence of symbolism and the imaginary, the rational and dreamlike vision of centrality accumulating wealth and human gestures, the presence of the other, presence-absence, the need for a presence that is never achieved. (131)

To this extent, the virtual provides an approach to the cognitive mapping of utopian elements of the dystopian turn, against the logics of post-utopianism in the post-60s. It also enables a distinction between utopia and dystopia that is not reliant upon genre, but form – that is, utopia can be understood as a non-narrative element of dystopian narratives. While Jameson makes the case for narrative as the political unconscious of the postmodern era – against the pronouncement of narrative decline – Lefebvre’s conception of the virtual could be further explored as a way to apprehend both the non-narrative and the not-yet-narrativized as temporalities operative in the present, as a site of possibility. As Lefebvre asks,

Is the unconscious the substance or essence of a blind field? Remember, these are fields and open to exploration: for the understanding they are virtuality, for action they are possibility... these blind fields are both mental and social. To understand them, we must take into account the power of ideology (which illuminates other fields and brings fictional fields into view) and the power of language. These are “blind fields” whenever language fails us... (31)

In this notion of the blind field, Lefebvre conceives of the virtual as an epistemological framework for utopian imagination and practice. While Lefebvre would later turn to an auditory metaphoric in the methodology of ‘rhythmanalysis,’ in his two post-68 texts he relies heavily upon a visual language for describing the virtual – as a “void” or a “blind field.” Building a contrast between the blinding and the blinded, he describes the blinding as “the luminous source (knowledge or ideology) that projects a beam of light, that illuminates elsewhere,” whereas the blinded is “our dazed stare, as well as the region left in the shadow. On the one hand a path is opened to exploration; on the other there is an enclosure to break out of, a consecration to transgress.” (ibid)

As an epistemological concept, the virtual develops what I want to understand as a counter-modernist utopianism – what should be distinguished from the ontological conception of the virtual posed by Deleuze and Guattari among others. It would be problematic to conflate this Lefebvrian conception of the virtual with that which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri later develop as the ‘multitude.’ Taking up this Lefebvrian epistemology, I want to re-think the ‘virtual’ from the Hardt and Negrian vision of the multitude as a monstrous flesh – a virtuality that is “bodyless” – (Hardt and Negri 44) However, it seems likewise imperative to disengage from the anti-utopian critiques of this ontological turn to the virtual, which mobilize a familiar set of tropes in the global nineties era.

While Lefebvre’s conception of the ‘virtual’ is primarily spatial – what could be otherwise engaged as a revolutionary imaginary of the perpetual present, as

Jameson suggests, unhinged from a past or future – this concept can be further developed as an epistemology of history. Such an epistemology of history – a historiography that apprehends history as both narrative and non-narrative – can be traced in Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” as a theoretical lineage of what I am treating as a counter-modernity that undoes the logics of postmodern hegemony. For Benjamin, the past is conceived as a “true picture” that “flits by”: “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again,” he continues, “for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.” (Benjamin 255) Benjamin’s conception of the past could be elaborated as a virtual image – a key category to Henri Bergson’s theory of memory. As Bergson writes,

Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act sui generis by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past... But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual; and as its outlines become more distinct and its surface takes on colour, it tends to imitate perception. But it remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and if, when once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for a memory. (Bergson 171)

Bergson’s account of perception is certainly integral to the epistemology of the virtual set by Lefebvre, nearly sixty years later. And while on the one hand fostering a mode of bourgeois interiority, this conception of memory can be elaborated, on the other

hand, as a mode of historical thought. In approaching history as a virtual object – what “little by little [comes] into view like a condensing cloud” – a set of possibilities unfold which allow us to develop a theory of history counteractive to the decline of narrative.

If we are to understand the postmodern period as defined by this waning narrativity, the ‘virtual’ provides a way out of an end of history – as well as a way out of the post-utopian imagination. Whereas the dystopian structure of feeling has long been attributed to the postmodern condition, here I want to suggest that this dystopian turn in the long 1980s articulates a desire for narrativity that is nevertheless structured by the punk diagnostic of “no future.” In Jameson’s distinction between utopian and dystopian texts, a broader set of non-textual distinctions could be elaborated: “the dystopia is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character, whereas the Utopian text is mostly nonnarrative,” Jameson writes, continuing that:

... the dystopia is always and essentially what in the language of science-fiction criticism is called a ‘near-future’ novel: it tells the story of an imminent disaster – ecology, overpopulation, plague, drought, the stray comet or nuclear accident – wanting to come to pass in our own near future, which is fast-forwarded in the time of the novel... But the Utopian text does not tell a story at all; it describes a mechanism or even a kind of machine. (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 55-56)

In this sense, Jameson fosters a dialectical correspondence between dystopia and utopia, unreliant upon a generic binary. While the dystopian turn, based on Jameson’s distinction, could be further defined as a desire for narrativity in the postmodern era of supposed post-narrativity, this conception of utopia as a

non-narrative formation seems useful as a way to unhinge the postmodern from what M. Keith Booker describes as the post-utopian imagination.

Utopia can be understood as a virtuality of the dystopian turn – an approach to thinking against the dominant tendencies of a period of political and revolutionary foreclosure. At stake in such an epistemology, in broader terms, is a counter-modernist re-orientation toward the western hegemony of postmodern thought. Rather than take up Lyotard’s observation of a decline in narrative knowledge as the logical corollary to Fukuyama’s pronouncement of an ‘end of history’ following the Cold War, I want to suggest that an alternate set of possibilities could be explored in terms of the epistemological break that Lefebvre also observes. For Lefebvre, this break is more explicitly a break from the moment of revolution, while it is also a way to map spontaneity – as a distinctly non-narrative revolutionary force. Spontaneity is thus a way to imagine possibility – what cannot be apprehended, but which must be nevertheless sought out. In this sense, the ‘virtual’ provides a means by which to cognitively map utopian hope, as Kathi Weeks describes a process of “[thinking] these two elements of the concrete utopia together: the commitment both to the real-possible and to the novum.” (Weeks 197) Of the cognitive task of utopian hope, Weeks explains, the challenge is to think “the relationship between present and future both as tendency and as rupture. The future is at once that which we must map cognitively and that which necessarily exceeds our efforts at representation.” (ibid)

Rather than reduce ‘utopia’ to a genre, space, or time, this epistemology enables an approach to utopia as method. Describing a utopian method that is

“essentially *archaeological*,” Ruth Levitas offers the following conception of such a methodology: “The excavations and reconstructions that archaeology undertakes, whether of artifacts or of cultures, are based on a mixture of evidence, deduction, and imagination, representing as whole something of which only fragments are actually available.” (Baccolini and Moylan 61) This method involves, as Levitas suggests, a conception of the implicit utopia – “utopias buried in the political programs in question.” (ibid)

### The Periodicity of the ‘Long 80s’

Following the 2008 financial crisis, the 1980s came to the foreground of contemporary popular culture and style. This ‘return of the 80s’ was perhaps epitomized by Oliver Stone’s sequel to *Wall Street*, in 2010. Set twenty-three years after the original financial conspiracy film, *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* draws from an already operative analogy between the 1980s and the present period. Perhaps it is not so much that, as Jeffrey Nealon suggests, “the ‘80s are back *culturally*, but that they never went anywhere *economically*,” adding that “the downsizing and layoff mania of the ‘80s – designed to drive up stock prices and impose market discipline on corporate managers – has now simply become business and cultural orthodoxy, standard operating procedure.” (Nealon 4)

Like Leigh Claire La Berge, I am using the ‘long 1980s’ as a periodization that only becomes legible during this period of a ‘return of the 80s,’ post-financial crisis. Demarcating this period as “roughly 1979 to the early 2000s,” La Berge

describes this period as “punctuated by the dissolution of the ostensibly Communist Eastern bloc and the declaration across much academic and popular American culture that there could be no alternative to a market economy.” (La Berge 5) La Berge develops a convincing analysis of the ways in which “finance manifested in multigeneric (novel, autobiography, reportage) multimedia (print, film, computer screen) and multimodal (realism, postmodernism) forms.” (7) In tracing this lineage of financial fiction, La Berge’s history of the long 1980s works through this problem of how to think and imagine an alternative to a market economy, providing a periodization for what Jameson has described as the ‘cultural turn’ – the broader historical context of which the dystopian turn is ultimately a symptom.

My own use of the long 1980s takes a different orientation toward revolutionary foreclosure, insisting on certain continuities with the long 1960s that counteract the dominant tendencies mapped out in La Berge’s periodization of financial capital. In the chapter that follows, I will take up another microperiodization of the 1980s-1990s, foregrounding the historical process of ‘undoing the post-60s.’ This process of undoing can be understood, as I will suggest, as the recuperation of countercultural utopianism. Instead of presuming this process of negation to be ‘anti-utopian,’ this chapter has conceived the negation of the 1960s cultural imaginary as part of a utopian epistemology that can nevertheless be recovered from the dominant trends of recuperation during the Reagan-Thatcher era of neoliberalism on the rise.

## Part Two



# Of Utopia and Recuperation: The Cultural and Spatial Imagination of the American Tech Industry

## ‘Creativity’ After the Post-60s

The television series *Mad Men* began in 2007 as a melodramatic re-chronicling of the American 1960s that essentially re-imagines the period through the framework of cultural recuperation. Throughout the series, advertising executive Don Draper draws inspiration from the aesthetic and ideological transformations of the burgeoning counterculture, and incorporates the revolutionary energies of the period into the market logics of commodity culture. This is a historical imaginary for which the iconicity of the Volkswagen, for instance, has entirely flattened and reified the dynamism of the counterculture, reducing the 1960s to the commodity world of the contemporary popular imagination.

*Mad Men* anticipates the end of the ‘post-60s,’ while bringing out a romantic thread from this revised narrative of a history located both inside and outside of the contemporary viewer’s sense of memorial history. While dominantly produced and written by generation x creators – born out of the cultural logics of the post-60s – the series often appeals to the narrative perspective of Sally, Draper’s daughter, who emblemizes the traumas and lost innocence of the baby boomer generation.

Through Sally, *Mad Men* speaks to this generation: whatever hope for innocence might remain active in this history has been deeply unsettled, ultimately revealing a lie on which that innocence was always based upon. Metaphorically, this takes place in Sally’s relationship to her father, as she comes to realize that he was not the man

she thought he was – a realization already confirmed for the viewer, as a witness to Draper’s life history of opportunism and manipulation. The viewer discovers early on that Draper was born by another name, that he has a secret history – a history that remains latent, like the post-60s, through the course of the series as a disaster waiting to happen.



Figure 2 – Mad Men 1

Although Draper is certainly portrayed as an anti-hero – a tortured soul, performing a kind of immanent critique to the Ayn Randian figure of the American business man – what largely redeems him within the narrative logics of the series is his creative impulse. Throughout the series, Draper’s ability to sell products for his clients is often framed in terms of artistry. In its complex and often problematic vision of commodity culture in the 1960s, the series provides an extensive elaboration of Jameson’s hypothesis about reification and utopia – that works of mass culture “cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well: they cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of

content as a fantasy to bribe to the public about to be so manipulated.” (Jameson, “Reification and Utopia” 144) As Draper explains in the first episode of the series, “What you call love was invented by guys like me... to sell nylons.” (*Mad Men*, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”)

While in one sense a creative utopian, Draper is on the other hand what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello describe as the “neo-manager” as an idealized figure.

Boltanski and Chiapello ask:

Is not the neo-manager, like the artist, a creative figure, a person of intuition, invention, contacts, chance encounters, someone who is always on the move, passing from one project to the next, one world to another? Like the artist, is he not freed of the burdens of possession and the constraints of hierarchical attachments, of the signs of power – office or tie – and also, consequently, of the hypocrises of bourgeois morality? (Boltanski and Chiapello 312)

These questions can be traced throughout *Mad Men* as a sustained study of the American 1960s, re-told from the political stakes of the post-60s through the foregrounding of what Raymond Williams describes as residual energies. The latency of the ‘end of the sixties,’ as a cultural narrative explored in my first chapter as predominantly anti-utopian, seems everywhere apparent and surfaced in the narrative world of the series. Though *Mad Men* cannot help but take this vantage of recuperation, it does so uncritically – consistently negating the possibility of breaking through the vibrant plasticity of its mis-en-scene, a conspiratorial ‘sixties’ from the eyes of the conspirator. Draper’s redemption – which goes hand-in-hand with his creativity – is always already prevented by his function as a managerial archetype.

The utopian and recuperative dimensions of the series reflect more about the contemporary moment than the 1960s – specifically, the elements of the 1960s that come to the foreground, leaving the content of ‘history’ largely re-mediated in the background, whether broadcast on radio or television. At one point, Draper in effect describes himself as a historical subject, while he explains to an employee the role of the advertising industry in a moment of social and political turmoil: “We’re going to sit at our desks typing while the walls fall down around us,” Draper says, “Because we’re the least important, most important thing there is.” It is from this standpoint of the least and most importance that Draper not only symptomatizes the ‘end of the sixties,’ but prefigures the end of the post-60s – at once articulating the ideological conditions of radical foreclosure under neoliberalism, and the shifting historical imagination of the late 2000s. Born out of the moment of global financial crisis, the 2007 emergence of the series captures a certain re-orientation toward the popular imaginary of the 1960s. This re-orientation casts onto the 1960s a set of neoliberal fantasies about the inevitability of recuperation.

While shifting its mode of historical representation toward the everyday, the series is largely organized around the narrative of Don Draper as an innovator – a “creative figure” whose contemporary analog is something like the neo-manager which Boltanski and Chiapello describe. Sarah Brouillette has done important critical work on the contemporary labor force and the ‘creative economy,’ which is re-cast onto the series’ historical conception of the advertising industry. In Brouillette’s critique of the paradigm of Creative Industries (CI), she writes of the “formation of

the sort of self who can thrive in the CI environment is hardly a given... Particularly useful to the process has been the valorization of a labour profile typical to the struggling artist, which drums up understandable desires for creative and stimulating work.” (Brouillette, “The Trouble With Creativity”) As a sustained study of the innovator as a historical type – here, as an extension of Lukacs’s notion of typicality – *Mad Men*’s historical imaginary of the American 1960s must be understood and ideologically situated in a typology of the present moment.



Figure 3 – Mad Men 2

Like its representation of Draper as a great innovator, *Mad Men*’s conception of the advertisement firm office is another important analogy to the contemporary cultural moment. Today, however, the recuperation of ‘creativity’ has as its locus the American tech industry, which will be a dominant focus of the next two chapters. The creative workplace is characterized by the strange juxtaposition between the bureaucratic architecture of the office and the subversive activities of employees and

executives alike. In such a space, Draper exists as a somewhat ‘functional’ alcoholic, whose inspiration comes largely from his hedonistic outlets. His staff, the creative branch of the firm, plays catch, jokes around, smokes pot, and has sex, all under the pretext of productivity. The series examines the workplace of advertising firm in terms of the particularities of creative labor – what has become in the United States increasingly dominant in sectors of industry such as technology. In my fifth chapter, I will discuss the ways in which these ‘utopian’ conceptions of creative productivity extend to contemporary corporate campuses in the Silicon Valley tech industry. From the standpoint of the advertising industry, the revolutionary moment of the 1960s is over before it ever begins – from the standpoint of Draper the innovator, the countercultural proliferation of the period has only the horizon of industry. On the one hand, the series might be interpreted through an alternate periodization of the long 1950s, while on the other hand, it is the product of a historical process I will explore in the next chapter as an ‘undoing’ of the post-60s in the cultural imaginary of tech, in the creative industry paradigm of the 1990s.

‘Creativity’ encapsulates the false utopianism of the contemporary 24/7 globalized labor and consumer market, as much defined by the neo-managerialism of the innovator as by the artistry of the precarious laborer. However, it is in this scheme that the utopian imagination and post-capitalist thought must be brought together more explicitly – working against and anticipating modes of utopian recuperation which are structural to the cultural turn, for which “every, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural,” as Jameson

writes, such that “culture has equally become profoundly economic and commodity oriented.” Through the course of the post-60s, such false utopianism has made a case, on the left, against utopia – as a concept complicit with the logics of late capitalist expansion. Certainly this is the ‘utopianism’ at work in *Mad Men*, as a more extensive engagement with the popular imagination of this history, for which the political stakes and urgency of the ‘end of the sixties’ has been long forgotten. While the following two chapters will seek to understand the recuperation of 1960s countercultural utopianism, this will not be in the service of a broader condemnation of utopia, but rather a critique of the false utopianism of the cultural turn.

## Chapter Four

### “We Owe It All to the Hippies”: Undoing the Post-60s in the Techno-utopian 1990s

“It is up to us to devalorize or to be devalorized according to our ability to reinvest in our own culture.” – Asger Jorn, “Detourned Painting”

1984 wasn't like *1984*

In January 1984, Apple Computers inaugurated its commercial campaign for the Macintosh personal computer with the one-minute television ad, the often-cited for its extravagance, entitled “1984.” The commercial incorporates various tropes of the 1980s dystopian turn taken up in my third chapter, in order to elaborate its Orwellian premise as a vision of totalitarianism and mass oppression – implicitly a future of the corporate monopoly of IBM. As it opens, the commercial shows a mass of gray-skinned, lifeless workers sitting obediently before a large screen, on which a

Big Brother type figure is projected. In an eerie monotone, the figure expounds propagandistic phrases: “Our Unification of Thoughts is more powerful a weapon than any fleet or army on earth. We are one people, with one will, one resolve, one cause.” Suddenly the vision is interrupted by a woman carrying a sledgehammer, who is being chased by riot police. Played by British athlete Anya Major, this utopian heroine wears bright red and white clothes, baring a Cubist rendition of the Apple logo. She runs across the mass of seated workers, throwing the sledgehammer into the screen. As the image of Big Brother explodes, a narrator interjects: “On January 24, Apple will introduce the Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like *1984*.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, “1984” was directed by Ridley Scott – whose then recent film *Blade Runner* (1982) seems thematically and aesthetically evoked by the commercial. As a product of the 'dystopian turn' in the 1980s, the commercial articulates the foreclosure of a Cold War era utopian imaginary, but also a new paradigm for utopianism in the global imaginary of late capitalism. In his 1983 keynote speech for Apple, Steve Jobs foreshadows the commercial campaign for the Macintosh by staging a new antagonism:

...It is now 1984. It appears IBM wants it all Apple is perceived to be the only hope to offer IBM a run for its money. Dealers initially welcoming IBM with open arms now fear an IBM dominated and controlled future. They are increasingly turning back to Apple as the only force that can ensure their future freedom. IBM wants it all and is aiming its guns on its last obstacle to industry control: Apple. Will *Big Blue* dominate the entire computer industry? The entire information age? Was George Orwell right about 1984? [Jobs “Keynote Speech”]

In the commercial “1984,” the utopian / dystopian binary of the Cold War era is displaced onto the field of industry, with IBM signified as the threat of a “dominated



and controlled future.” Among industries of a globalized market, this new Cold War stages emergent conditions of utopian and dystopian imagination within the totalizing dynamics of a capitalist geo-imaginary.

1984 wouldn't be like *1984* because of global capitalism. No longer could the tropes of totalitarianism account for the dystopia of this period – as the gradual process of displacing the Cold War historical imagination for what Francis Fukuyama would call the “end of history.” This is the congealment of what Christopher Connery describes as the “becoming global of the 1990s,” which “diminished rather than opened a sense of global possibility.” (Connery 79) The Macintosh personal computer “revolution” – in its mobilization of the dystopian tropes of contemporary culture – reflects this sense of global possibility as an integral logic of dominant capitalist power, for which this period marks a juncture of negative interpellation, as Connery suggests, as “global capital brought large sectors of the population wholly under its dominion, but as negative presences: without hope, future, or alternative.” (80) In articulating the breakdown of Cold War geo-politics and the expansion of capitalist production and circulation, the global nineties delineates a shift in the utopian imagination, which occurs alongside the ‘dystopian turn’ discussed in the previous chapter. Elements of the dystopian turn can be understood, as I have suggested, as re-imagining utopia in an otherwise anti-utopian period – as a “long 1980s” comprising both the gradual collapse of Soviet power and the foreclosure of sixties possibility. The reassertion of utopianism in “1984” – the Macintosh future – should be distinguished from these elements of re-imagining utopia against the logics of anti-

utopianism, epitomized in Margaret Thatcher's pronouncement of "no alternative." That there is no alternative to capitalism is the precondition for this personal computing "revolution," as a pivotal point in the process that this chapter will discuss as the *undoing* of the post-60s – a key dynamic of the historical imagination of the global nineties.

Rather than the re-imagining of utopia, "1984" epitomizes the recuperation of utopia in this period. The advertisement reflects the becoming global of the global nineties. The process of undoing the post-60s is integral to the emergence of what Joshua Clover takes up as the 'long 1989.' This periodization can be imagined in terms of the global nineties historical imaginary, as a mixture of "disaster and triumph," as Clover describes of events ranging from the occupation of Tiananmen Square and the world-wide broadcast of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc – events that "all belong to 1989, the category – and just as well to [the concept]." (Clover, 1989 5) The category is a "container into which can be tossed songs and images and newspaper articles and punctual happenings, anything with a date on it," as Clover suggests, while the concept corresponds with a "shorthand for what happened, for the experiential dimension of a capacious swath of history: an index that becomes more impacted, more challenging to unpack, with each passing year." (ibid) While, in this sense, the 'undoing of the post-60s' must be distinguished from the 'long 1989,' these historical phenomena cannot be thought apart. It is through the eradicating of revolutionary energies of the world 1960s that the periodization of the 'long 1989' finds legibility. The recuperation of the counterculture, in this sense, is integral to the

post-1989 historical imagination, as the cultural logic of the global nineties – the ostensible expansion of possibility coinciding with the saturation point of capitalist power.

To recuperate is to “[reuse preexisting] artistic elements in a new ensemble,” as both negation and prelude, as the Situationist International describes detournement. (Situationist International, “Faces of Recuperation”) As an object of such recuperation, the advertisement campaign is “a negation of the value of the previous organization of expression.” Recuperation can be understood through detournement – what Asger Jorn describes as a “game born out of the capacity for devalorization.” (Jorn) Such a process of devalorization can be traced throughout the tech industry’s various ‘revolutions’ – ranging from personal computing, software, and cyber-technology. These ‘revolutions’ are more than advertising campaigns, describing the cultural imagination of the tech industry, but also the degree to which the historicity of these technological innovations enact a process of undoing the 1960s – a political eradication of the recent past. “Before revolution can be recuperated, it has to mean first simply change; change in fare, small change. After that, the words – having inverted truth, and *their* truth – mean little else,” as the SI writes, “To recuperate words is really to recuperate what they represent; so that the only activity that words describes is the activity the recuperated words describe. It follows that the true meanings of the words merely become aspects of their false meanings, the true activity they describe merely aspects of their false activity.” (Situationist International, “Faces of Recuperation”) The same process of emptying out and

falsifying can be located in the Orwellian detournement at work in “1984,” in which a critical axis of the cultural imagination is rendered its opposite: a utopianism of the free market and the liberal individual.

In his marketing campaign in 1984, Steve Jobs would call the Macintosh the “peoples’ computer.” As Ted Friedman explains, “it was designed to look not like an imposing piece of machinery, but an ‘information appliance.’ In its sleek, inviting shape, it bore the influence of another high-tech product of the early 1980s: the Cuisinart food processor.” (T. Friedman 97) While imagined as the “peoples’ computer,” the Macintosh also marks the feminization of the personal computer – so much at work in the image of Anya Weeks in the advertisement. On the one hand, as Friedman suggests, “1984” can be read as a Manichean battle of good versus evil: “There’s the bad technology – centralized, authoritarian – which crushes the human spirit and controls people’s minds. Read, IBM,” as Friedman writes, “But we can be liberated from that bad technology by the good technology – independent, individualized – of the Mac.” (ibid) However, on the other hand, “what seemed to really impress TV viewers... was the vision of the bad technology. It’s the futuristic gloss of that technology that is so compelling.” While all the viewer sees of the good technology is a hammer and the Mac logo, “the schema of the ‘1984’ ad allowed Apple to harness the visual fascination of a high-tech future, while dissociating itself from its dystopic underside.” This is not through a mode of utopian negation, as explored in punk literature in my third chapter, but through mode of dystopian recuperation.

Needless to say the “revolution” imagined by the Macintosh personal computer is the ultimate anti-revolution: a revolution only imaginable through the total dissolution of revolutionary possibility. In this sense, “1984” captures both the undoing of the post-60s revolutionary paradigm, and the decline of historicity and culmination of “no alternative” in the long 1989. “1984” prefigures the global nineties, as a horizon of dematerialization and marketization. Through these processes, the vision of a personal computer revolution articulates the recuperation of utopia and dystopia, as cultural dynamics of the “end of history.” The revolutionary imaginary conjured by the tech industry in this period symptomatizes this general foreclosure of possibility – the recuperation of utopianism, nevertheless premised upon a fundamental dystopianism.

#### Techno-utopianism as the “End of the Sixties”

“Techno-utopianism” is another way of describing the recuperation of countercultural energies from the long 1960s into the neoliberal logics of the tech industry. Such a trajectory can be traced out through Stewart Brand, who began to explore cybernetics in the hip communes in the late 1960s. Brand’s communalist project of the Whole Earth Catalog eventually mutated into the entrepreneurial projects of Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link (WELL), the Global Business Network and the Long Now Foundation from the mid-1980s to present. As a key figure of both the American counterculture and the tech industry, Brand also captures the extent to

which techno-utopianism is the ultimate “end of the sixties.” However, this end takes on the appearance of a return of the counterculture – a triumphant end of the post-60s.

Such a vision of the utopian possibilities of the 1990s oversaturates Brand’s account of the ‘cyber revolution’ in a piece for TIME in 1995: Brand writes,

Newcomers to the Internet are often startled to discover themselves not so much in some soulless colony of technocrats as in a kind of cultural Brigadoon - a flowering remnant of the '60s, when hippie communalism and libertarian politics formed the roots of the modern cyber revolution. At the time, it all seemed dangerously anarchic (and still does to many), but the counterculture's scorn for centralized authority provided the philosophical foundations of not only the leaderless Internet but also the entire personal-computer revolution. (Brand, “We Owe it All to the Hippies”)

Here, Brand looks ahead to the new millennium as an impending cyber utopia that necessarily breaks apart ideological frameworks of the post-60s era – dominated, as I discuss in my first chapter, by a notion of failure. This is more specifically a victory over the post-60s, as a reassertion of the “countercultural roots” of the “electronic frontier.” “Our generation proved in cyberspace that where self-reliance leads, resilience follows, and where generosity leads, prosperity follows,” Brand claims, adding that “If that dynamic continues, and everything so far suggests that it will, then the information age will bear the distinctive mark of the countercultural ‘60s well into the new millennium.” (ibid) Twenty years later, this dynamic might be understood instead as anti-utopian – in the sense that this distinctive mark of the counterculture is one of conjunction with neoliberal capitalism.

Techno-utopianism, I want to suggest, is a form of anti-utopianism. The anti-utopia is a defense of the counter-revolution, rather than a case for social

transformation. Brand's account of the utopian horizon of the new millennium bares all the problems that Lisa Nakamura takes up in the post-racial utopia at stake in this countercultural imaginary of the 'cyber revolution.' "In the early days of the Net," Nakamura writes, "technological visionaries imagined the online world as a utopian space where everything – even transcending racism – was possible." (Nakamura xi) The dream of a post-racial cyberspace should not be understood, as Brand suggests, as marking the "roots of the '60s," but rather, as bearing the recuperation of the counterculture. As Nakamura argues, this techno-utopianism produces a 'post-racial' context while redefining the terms of racism. While celebrating the liberal individual, this cyber revolution also articulates the desire to eradicate difference in a period otherwise conflicted with dynamics of white supremacy. Taking the launch of the World Wide Web in 1989 as the beginning of a new millennium transformed by "tools of liberation," Brand and other techno-utopians conceived of a post-racial vision of the future in the midst of a re-emerging civil rights era.

The problem of white supremacy – which so riddled the New Left of the 1960s – is reproduced in this techno-utopian future, rather than exceeded. Meanwhile, Los Angeles was on fire with wide-spreading riots for six days in 1992, and civil unrest over police brutality proliferated as the United States saw the largest sustained urban riot since the 1960s. Techno-utopianism in large part describes the dematerialization of a period otherwise dominated by a crisis of pervasive racism and class oppression. Instead of conjuring the "roots" of the 1960s, the cyber revolution of the 1990s eradicates the politics of the 1960s. The Los Angeles Riots locates a

different set of dynamics between these periods, distinct from the hegemonic process of undoing the post-60s. While the cyber revolution imagines a triumphant return of the 1960s, undoing the recuperation of the post-60s era, the proliferation of riots from South Central Los Angeles articulates another set of continuities with the 1960s as the threshold of social transformation. These continuities with the 1960s are not made legible through nostalgia – the “distinctive mark of the countercultural ‘60s” described by Brand’s techno-utopianism – but through the reactivation of possibilities that bring the struggles of the 1960s to the present, against the dominant logics of foreclosure in this period.

Brand’s Whole Earth project delineates the emergence of the global nineties, in its gradual absorption of the counterculture into the neoliberal paradigm of free market entrepreneurialism. In his 2005 Stanford commencement speech, Steve Jobs would remember the Whole Earth Catalog as “sort of like Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along. It was idealistic and overflowing with neat tools and great notions.” (Jobs “Commencement Speech”) Many have theorized the Catalog as a proto-search engine, as an ongoing project of archiving what were broadly termed “tools” that ranged from various homesteading skills to early personal computers. From 1968-72, the Catalog was frequently published. There were two Whole Earth Catalogs in the 1980s, and the final publications were in 1994 and 1998. In 1985, Brand launched the WELL, a virtual community that would be one of the first dial-up ISPs in the early 1990s. As a company, WELL has been bought and sold several times over, and continues today as The WELL Group Inc. During the 1990s,



as Fred Turner explains, Brand's various projects would help develop certain alignments between latent elements of the 1960s counterculture and the political apparatus of 1990s conservatism: "To those who think of the 1960s primarily as a break with the decades that went before, the coming together of former counterculturalists, corporate executives, and right-wing politicians and pundits may appear impossibly contradictory." And yet, Turner writes, Brand's Whole Earth network suggests much to the contrary. "As they turned away from agonistic politics and toward technology, consciousness, and entrepreneurship as the principles of a new society," Turner argues, "the communards of the 1960s developed a vision that was in many ways quite congenial to the insurgent Republicans of the 1990s," including the "widespread affection for empowering technologically enabled elites, for building new businesses, and for rejecting traditional forms of governance." Before long, many right-wing politicians and executives would "[long] to share the hip credibility of people like Stewart Brand." (Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* 8) What distinguishes the vision of the hip communards in the 1960s from this later political realignment, however, is the historicity of this vision – lost with the de-historicizing processes of 1990s globalization.

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello help to historically situate this techno-utopian imaginary within the "ideological changes that have accompanied recent transformations in capitalism." As they elaborate, these recent transformations of capitalism in this period are based on:

... an interpretation of the dynamic that runs from the years following the events of May 1968, when the critique of capitalism was expressed loud and

clear, to the 1980s when, with critique silenced, the organizational forms on which the functioning of capitalism rests were profoundly altered, right up to the faltering search for new critical foundations in the second half of the 1990s. (Boltanski and Chiapello 3)

It is precisely the dynamic of Brand's 1995 vision of the 'cyber-revolution' which, as Boltanski and Chiapello suggest, must be re-articulated today as the “new spirit of capitalism” – what they go on to describe as:

... the set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order and, by legitimating them, to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it. These justifications, whether general or practical, local or global, expressed in terms of virtue or justice, support the performance of more or less unpleasant tasks, and, more generally, adherence to a lifestyle conducive to the capitalist order. (10-11)

At stake in the tech industry's association to the historical imaginary of the 1960s is precisely the rendering of the American counterculture into a lifestyle conducive to capitalism. Such a process can be traced throughout the 1990s, as a period in which many of the key values of the American counterculture became incorporated into commodity culture. By the end of the 1990s, 'ethical consumerism' and 'eco-capitalism' mark some of the ideological changes, as described by Boltanski and Chiapello, which are inherent to this restorational project of the undoing of the post-60s. Whereas the 1990s, as Boltanski and Chiapello suggest, can be understood as “the reverse of the late 1960s and early 1970s,” the techno-utopian historical imaginary mobilized in this period is premised on a project of restoration and nostalgia. (xxxv) Techno-utopianism describes a sense of irreversibility – the “end of the sixties,” disguised as a return.

This dialectic of restoration and recuperation of the 1960s has become a critical approach to the project of periodizing the 1990s over the last several years. Since Steve Jobs's death in 2011, his biography has provided a premise for this cultural imagination of the tech industry within the expanding 'creative economies' of late capitalism. In 2012, Caleb Melby would publish a graphic novel entitled *The Zen of Steve Jobs*, telling the story of Jobs's relationship with Zen Buddhist priest Kobun Chino Otagawa. Much of the plot focuses on Jobs's period of exile from Apple, after 1985, and represents his relationship with Kobun as a spiritual awakening. Jobs's exile signifies a post-60s era of countercultural retreat – a period in which Jobs pursues Zen Buddhist practice as a way to preserve elements of an endangered past. The graphic novel spiritualizes a business ideology of entrepreneurialism and maverickism. While in 2011, Apple supplier factories in China were the subject of increasing scrutiny over fair labor practices, Melby's text counteracts this scrutiny with a depiction of Jobs as a figure of transcultural hybridity, motivated by a common good rather than personal profit.

As a cultural icon, Jobs is often characterized by his utopianism. "Jobs always wanted Apple to create its own unified utopia, a magical walled garden where hardware and software and peripheral devices worked well together to create a great experience," writes Jobs biographer Walter Isaacson. In *Jobs* (2013), this biography is taken up to elaborate the utopian project of Apple's company history. Like *The Zen of Steve Jobs*, the film offers an apologist narrative – redeeming Jobs from certain matters of public criticism, most notably his estrangement from his daughter – but

performs a different undoing of the post-60s era in relation to this biography. Assuming a more linear plot, *Jobs* reinforces the tropes of a return to the 1960s, developing a lineage from Jobs's sepia-toned period at Reed College in 1974 to his influence in Apple's renaissance period of the mid-1990s. Jobs's period of exile, however, is sparsely conceived. As a result, the entirety of the post-60s era is erased from the film's historical imaginary – following the dystopian turn of the company in the mid-1980s, the film jumps to Jobs's return to Apple in 1996 and ends in 1997. The film glorifies the long 1960s in its representation of Jobs's epiphany use of LSD and trip to India, and conceives of the formation of Apple in 1977 as a point of continuity with these experiences. In its eradication of the post-60s, the film is ultimately about a nostalgia for the 1990s. These historical valences are all at work in the “Think Different” ad campaign of 1997, included in the film's closing narration:

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. But the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

In the film's historical imaginary, 1997 marks the turning point of a technological revolution for which Steve Jobs is the pioneering “crazy one” – a utopian thinker, with a vision of a technology for a 'common good.'

Jobs's death in 2011 became an opportunity to reinforce this historical imaginary projected through countless biographies, in which the return to Apple

marks a triumph over the post-60s and a technological revolution that we are still living out today. Published in 2011, Walter Isaacson's authorized biography of Steve Jobs has provided a template for such pioneer narratives of the tech industry – as well as material for the media coverage around Jobs's death. In the conclusion of the book, Isaacson gives his subject the “last words” in excerpted, self-reflective material from Jobs:

My passion has been to build an enduring company where people were motivated to make great products. Everything else was secondary. Sure, it was great to make a profit, because that was what allowed you to make great products. But the products, not the profits, were the motivation. Sculley flipped these priorities to where the goal was to make money. It's a subtle difference, but it ends up meaning everything: the people you hire, who gets promoted, what you discuss in meetings.

Some people say, “Give the customers what they want.” But that's not my approach. Our job is to figure out what they're going to want before they do... People don't know what they want until you show it to them. (W. Isaacson 735-736)

In his critique of former Apple CEO John Sculley, Jobs contributes to the historical narrative of a return to the 1960s – what biographer Alan Deutschman termed the “second coming of Steve Jobs” – in the 1990s.

Throughout Isaacson's biography, Jobs defines his own legacy in relation to certain preserved lineages of counterculturalism – deriving from the artistic and cultural productions of the 1960s a set of business and managerial practices for the 1990s, as in the following passage:

... You always have to keep pushing to innovate. Dylan could have sung protest songs forever and probably made a lot of money, but he didn't. He had to move on, and when he did, by going electric in 1965, he alienated a lot of people. His 1966 Europe tour was his greatest. He would come on and do a set of acoustic guitar, and the

audiences loved him. The he brought out what became The Band, and they would all do an electric set, and the audience sometimes booed. There was one point where he was about to sing “Like a Rolling Stone” and someone from the audience yells “Judas!” And Dylan then says, “Play it fucking loud!” And they did. The Beatles were the same way. They kept evolving, moving, refining their art. That's what I've always tried to do – keep moving. Otherwise, as Dylan says, if you're not busy being born, you're busy dying. (739)

This business ideology of 'innovation' marks the complicity of artistic critique, as Boltanski and Chiapello argue, in the new spirit of capitalism. As they write,

... it was by opposing a social capitalism planned and supervised by the state – treated as obsolete, cramped and constraining – and leaning on the artistic critique (autonomy and creativity) that the new spirit of capitalism gradually took shape at the end of the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, and undertook to restore the prestige of capitalism. (Boltanski and Chiapello 201)

The incorporation of artistic critique into the managerial culture of the tech industry is part of these larger processes of undoing the post-60s. Yet what kinds of history are made possible by this narrative of recuperation? How are these processes of the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ to be intervened upon? While it is on the one hand quite simple to delineate the contours of these processes, it is quite a different task to recover from such a delineation the residual elements of critical negativity – what remains available for the undermining and re-appropriation of utopian imagination.

### Recuperating the ‘Hacker Ethic’

In his 1983 popular history *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, Stephen Levy describes a “Hacker Ethic” that reflects the residual elements of the 1960s counterculture in the impending information age. Levy writes of the Hacker Ethic as a “revolutionary” set of principles that were “not so much debated and

discussed as silently agreed upon” among hackers who “believe that essential lessons can be learned about the systems – about the world – from taking things apart, seeing how they work, and using this knowledge to create new and even more interesting things,” adding that “they resent any person, physical barrier, or law that tries to keep them from doing this.” (Levy 27-28) The Hacker Ethic corresponds with a practice of world-making and innovation oriented by an impulse toward social transformation. To this extent, the Hacker Ethic is deeply connected to the explosion of possibilities experienced in the 1960s, counteracting the hegemonic foreclosure of revolutionary energies in the post-60s. However, as I will go on to discuss, this ethic has undergone a series of mutations, as hacking and hacker culture have been incorporated into the business logics of the tech industry. And yet, it seems critical to engage with the Hacker Ethic as part of a project of working against the recuperation of the counterculture in the 1980s and 1990s.

This ethic consisted of six shared values among hackers, as Levy elaborates in his historical account:

1. Access to computers – anything which might teach you something about the way the world works – should be unlimited and total;
2. All information should be free;
3. Mistrust Authority – Promote Decentralization;
4. Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position;
5. You can create art and beauty on a computer;
6. Computers can change your life for the better. (27-33)

The Hacker Ethic was primarily anti-bureaucratic and anti-privatization. “The belief, sometimes taken unconditionally, that information should be free was a direct tribute to the way a splendid computer, or computer program, works,” Levy argues, “What

was a computer but something that benefited from a free flow of information?... In the hacker viewpoint, any system could benefit from that easy flow of information.”

(29) In Levy’s conception of this hacker phenomenon, “no missionaries tried to gather converts,” since the “computer did the converting.” (27) The centrality of the computer in Levy’s account should not, however, occlude the influence of the New Communalist phenomenon on the Hacker Ethic.

Like the communards of the 1960s, the hackers of the post-60s were concerned with a practice of world-making and utopian imagination. In *A Hacker Manifesto*, McKenzie Wark writes of hacking as the enduring practice of such an ethic:

Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colourings, we create the possibility of new things entering the world. Not always great things, or even good things, but new things. In art, in science, in philosophy and culture, in any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information new possibilities for the world are produced,” Wark elaborates, “there are hackers hacking the new out of the old. (Wark, 58)

Wark conceives of hacking as an expansive practice, far beyond the scope of computers. It is for this reason that an ethic is so critical to the practice of hacking – and more specifically, a critique of the logic of property. Such an ethic emerges from the distinction that “while hackers create these new worlds,” they do not “possess them,” as Wark writes: “That which we create is mortgaged to others, and to the interests of others, to states and corporations who control the means for making worlds we alone discover. We do not own what we produce – it owns us.” (ibid) The practice of hacking, in this sense, requires resistance to reification – a critical



orientation toward capitalist recuperation that also actively antagonizes recuperative forces. While such a critique of recuperation is immanent to the Hacker Ethic, however, the cultural phenomenon of hacking nevertheless reflects the absorption of this practice into the marketization of the information age.

Key to this recuperation of hacking culture is the mainstreaming of the hacker as a hero figure of the post-60s era. In Levy's popular history, for instance, the hacker is taken up in a series of character studies to advance an emergent brand of heroism – a distinct to a period of political foreclosure and subcultural proliferation. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the hacker was increasingly an object of cultural fascination, having to do in large part with the popularization of cyberpunk and neo-noir literature and film, as components of the dystopian turn of this period. In Hollywood blockbusters like *WarGames* and *Tron*, however, the figure of the hacker is distinct from the typical cyberpunk anti-hero, whose status as hacker comes along with an established hacker subculture. As Levy argues, whereas the First and Second Generation of hackers fit the description of counter-cultural, the Third Generation makes a departure from lineages to the 1960s. This later wave of hackers in the 1980s consisted of a highly individuated subculture: as Levy writes, “Third-Generation hackers never had the sense of community of their predecessors, and early on they came to see healthy sales figures as essential to becoming winners.” (Levy 389) This was the youth culture of the ‘personal computing revolution’ – far from inheritors of countercultural politics, these were proto-venture capitalists.

By the mid-1980s, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* would bring this Third Generation of hacking into the mainstream in a significant way – representing the hacker as a popular, charismatic figure, no longer the marginalized paranoiac or nerd. The Ferris Bueller version of the hacker – who uses his personal computer to modify his high school attendance records – displaces the Cold War conception of the hacker as a terrorist with a more playful conceptualization of the prankster. Dennis Hayes critiques certain elements of this romantic reconceptualization of the hacker figure, writing that hackers are typically:

... white, upper middle-class adolescents who have taken over the home computer (bought, subsidized, or tolerated by parents in the hope of cultivating computer literacy). Few are politically motivated although many express contempt for the 'bureaucracies' that hamper their electronic journeys. Nearly all demand unfettered access to intricate and intriguing computer networks. In this, teenage hackers resemble an alienated shopping culture deprived of purchasing opportunities more than a terrorist network. (Hayes 70)

With this mainstreaming of hacker subculture, the hacker is absorbed into a cultural typology of the 'rebel without a cause' – ascribed an adolescence which delegitimizes the most radical elements of hacking.

Instead of this romantic heroism, the Hacker Ethic is structured by criminality. In 1986, The Mentor – hacker Loyd Blankenship – released a manifesto describing the practice of hacking through this problem of criminalization:

This is our world now... the world of the electron and the switch, the beauty of the baud. We make use of a service already existing without paying for what could be dirt-cheap if it wasn't run by profiteering gluttons, and you call us criminals. We explore... and you call us criminals. We seek after knowledge... and you call us criminals... You build atomic bombs, you wage wars, you murder, cheat, and lie to us and try to make us believe it's for our own good, yet we're the

criminals. Yes, I am a criminal. My crime is that of curiosity. My crime is that of judging people by what they say and think, not what they look like. My crime is that of outsmarting you, something that you will never forgive me for. (Blankenship)

Blankenship imagines a world without heroes, but also, without the possibility of heroism. The romanticism elaborated in Levy's popular history, for instance, contributes to the fantasy of liberal individualism propagated as techno-utopianism. There are utopian elements to be recovered from Blankenship's conception of hacking, however, which should be distinguished in terms of another fantasy of de-individuation and the eradication of difference: the hacker is criminal, while existing "without skin color, without nationality, without religious bias." To the contrary, the hacker should be understood as a form of white criminality -- what Lisa Nakamura calls the "default whiteness" of cyber identities. In Blankenship's manifesto, the hacker represents a position of privilege that is, nevertheless, antagonistic toward the social conditions structuring that privilege. In this sense, Blankenship approaches the Hacker Ethic as a political problem, whereas the heroism ascribed by Levy's popular history conceives of the hacker in moral terms, this criminalization politicizes the hacker. This criminal conception positioned the hacker as at once complicit and antagonistic -- a position of immanence and sabotage.

Between Levy's popular history and Blankenship's manifesto, the Hacker Ethic is taken up as a moral or a political orientation toward the practice of hacking in the midst of the personal computer boom of the mid-1980s. These conceptions of the Hacker Ethic would continue to define the absorption of hacking into youth subcultures of the white middle class. By the 1990s, the youthful and libidinal fantasy

of the hacker became an important cultural archetype, as in the 1995 cult classic *Hackers* – a film that is framed in dialogue with The Hacker Manifesto. While drawing heavily from Blankenship’s revolutionary rhetoric, the film follows its teenage characters’ adventures in preventing an international security threat, while ultimately it settles into the narrative world of a high school melodrama. Rather than a Hacker Ethic, the film romanticizes the criminality of hacking – revealing an underpinning narrative logic of heroism, as conceived by Levy’s genealogy.

Whereas *Hackers* takes the hacking subculture of the 1990s as its focus, the 1992 film *Sneakers* constructs a generational imaginary of hackers in this period that aligns with Levy’s earlier genealogy of the post-60s. A first generation hacker Martin who goes underground after his best friend and collaborator Cosmo is arrested for hacking with university equipment in 1968. By the early 1990s, Martin has established a private practice with fellow outlaws and misfits, working for mostly banks and corporations. Cosmo, presumed dead, reappears to steal the ultimate code-cracking machine, and threatens to update Martin's FBI records – with the hope that Martin will instead join him in his plans to collapse the global economy. Between these characters, there are competing visions of the post-60s, each of which reflects the processes of recuperation distinct to this period.

Cosmo, played by Ben Kingsley, is the return of the 1960s with a vengeance. He wants to incite a financial crisis, taking down the stock market, currency market, and commodities market -- “I might even be able to crash the whole damn system,”

as he explains to Martin, “Destroy all records of ownership. Think of it, Marty – no more rich people, no more poor people, everybody’s the same. Isn’t that what we said we always wanted?” While motivated by this fidelity to the 1960s in what he “always wanted,” Cosmo is also oriented by a vision of the 1990s as an information age of revolutionary possibility. The vision is limited by his insistence that data has outmoded money – that information will not be monetized or weaponized. “There’s a war out there, old friend,” Cosmo says to Martin, “A world war, and it’s not about who’s got the most bullets, it’s about who controls the information. What we see and hear – how we work and what we think. It’s all about the information!” Cosmo sees in this horizon a possibility to end capitalism, while Martin describes Cosmo’s plan as “crazy.” Whereas Cosmo describes their experience in the ‘60s as a “journey” they shared, Martin insists that it was a “prank.”

Cosmo and Martin align with a familiar opposition between idealism and realism – an opposition that riddles the history of utopian thought, and revolutionary imagination. As figures of possibility and impossibility, the characters correspond with different historical dynamics of the undoing of the post-60s. Whereas Cosmo is imagined in terms of the danger of a return to the 1960s, Martin is instead a figure of reconciliation and reformism. Played by Robert Redford – who likewise encapsulates these dynamics of the recuperated counterculture – Martin operates primarily out of self-interest, as when he and his business partners essentially bargain their retirement plans with the NSA in the closing scene. As implied by the postscript, Martin’s retirement includes reallocating funds from the Republican National Committee to

organizations like GreenPeace. In eclipsing Cosmo's vision of a world without money, the film depicts the abandonment of Martin's Hacker Ethic for a form of liberal moralism and ethical consumerism.

Films like *Hackers* and *Sneakers* coincide with the steady dissolution of the Hacker Ethic in the mid-1990s – what McKenzie Wark describes as a “crisis of identity” in hacker culture. This crisis emerges because “The hacker class has produced itself as itself, but not for itself,” as Wark argues, leaving the hacker to “[search] for a representation of what it is to be a hacker in the identities of other classes.” In treating hacking culture as a class, Wark makes the case that this class “has to distinguish itself between its competitive interest in the hack, and its collective interest in discovering a relation among hackers that expresses an open and ongoing future.” (38) Wark responds to this tendency in the hacker subculture with the concept of expressive politics, precisely as a way to engage with hacking as a political practice:

Expressive politics is a struggle against commodity property itself. Expressive politics is not the struggle to collectivise property, for that is still a form of property. Expressive politics is the struggle to free what can be free from both versions of the commodity form – its totalising market form, and its bureaucratic state form. What may be free from the commodity form altogether is not land, not capital, but information. All other forms of property are exclusive. The ownership by one excludes, by definition, the ownership by another. But information as property may be shared without diminishing anything but its scarcity. Information is that which can escape the commodity form. (58)

At stake in this escape from commodification – the very endeavor of expressive politics – is a utopian imaginary which describes a particular continuity with the

1960s counterculture, but one which must be re-articulated for a different context and, more specifically, for a different phase of capitalism in which such a utopian imaginary is easily subsumed by a contradictory logic.

Since the 1990s, the Hacker Ethic has become even more transfigured into a work ethic of corporate management in the tech industry. Mark Zuckerberg's 2012 mission statement for Facebook refers to "The Hacker Way" as "a unique culture and management approach" cultivated by the company. Describing the company's "social mission," the statement features much of the utopian rhetoric which proliferates in the tech industry today:

Most great people care primarily about building and being a part of great things, but they also want to make money. Through the process of building a team – and also building a developer community, advertising market and investor base – I've developed a deep appreciation for how building a strong company with a strong economic engine and strong growth can be the best way to align many people to solve important problems... Simply put: we don't build services to make money; we make money to build better services.  
(Zuckerberg 68)

Drawing from hacker culture to further elaborate this utopianism, Zuckerberg continues to define the company's social mission with the notion of The Hacker Way:

The Hacker Way is an approach to building that involves continuous improvement and iteration. Hackers believe that something can always be better, and that nothing is ever complete. They just have to go fix it – often in the face of people who say it's impossible or are content with the status quo.  
Hackers try to build the best services over the long term by quickly releasing and learning from smaller iterations rather than trying to get everything right all at once...  
Hacking is also an inherently hands-on and active discipline. Instead of debating for days whether a new idea is possible or what the best way to build something is, hackers would rather just prototype something and see what works...

Hacker culture is also extremely open and meritocratic. Hackers believe that the best idea and implementation should always win – not the person who is best at lobbying for an idea or the person who manages the most people. (69)

For Zuckerberg, hacking is a culture of work imagined in terms of immediacy and creativity, but for the sake of increased competition and productivity. Whereas the Hacker Ethic once corresponded with a practice of anti-work, it is here rendered a work ethic of the creative economy.

To encourage this approach of hacker productivity, Facebook employees participate in a “hackathon” every few months: as Zuckerberg explains,

... everyone builds prototypes for new ideas they have. At the end, the whole team gets together and looks at everything that has been built. Many of our most successful products came out of hackathons, including Timeline, chat, video, our mobile development framework and some of our most important infrastructure...

To make sure all our engineers share this approach, we require all new engineers – even managers whose primary job will not be to write code – to go through a program called Bootcamp where they learn our codebase, our tools and our approach. There are a lot of folks in the industry who manage engineers and don't want to code themselves, but the type of hands-on people we're looking for are willing and able to go through Bootcamp. (69)

This emphasis on a “hands-on approach” is paired with a description of the Hacker Way as an approach that “involves continuous improvement and iteration,” as well as a constant stream of production. In renewing its interface in this iterative manner, Facebook has cultivated a model of sustainability, while competing social network sites have been repeatedly outmoded. Zuckerberg attributes this constancy to Facebook's work culture, which derives from hacker culture that “something can always be better, and that nothing is ever complete.” He continues,



Hackers try to build the best services over the long term by quickly releasing and learning from smaller iterations rather than trying to get everything right all at once. To support this, we have built a testing framework that at any given time can try out thousands of versions of Facebook. We have the words “Done is better than perfect” painted on our walls to remind ourselves to always keep shipping. (ibid)

Zuckerberg's conception of hacking draws from some of the dominant tropes of post-Fordist management, including flexibility and flexible specialization, decentralized organization, creative and innovative labor. Beyond its disarticulation of the Hacker Ethic, the Hacker Way captures the larger historical process of re-imagining work in this period. Facebook's brand identification with hacker culture is also strategic in the sense that it obscures the company's profit-scheme with the logic of a public good. As Zuckerberg writes,

By helping people form these connections, we hope to rewire the way people spread and consume information. We think the world's information infrastructure should resemble the social graph — a network built from the bottom up or peer-to-peer, rather than the monolithic, top-down structure that has existed to date. We also believe that giving people control over what they share is a fundamental principle of this rewiring. (68)

The logic of a public good – the social mission of the company – here obscures the distinction between consumer and worker. While producing data for Facebook, the user is placed in the subject position of the consumer. Facebook is a company that does not think of itself as a company, and which persists because its workers do not think of themselves as workers – and hacker culture is precisely what fosters this ambiguity.

In this section, I have briefly traced out this trajectory from the Hacker Ethic to Zuckerberg's Hacker Way, to illustrate the particular dynamics of recuperation at

work in the legacy of the counterculture taken up by the contemporary tech industry. However, there are different trajectories which diverge from this trend of recuperation, and which attempt to articulate a contemporary vision of anti-capitalist techno-utopianism. One such vision was that of Aaron Swartz, the political organizer and computer programmer, and founder of the Creative Commons and Reddit, among other organizations. In July 2008, Swartz would write the “Guerilla Open Access Manifesto,” in which he takes up the question of the Hacker Ethic for the contemporary digital age. The manifesto begins with familiar rhetoric: “Information is power. But like all power, there are those who want to keep it for themselves,” Swartz writes, “The world’s entire scientific and cultural heritage, published over centuries in books and journals, is increasingly being digitized and locked up by a handful of private corporations.” However, as Swartz argues, there are those “struggling to change this”:

The Open Access Movement has fought valiantly to ensure that scientists do not sign their copyrights away but instead ensure their work is published on the Internet, under terms that allow anyone to access it. Everything up until now will have been lost. That is too high a price to pay. Forcing academics to pay money to read the work of their colleagues? Scanning entire libraries but only allowing the folks at Google to read them? Providing scientific articles to those at elite universities in the First World, but not to the children in the Global South? It’s outrageous and unacceptable. (Swartz)

At stake in the efficacy of the Open Access Movement for Swartz is precisely the total elimination of the past – a particular crisis of historical consciousness that comes with the privatization of knowledge. Swartz’s manifesto is motivated by a utopian impulse, that seems critically distinct from the techno-utopianism imagined in the

virtual communities of the 1990s. “We need to take information, wherever it is stored, make our copies and share them with the world,” Swartz writes, “We need to take stuff that’s out of copyright and add it to the archive... we need to fight for Guerilla Open Access.” (ibid)

Three years after writing the Guerilla Open Access Manifesto, Swartz would be arrested for breaking-and-entering, after he installed a computer in an MIT closet in order to download and distribute journal articles from JSTOR. While under federal indictment for downloading 4.8 million documents, Swartz hung himself in 2013. Swartz’s death marked, as Elizabeth Day suggests, “a particular tragedy,” as he “was one of the few people equipped with the skills and idealism to want to change [a corrupt] system for the better.” For many, Day writes, Swartz “had been both hero and pioneer: a man who used his technological ability not to become a multimillionaire Silicon Valley entrepreneur but, instead, to try and make things better for others.” (Day) Swartz’s criminalization and eventual suicide have been incorporated into a cultural narrative of martyrdom, as Day argues – yet another hero of tragic idealism in the longer history of hackers. This tragic end is perhaps the only way to make sense of Swartz’s vision for the internet – demonstrating the danger of utopian imagination, so distinct to the ideological conditions of an anti-utopian period. This is a familiar, idealist narrative, as Justin Peters describes, of “the last honest man taking a stand against a corrupt world.” (Peters) However, Swartz’s suicide should not affirm some counter-position of ‘realism,’ but rather point to the ways in which his techno-utopianism was criminalized.

These posthumous representations of Swartz as a tragic idealist have been problematic to the project of politicizing his death, and recovering his various projects. In response to such representations, Swartz's longtime mentor Lawrence Lessig would ask, "Please don't pathologize this story." (Lessig) To pathologize idealism is precisely the agenda of anti-utopianism. As Lessig argues, in the attempt to make sense of Swartz's death it is imperative to remember that "we live in a world where the architects of the financial crisis regularly dine at the White House – and where even those brought to 'justice' never even have to admit any wrongdoing, let alone be labeled 'felons.'" It is in this world, he continues, that "the question this government needs to answer is why it was so necessary that Aaron Swartz be labeled a 'felon.'" (ibid) What is lost in the narrative of utopian martyrdom or tragic idealism, in other words, is the criminalization of Swartz's vision of freedom of information. To this extent Swartz epitomizes the danger of techno-utopianism in the contemporary period – the perceived threat of the hacker figure, as antagonist and political agent in an era of digital capitalism.

In Swartz's legacy, certain residual elements of the Hacker Ethic can continue to provide the basis for a techno-utopianism resistant to the business logics at work in Zuckerberg's Hacker Way. Hacking remains important figure to the contemporary political imagination. However, this will require new cultural narratives of the hacker. The 'heroes' of Levy's genealogy must be de-centered, along with the hero narrative in general. Instead, this notion of heroism must be critiqued as part of the tech industry's sustained project of recuperating the counterculture. Preserved most

effectively are the problems of white supremacy and patriarchy, which remain unobstructed through this process recuperation. The heroism of the hacker figure must be ideologically interrogated as a cultural narrative of white male criminality.

While the hacker's subject position of criminality is potentially politicizing, it also becomes mobilized by a similar set of tropes to those of the entrepreneurial genius, the iconoclast who "thinks different." These conceptions of the digital pioneer and idealistic hero are at once fundamental to the cultural imagination of technopopians and hackers, throughout the genealogy proposed by Levy – stretching back to the late 1950s, at the very university that would end up prosecuting Swartz, as Lessig insists, for "always and only working for (at least his conception of) the public good." (ibid) What makes Swartz's criminality exceptional is his class status and racial privilege – the problem of criminality must be further complicated to include the criminalization of race. In this sense the politics of the post-60s – far more than the countercultural elements of the long 1960s – must be recovered from this history in a Hacker Ethic of the present. The struggles of the 1960s civil rights, feminist, and anti-imperialist movements must be re-articulated in a different historical situation. This involves thinking through these problems of the historical imagination of the 1990s, against the dominantly de-historicizing modes of cultural recuperation.

Swartz was often described as the "Internet's own boy" – a figure who captured the periodicity of the Internet boom, as a child prodigy radicalized by hacker culture. "Aaron's commitment to social justice was profound and defined his life," wrote his family in a statement released shortly after his death. "He used his

prodigious skills as a programmer and technologist not to enrich himself but to make the Internet and the world a fairer, better place.” (Nelson) While distilling elements of the cultural imagination of the Internet era, Swartz also captures the foreclosure of this imagination – and more precisely, the hacker’s political status within it.

### Periodizing the ‘90s

Periodizing the global nineties as the “undoing of the post-60s” is a critical operation of the contemporary historical imagination. To periodize, in this sense, is not to homologize, but to delineate a dialectic. This dialectic of becoming global and undoing the post-60s in the 1990s is the very basis of the historical imaginary of techno-utopianism in this period. And yet, as I have argued, this historical imaginary does not retain the utopian elements of the counterculture, in its staging of a triumphant return of the 1960s. This ‘return’ renders these elements into their opposite – this is the ultimate negation of the “counter”-culture.

There are some who argue that consumer culture has always been the basis of the countercultural elements that ostensibly reappeared in this cultural imagination of the 1990s. In 1998, Thomas Frank would write of the rise of hip consumerism as part of an already established complicity between business culture and the counterculture – while these cultural categories themselves remain uninterrogated. While demonstrating the ways in which the neoliberal paradigm has drawn in elements of this cultural imaginary of the 1960s, Frank also contends that ‘hip’ never constituted a “fundamental adversary to a joyless, conformist consumer capitalism.” (Frank 17)

Frank's account of 'hip capitalism' reflects the ideological conditions of the 1990s – for which, as I have suggested, the politics and historical struggles of the 'post-60s' become enveloped into a temporality fixed to an expansionary present, and occluded from revolutionary energies of the past and possibilities of the future. As Frank argues, 'hip capitalism' was not merely “on the fringes of enterprise, an occasional hippie entrepreneur selling posters or drug paraphernalia. Not was it a purely demographic maneuver, just a different spin to sell products to a different group.”

(26) Rather, according to this historical conception of the relation between the counterculture and business culture, “what happened in the sixties is that hip became central to the way American capitalism understood itself and explained itself to the public.” (ibid) While certainly bringing to the foreground certain residual elements of the 1960s counterculture in the 1990s, such arguments about 'hip capitalism' typify this process of political eradication and temporal flattening in this period, which reduces a history of struggle and re-socialization to Beatlemania and VW vans.

Steve Jobs's return to Apple in 1997 is an important juncture in this mobilized nostalgia, with the 1997 advertising campaign “Think different,” which featured images of 1960s icons such as Martin Luther King, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Buckminster Fuller, and Muhammad Ali, among other historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Amelia Earhart. “The campaign was a rallying cry,” as Michael Moritz suggests – but it was also, he continues, “a keen expression of the artistic, sensuous, romantic, mystical, inquisitive, seductive, austere and theatrical side of [Jobs] – adjective not usually associated with the leader of a technology company.”

(Moritz 202) In other words, what was ‘revolutionary’ about Jobs was his capacity as an agent of cultural recuperation – his ability to translate the utopian impulses of the 1960s counterculture into the business practices of the 1990s tech industry. Today it seems imperative to construct a different account of techno-utopianism, as part of the global imaginary of the 1990s, and the recuperative imaginary of the post-60s.

How does the history of the tech industry figure into the contemporary cultural imagination – and how does this reflect the historicity of the present? The legibility of these historical processes is itself a result of their culmination, in what has been described as the ‘post-Internet’ era. The ‘post-internet’ is another way of periodizing the 1990s – a way to historically imagine the present in relation to a foreclosed ‘cyber revolution.’ New York Times columnist David Brooks – notably an idealist of this ‘revolution’ of the 1990s – would declare the “goodbye to the epoch” of the internet in 2001: “We used up the zeitgeist of the 1990s, and now we’re trying to sell it off. As Brooks suggests of this post-Internet era, people will continue to use computers but “what’s gone is the sense that” the people who use computers “are on the cutting edge of history.” (Brooks) Others have characterized this post-Internet era in terms of this lost sense of possibility – that the novelty had worn off. There are other ways to account for this ‘post-Internet’ moment, however, including the collapse of the dot-com bubble between 1999-2001. What seems more important today, in thinking through the periodicity of the ‘Internet boom’ of the 1990s, are the ways in which this burst of techno-utopianism can be historicized as part of the neoliberal project of recuperation that I have described as the undoing of the post-60s.



In the utopian imagination of this period, it seems possible to posit “the world sixties against the global nineties,” as Christopher Connery suggests of a process of ‘worlding’ against globalization. What is fundamentally at stake in the Hacker Ethic, for instance, is the everyday practice of world-making and re-imagining conditions of possibility in the present, for which the computer one of many tools.

As a practice, the Hacker Ethic is doomed without a broader political orientation. What is most dangerous about the dominant tendencies of techno-utopianism in the 1990s is the fantasy of a world without difference. In asserting the politics of difference, however, it may be useful to return to the historicity of techno-utopianism in the 1990s as a dynamic of contemporary resistance to digital capitalism. As Veronica Barassi argues,

... techno-utopian discourses on the so-called revolutionary qualities of new technologies have not only defined the history of the internet and the development of the web 2.0, but also they have largely impacted activists’ every practices by redefining political priorities and transforming understandings of political participation. (Barassi 62)

Without tending toward the problematic idealism of social media revolution, Barassi offers a historical account of techno-utopian discourses that demonstrates the instrumentality of contemporary technologies in various struggles, precisely as a tool of what she describes as “counter-power.”

The ‘post-Internet’ era, if anything, marks a period of proliferation for cyber technologies – while also describing the dwindling of free-market utopianism after the collapse of the dot-com bubble, and the rise of technophobia in the contemporary period. As Debra Ferreday argues, we are living in a ‘post-Internet’ age in the sense

that “the ‘Internet’ is understood to mean the text-based Internet together with the constellation of grand theoretical claims associated with it.” (Ferreday 4) This new paradigm of what Lisa Nakamura calls the “post-2000 popular graphical Internet.” (Nakamura 4) The global image of today is the google map – the interactive, totalizing spatialization of the earth, the saturation point of digital capitalism. With this dominant tendency toward techno-dystopian imagination, the techno-utopianism of the 1990s takes on a different set of cultural valences as a history to the present period.

#### The History of Tech in Contemporary Popular Culture

Following Steve Jobs’s death in October 2011 there has been a surge of biographies and popular histories, as well as documentaries and feature films, in which Jobs’s life serves as a vehicle for continuing this process of recuperating the counterculture. These biographical narratives participate in the larger cultural project of dehistoricizing the 1960s, and depoliticizing the post-60s – reflecting this process of both flattening the historical character of the counterculture and dulling the political stakes of the counterculture’s recuperation. Ranging from the BBC documentary *Billion Dollar Hippie*, to Chrisann Brennan’s memoir *The Bite in the Apple*, to Caleb Melby’s graphic novel *The Zen of Steve Jobs*, these narratives also reinforce a dominant fixation on the genius innovator figure as both hero and pioneer of this popular imaginary of the history of tech.

The historical scope of this popular imaginary has shifted over the last several years, while being all the while dominated by the trope of the heroic pioneer. In *The Imitation Game*, such a pre-history is imagined of hacking, through the narrative of Alan Turing's decryption of German intelligence codes in WWII. As the story of the "first hacker," as Andrew O'Hehir suggests, the film makes clear connections between the "legacy of Turing's research and experiments [and] the world around us." (O'Hehir) The film brings to the foreground the story of Turing's homosexuality, as a form of tragic criminality at work in the heroic tropes of this longer history of computer technology. This incorporation of Turing's biography into the popular imagination of tech history is what distinguishes *The Imitation Game* from yet another WWII film, while it likewise reinforces the dominant conceptions of a genius innovator so prevalent to the tech industry in the neoliberal paradigm.

In popular culture over the last several years, the more recent history of genius innovators in tech has tended increasingly toward the anti-hero figure – in contrast with the archetypes of the inspired, utopian entrepreneurial pioneer, or the tragically idealist and criminalized hacker. The 2013 film *The Fifth Estate*, for instance, derails from the political vision of the Wikileaks scandal in favor of a pathologizing character study of Julian Assange as a paranoid hacker and narcissistic genius. David Fincher's 2010 *The Social Network* features a damning portrait of Mark Zuckerberg, as an elitist misogynist who began Facebook, primarily, as the fulfillment of an adolescent fantasy more than the techno-utopian vision of social connectivity described in Zuckerberg's 2012 statement "The Hacker Way." Both films take clearly

anti-utopian valences, in their ‘realist’ conceptions of these anti-heroes and the revolutionary possibilities of social media and virtual databases. In their critical representations of these contemporary figures, the films still reinforce the centrality of these genius innovators, while collapsing the romantic narrative of heroic idealism.

The 2014 television series *Halt and Catch Fire* reflects recent critiques of the masculinist culture of the tech industry, in its fictionalized account of several innovators of the personal computer boom in the Silicon Prairie of Texas in 1983. The series brings to the foreground the feminization of labor, as a key dynamic at work beneath the surface of this period in the tech industry. While organized around the collaboration of Joe MacMillan, a charismatic entrepreneur, and Gordon Clark, an underdog engineer. These men correspond with familiar archetypes in the tech industry’s cultural history. And yet, these men are consistently de-centered by the narrative, as the show becomes increasingly focused on the instrumentalization of Cameron – a young, punk woman who drops out of college to become a programmer – and Donna – Gordon’s wife and former engineering partner, who has worked at Texas Instruments since becoming a mother. From the start of the series, it is clear that Cameron is the prodigy figure. Whereas Joe has a knack for marketing, Cameron has the vision he needs to sell. Donna, on the other hand, “makes [Gordon’s] life possible,” as she declares at one point in the first season: in addition to performing most of the household labor, which the series attentively portrays, she fixes Gordon’s crises at work and turns out to be a far more gifted engineer. Through these female protagonists, the series develops a critical articulation of this history – and it is in this

sense that Cameron and Donna reveal the ways in which the series is more accurately a history of the present.

While *Halt and Catch Fire* is certainly critical, it is not anti-utopian. Cameron represents the punk idealist – the only character in the series with a vision of the future, making her not naïve but perceptive. When at a tech convention, Joe and Gordon encounter the “1984” campaign for Macintosh, they are both struck by Anya Major’s resemblance of Cameron. She captures the same element of futurity and hope – but unlike Apple, Joe and Gordon are keeping this source of utopianism essentially locked in a basement. Nothing like the feminine secretaries spread across the office, Cameron’s punk androgyny and adolescent lifestyle are contained in her workspace of a storage facility. It is from this enclave, however, that Cameron generates the essential utopian dimension, which Joe recuperates into the vision of their burgeoning company.

On the one hand, Cameron’s techno-utopianism is imagined as a prophetic mode of the series – a point of contact with what would become of this history, as Cameron envisions the possibilities for a ‘personal computer revolution.’ On the other hand, Cameron can be interpreted as an intuitionist figure – for whom, as Lauren Berlant suggests, “whatever potentiality exists [is] not about futures, in any real sense of world-changing,” but rather about “alternative presents, interrupting what there is and world-making in the just now.” (Berlant 11) The temporality of intuition, in this sense, brings out a set of valences in Cameron’s techno-utopianism in the series – as the articulation of a ‘past’ that looks onto the present as its future, a periodicity made

imaginable by the historicity of the contemporary period. In the figure of the intuitionist, Berlant argues, “historical pasts and phantasmatic futures are the heuristics that bring us back to what is affectively charged and experience in, but what can only be intuited as, the historical present.” (15)

What is moreover made clear in Cameron’s function as an intuitionist figure is the evaporation of the post-60s from this conception of techno-utopian futurity. This distinction is elaborated between Cameron’s futurity, and Donna’s ostensible outmodedness, as a figure who instead articulates the process of second-wave feminism’s recuperation into the neoliberal paradigm. Donna represents the dissolution of the family wage – decentering Gordon as the ideal male earner – while also representing the ways in which, as Nancy Fraser argues, “that ideal now serves to legitimate ‘flexible capitalism.’” (Fraser, “How feminism became capitalism’s handmaiden”) Instead, this new mode of capital accumulation “heavily [depends] on women’s waged labor, as idealized in the ‘two-earner family.’” (Fraser, “*Fortunes of Feminism*” 218) Donna’s inner turmoil expresses the limits of second wave feminism, which has enabled her to demand reciprocity from Gordon in their daily housework – but which also makes visible to her the extent of incommensurability between them.

These dynamics are the focus of a pivotal episode, in which Gordon asks Donna to help he and Joe recover some of Cameron’s lost work, after a power shortage. Her “collaboration” is based on the re-assertion of the cultural logics of the family wage, under the economic conditions of feminized labor. By the end of the episode, Donna’s unwaged absorption into their business is what “saves the day,”

when Cameron's work is fully recovered. The conclusion of this episode does not, however, resolve a fundamental conflict between Cameron and Donna, as elements of critique in the series' historical imagination. When Donna comes to help Cameron, in the midst of an emotional meltdown about losing her work, Cameron lashes out at

Donna:

Cameron: Who are you, anyways? Just somebody's mother? Do you have any clue what it's like to work close to the metal? Like any idea what I've lost?

Donna: Well, I am also an engineer with a degree from Berkeley who's not only created my share of code, but given birth to two real humans.

Cameron: Oh, God.

Donna: So yeah, I am somebody's mother and you could use one right now because, frankly, you're a mess.

Cameron: Leave me alone. Go burn a bra or something.

Donna: That's great. Sally Ride just went to space and here's you screwing up at work and lashing out like a child at the people trying to help you. ("*Halt and Catch Fire*")

For both characters, the 'feminism' is flattened out and un-imagined by the post-60s paradigm – throughout the series, the 1960s appears as contradiction. Donna's marriage to Gordon conveys the failure of the 1960s, as they remember having dreams and wanting to change the world in their youth. Instead, Donna keeps a secret stash of marijuana in her basement, and experiences her countercultural past as regression. Born out of the 1960s, by contrast, Cameron at once represents the radical burst of possibilities from this period, but also the threat of historical amnesia – the horizon of ahistoricism in the global 1990s.

In their recruit of Cameron, Joe and Gordon offer her twenty-thousand dollars for a position as junior engineer, based on the fact that she has "no experience" – to

which Cameron's counter-offer is "Double it." In Gordon's rebuttal, he decries, "My wife makes 15 at TI!" Rather than compromise, Cameron simply responds, "Well then I feel sorry for her." Cameron's conception of the future, in other words, is one of taking pity on the political and cultural project of the 1960s, rather than one of recuperation and neoliberal absorption, as figured by Donna along with Joe and Gordon. What makes Donna distinct from Joe and Gordon, however, is the extent to which her ambivalence and complicity become formulated as a mode of critique. While the 1960s counterculture is nowhere to be found, this element of critique is re-asserted through these characters. This is precisely the "force of critique" discussed by Boltanski and Chiapello, as a necessary mode of counteraction to the "new spirit of capitalism." Following the "disarray of the 1980s," they argue that "we are currently witnessing a period of revival of critique," citing the artistic critique – which "elaborates demands for liberation and authenticity" – and the social critique – which "denounces poverty and exploitation" – as showing a "new lease of life." (Boltanski and Chiapello 346) In thinking through this emergence, it is critical, they continue:

[to] remember that when the fallout of the 1960s protest wave came, from the mid-1970s onwards, the fate of the two critiques was very different: whereas themes from the artistic critique were integrated into the discourse of capitalism, so that this critique might seem to have been partially satisfied, the social critique found itself nonplussed, bereft of ideological props, and consigned to the dustbin of history. (ibid)



As in the conception of the tech industry developed by *Halt and Catch Fire*, such a resurgence of critique is at work in certain regions of the popular imagination of this history in the contemporary period.

What is the status of this historical imaginary of the personal computing revolution in contemporary culture? How do such mythologies of the tech industry become remobilized in various periods of technological development? Over the past several years, these origin narratives of the contemporary tech industry have become increasingly dominant – articulating a mounting desire to encounter the cultural dynamics of this industry as historical. In the ‘cyber revolution,’ we can consider another iteration of this desire to engage with the industry’s production and circulation as a historical situation, through a burst of futurity that is nevertheless contained by the telos of free market expansion.

Nevertheless, the inevitability of recuperation presents another set of problems, more than a mode of narrativization – a historiographical solution to the counter-revolutionary aspects of these tech ‘revolutions.’ Rather than conceive of this recuperative element as a historical inevitability of the ‘undoing of the post-60s,’ this desire to think historically about the cultural imagination of the tech industry could take alternate orientations toward the problem of recuperation. While structural to capitalism, this recuperation might instead be taken up as a conflictual dynamic of this history, as opposed to a source of inevitability. To recover such a vantage, however, would entail a critique of the popular imagination of this history. This includes not only a skepticism toward the ‘revolutions’ staged by the tech industry,

and the absorption of the counterculture into cyberculture – the genealogy posed by Turner – but also toward the dominant perception of the depoliticization of the post-60s which I have described as a historical process of ‘undoing’ and recuperation. How do we think outside of these frameworks of skepticism or nostalgia – a lamenting that also characterizes certain perceptions of contemporary technology – in engaging with the historicity of these processes?

## Chapter Five

### False Utopias of Silicon Valley

With free-market utopianism flourishing in the Silicon Valley tech industry, Bay Area anti-capitalism has been dominantly articulated in anti-utopian terms. During what some call the ‘nihilist turn’ of anti-capitalist struggles, this tech-utopianism has been mobilized against utopia, in direct responses to tech boom gentrification. As opposed to the nihilist critique of utopianism, this phenomenon among the tech could be productively reconceived in terms of an ideological critique of frontierism. Silicon Valley tech elites represent a utopianism always already structured by the anti-utopianism inherent to the neoliberal paradigm – what Ruth Levitas describes as a “fallacy that closes off all futures, paralyzes us imaginatively and politically, and says it will never be much better than this.” (Levitas and Sargisson 37) This is a false utopianism, rather than the means for a case against

utopia. This is what Adorno calls “the cheap utopia, the false utopia, the utopia that can be bought.” (Adorno and Bloch 11)

This chapter looks at three features of this false utopianism in Silicon Valley, focusing on free market frontierism, creative labor workspaces, and gentrification as elements of techno-utopianism in the actually existing dystopia of the present. While approaching these elements of contemporary Silicon Valley as ‘utopian,’ however, I am ultimately interested in the falsehood of these utopias – as contained, unreflexively, by the totality of an ever-globalizing late capitalism. It would be naïve, as many anti-utopian rebukes would have it, to misconstrue any ‘utopia’ as a site outside this totality. Yet this rebuke does not suggest, by necessity, that a critical utopianism cannot be immanently cultivated. A ‘false utopia,’ as Herbert Ross suggests in relation to the emergence of fascism, is “not so much a Utopia as a nightmare and warning to all who would plan a Utopia,” as he describes of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. (Ross 200) If anything, the false utopia should instill a sense of urgency, precisely to imagine ‘utopia’ apart from the modality of the utopian blueprint. It is through such a sense of urgency that the following portraits of Silicon Valley have been conceived – not as an indictment of utopianism, or an account of the “end of utopia,” but as a critical engagement with the ways in which utopian imagination and practice are always already in danger of recuperation.

#### Of Frontiers and Utopianism

“...capital is the endless and limitless drive to go beyond its limiting barrier. Every boundary is and has to be a barrier. Else it would cease to be capital.” – Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*

Silicon Valley entrepreneur and venture capitalist Peter Thiel personifies all that is wrong with “utopianism” in Silicon Valley. He captures the ways that “market managerialism, not sky-scraping ambition, dominates everyday life and, simultaneously,” as Martin Parker argues, “the intellectual credibility of radical utopian thinking is deeply compromised by the ever-growing piles of pro-managerial futurology.” (Parker 217) The chairman of Palantir Technologies and former CEO of PayPal is often described as an eccentric, a “hyper-libertarian,” an idealist, and a contrarian. He describes himself as an entrepreneur, economic theorist and philanthropist. “When Peter Thiel ventures outside for a run, typically in the early-early morning,” journalist Nathan Miles writes, “he’s often drawn to [what Lawrence Ferlinghetti] called ‘the end of the land and land of beginning.’” (Miles) Miles’s 2011 portrait of Thiel derives a certain heroics from a set of frontierist tropes. At the waterline of the western frontier, as Miles writes, Thiel looks onward to where “the next – and most audacious – frontier begins.” (ibid)

Frontierism – alongside blueprintism – represent key features of the programmatist conception of ‘utopia.’ Epistemologically, ‘utopia’ provides the basis of an ideological critique of possibility, precisely through illuminating the contours of the imagination. ‘Utopia’ shows us limits of thought. Taking up the problematic of limits in utopian thought, Louis Marin describes the figure of the island of utopia in terms of the frontierism of:

...the infinity of the ocean, its border, a boundless space. Utopia is a limitless place because the island of Utopia is the figure of the limit and of the distance, the drifting of frontiers within the ‘gap’ between

opposite terms, neither this one nor that one. Utopia is the figure of the horizon... *space cannot exist without limits and frontiers*... [utopia] offers to the beholder-reader an ambiguous representation, the equivocal image of significations contrary to the concept of “limit”: on the one hand the synthetic unity of the same and the other, of past and future, of this world and the beyond (and the frontier would be in this case the place where conflicting forces are reconciled), and on the other hand the active tracing of differences, the indefinite fight between opposite forces (in this case the frontier would open a gap, a space “in between” that could not exist except by the encountering of violent and resisting forces). (Marin 412)

The politics of frontiers and spatial imagination, in this sense, can be re-evaluated in terms of the homogenizing function of frontiers – producing the “synthetic unity of the same and the other.” As Marin explains, there is another function of the frontier as a mode of utopian spatial imagining, which can be understood as a lacuna – an opening, a break from the continuum. This doubleness of the frontier – as a mechanism of closure and opening, homogenization and infinitesimal possibility – aligns with the analogical correspondence between utopia and totality. While the frontier represents a horizon of infinite possibility, it is through such modes of closure, as in the case of techno-utopian Thiel, that utopian imagination becomes an exercise in capitalist expansionism. While proliferating fantasies about technological possibilities, Thiel’s version of frontierism is contained by this frontier. The frontier articulates in this case what Marin conceives as the limit-point of ideology, at which ‘utopia’ becomes totality. (414)

Thiel identifies three technological frontiers, which he describes in a 2009 essay entitled “The Education of a Libertarian.” The first of these frontiers is cyberspace – as Thiel writes, “by starting a new Internet business, an entrepreneur

may create a new world.” In addition to cyberspace, Thiel imagines outer space as the frontier of a libertarian future, for the expansion of the free market, outside the nomos of global sovereign territories. “The fate of our world,” he writes, “may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism.” (ibid) The third frontier he identifies is the ocean, for which he began an initiative called The Seasteading Institute.

Along with collaborator Patri Friedman – grandson of Milton Friedman – Peter Thiel spent years working to actualize his ambition to become, as Miles writes, “the world’s most prominent micro-nation entrepreneur.” (Miles) What was once the dystopian premise of *WaterWorld* has been imagined by Friedman as a “frontier for experimenting with new ideas for government” – Miles explains:

[Thiel and Friedman want] to establish new sovereign nations built on oil-rig-type platforms anchored in international waters – free from the regulation, laws, and moral suasion of any landlocked country. They’d be small city-states at first, although the aim is to have tens of millions of seasteading residents by 2050. Architectural plans for a prototype involve a movable, diesel-powered, 12,000 ton structure with room for 270 residents, with the idea that dozens – perhaps even hundreds – of these could be linked together. (ibid)

A potential model for this seasteading colony is ‘Appletopia,’ which “starts a country as a business,” as Friedman describes, “the more desirable the country, the more valuable the real estate.” In the words of Ken Howery – one of Thiel’s partners at the Founders Fund – “It’s almost like there’s a cartel of governments, and this is a way to force governments to compete in a free-market way.” Since the establishment of The Seasteading Institute in 2008, this free-market archipelago of self-governing mobile communities has gone from a “whacky idea” to an increasingly possible future, in

large part due to Thiel’s funding contributions. “The Floating City Project” was launched in 2013, and in March of 2014, a 134-page report was published on the design and implementation of floating startup cities. The report obtained data from 1235 potential residents, and now has several planned projects.



**Figure 4 – Floating City Plan**

Thiel’s frontierism operates in terms of the “end of the future” posed by the 1960s. “After 40 years of wandering,” Thiel writes in a column for the National Review, “it is not easy to find a path back to the future. If there is to be a future, we would do well to reflect about it more.” (Thiel, “The End of the Future”) While for techno-utopians like Stewart Brand, the long – and recuperating – 1960s provides a historical framework for imagining the future, Thiel argues that this historical imaginary of the 1960s in fact indicates a plateau in futurity. Thiel speaks of a technological slowdown for which the internet and the financial market are anomalies within a larger trend of decelerated innovation and modernization since the 1960s – a

phenomenon which should be mapped onto the depoliticization of ‘utopia’ during the post-60s era. Thiel’s conception of a technological slowdown bares continuities with Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis from over twenty-five years ago. In an interview with Fukuyama in 2012, Thiel argues that, “Even though there have been a lot of bumps in the road, your ‘End of History’ strikes me as very much true today.” (Fukuyama, “A Conversation with Peter Thiel”) Like many anti-capitalists, Thiel recognizes elements of a crisis in historical thought in the contemporary moment – however, for Thiel, this crisis must be resolved through the production of liberated zones for the free market – prompting the necessity for new modes of entrepreneurial frontierism.

These frontierist modes should be considered in terms of a larger, emergent historical imagination of contemporary techno-utopianism, for which the entrepreneurial figure is an organizing principle – a figure through which to conceive of the utopian possibilities at stake in technological innovation in terms of heroic individualism. Ideologically, this frontierism articulates a set of libertarian principles, through the idealization of an entrepreneurial self – what Christian Maravelias describes as a dominant form of opportunism in contemporary managerial discourse. As Maravelias explains, “it is the fact that an individual acts opportunistically that makes the individual entrepreneurial” under this managerial paradigm. (Maravelias 27) The entrepreneur figure, in this sense, is the false utopian of the contemporary period – equivalent to the figure of the heroic traveller, instrumental to utopian colonialism.



For Thiel, the future is a mechanism for a frontierist ideology that, while utopian in its conception of technological and free market possibilities, is nevertheless materially situated. Primarily, this frontierism is a mode of material dispossession. In Silicon Valley today, frontierism provides an ideological framework for the tech industry's processes of gentrification, compelling evictions and increasing rent rates throughout the Bay Area.

Causa Justa :: Just Cause (CJJC) released a comprehensive report on Bay Area gentrification in 2013, using data contributed by the Alameda County Public Health Department. The report describes gentrification as neoliberal urban development, premised upon racialized underdevelopment, government public policy, and profit motives, with multiple effects: the loss of social, cultural and community cohesion; displacement; commodification and appropriation of culture; loss of housing security; criminalization and mass incarceration; environmental degradation; and loss of political power. (*Development Without Displacement* 12) The report marks the dot-com boom of 2000-2003 and the housing crisis of 2007-2009 as the first and second waves of urban restructuring. "San Francisco and Oakland are now facing a third round of gentrification driven again by the fortunes of the new tech giants, like Google and Facebook," the report suggests, adding that "many of the similar features from the first tech boom are being re-visited":

Homeownership, rental prices, and evictions are all simultaneously rising... Housing pressures in San Francisco are once again increasing as the stock of affordable rental units continue to shrink, owners turn rental units into condos and rental prices skyrocket. (25)

This third wave of recent gentrification has had a particularly strong impact on the African American, Latino, and Queer communities.

Disproportionately impacting minority communities, this displacement of an unprecedented rate of lower-income renters is often described in terms of the outcomes of cultural homogenization -- ‘yuppification’ and the infiltration of white ‘bros.’ The local and historic character of spaces has been systematically erased by the consumer demands of the tech industry. As the Research and Destroy Collective writes, the city by now resembles a tech campus: “a place owned and operated by highly effective people pulling long work sessions punctuated only by the things that will keep them on the job,” such as a “revivifying massage or a quick workout at the climbing gym in their few spare moments before they turn back to making it happen.” (“Land and Liberty”) In the next section, I will turn to the tech corporate campus as a model of utopian design and interiority, that is also an expansionary, frontierist modality that can be engaged as a mode of gentrification. While structured by interiority, the frontier has an expansionary function – compelled by a horizon which contains the totality of conditions of the ‘possible,’ but also the illuminates the zones of inquiry for an ideological critique of the ‘impossible.’ Thiel’s frontierism in this sense demonstrates the culpability of ‘utopia’ within the frontierist imaginary of the free-market, as well as the vulnerability of ‘utopia’ in relation to these modes of recuperation and expropriation.

The Google-Phalanx

“Nevertheless, maybe a mental catastrophe, a mental implosion and involution without precedent lies in wait for a system of this kind, whose visible signs would be those of this strange obesity, or the incredible coexistence of the most bizarre theories and practices, which correspond to the improbable coalition of luxury, heaven, and money, to the improbable luxurious materialization of life and to un-discoverable contradictions.” – Jean Baudrillard writing of Disneyland

“Architecture is a business. It is produced under economic conditions very similar to the ones governing much of mass culture, and in this too differs from other forms of culture... the architect cannot be engaged in the practice of architecture without inserting himself into a given economy and technology and trying to embrace the logic he finds there, even if he would like to contest it.” – Umberto Eco, “Mass Appeal in Architecture”

Overlooking the Santa Cruz mountains and the San Francisco Peninsula, Mountain View, California is a landscape of endless corporate campuses, office parks and strip malls. This is the landscape of what Louise Mozingo describes as “pastoral capitalism,” which projects a kind of utopian imaginary onto suburban corporate development. The corporate campus is a key feature of this corporate landscape, as Mozingo explains, as a workspace and managerial model that emerged after WWII, “as an instrument to reconceptualize research management, attract scientists from academia, and cloak the corporation in high-minded institutional garb,” housing increasingly “valuable middle management research divisions in purpose-built facilities at the urban periphery,” while concentrating “physical, financial, and personnel resources that few universities could muster.” (Mozingo 46) In this sense, the corporate campus can be understood as an organizing principle to urbanization in the last six decades, through an ideological pastoralism that obscures processes of corporate development and suburbanization. These dynamics can be read into

Mountain View, as the terrain of Silicon Valley – where this false utopianism of “pastoral capitalism” is a dominant force.

Ironically, this landscape of technological innovation also articulates the ‘ludification’ of work in post-Fordist capitalism. Silicon Valley describes the “shifting sites of labor markets,” for which, as Trebor Scholz explains, “the creative use [of] a notebook computer involves a highly customized work experience, emblematic of the fluid, flexible, self-organized profile of post-Fordism, the conditions of its manufacture could not be more different.” (Scholz 28) The ‘playbour’ atmosphere of the Silicon Valley workspace not only illustrates the separation and global outsourcing of manufacturing labor in the tech industry, but also the ways in which, as Florian Idenburg writes, “the office is no more. We work anywhere, anytime. We don’t even think we are working... work is everywhere but in the traditional office.” (Idenburg 117) In terms of the design and conception of the contemporary workplace, as Jeannette Kuo explains,

The changing definition of work today demands a new conception of the office space. The increasing integration of informality, pleasure, and even play – notions often seen as the antithesis of work – into the office has profound implications on the architectural evolution of the workplace. (Kuo 19)

For each of these Silicon Valley playgrounds there are numerous factories as counterparts – distant and absent from the creative labor of the corporate campuses are the prison-like conditions of cheap labor in the global production supply chain. The very notion of this “changing definition of work” is premised upon not the outmoding of certain types of labor, but the displacement of this labor. These

playgrounds must be designed as monads for which the outside reality of this global production supply chain can be displaced by a fantasy-world of creative productivism.

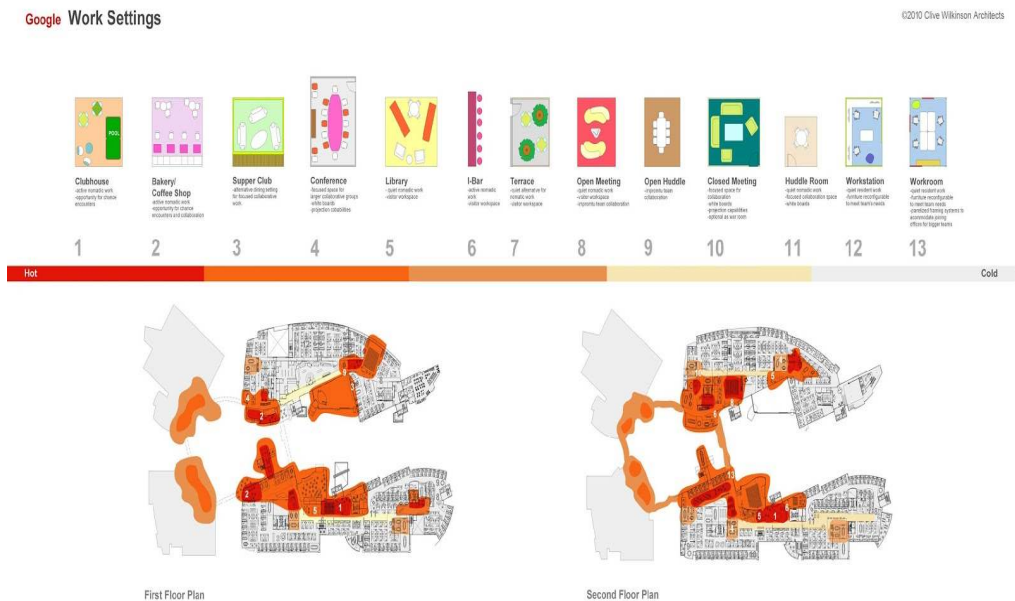
In the pastoral capitalist imaginary of Silicon Valley, the corporate campuses blur the distinction between workplace and household, designed as fortresses offering the social kinetic energy and interiority of a college campus, with all the amenities of a 24/7 consumer market. Between these campuses an entire industry expands to maintain corporate productivity such that all leisure is for the sake of more work: gyms, yoga studios, spas, restaurants, health food stores. While Silicon Valley is “suburban in form,” as Alex Marshall suggests “it is a city in function”:

It is a center of wealth, business, industry, finance, education, and research. It’s not “sub” anything. It is not a bedroom community. It is a city by every definition except politically and urbanistically. If the borders of the Silicon Valley were sealed tomorrow, it would have everything it needed except enough waitresses, janitors, and gardeners, and hotel managers, food service clerks, and assistant book store clerks, who come from over the hills. (Marshall 66)

As a center of financial power, the de-centered fantasy of a ‘suburban’ corporate landscape emerges from the de-centering of this labor force, for which the site of work becomes more and more distant through systematic gentrification. This separate geography of affordable living reflects the separation of such labor from the utopian imaginary of Silicon Valley. In this sense, the corporate campus is conceived as what Mozingo describes as “separatist enclaves of corporate management in the suburbs,” based on a logic of “independence from larger metropolitan realities and the power of selective participation in issues of collective governance.” (Mozingo 220) This is a

key dynamic to what Robert Fishman calls the “technoburb,” for which a “peripheral zone... [emerges] as a viable socioeconomic unit.” (Fishman 183)

Silicon Valley’s landscape of corporate campuses is the epicenter of the Googleplexification of the Bay Area – a process of redevelopment and centralization for which the redesign of the Google corporate campus between 2003-2005 marks a major paradigm shift. Following a competitive selection process, Google hired Clive Wilkinson Architects to redesign the interiors of Building 43 at the company headquarters, formerly the Silicon Graphics campus. Clive Wilkinson Architects, as Michelle Young writes, “design interior spaces with a city scale in mind.” (M. Young) The Googleplex can be read as the new phalanx – the enactment of a modern Fourierism, adapted to the conditions of tech as a ‘creative industry.’ Yet “the experimental Phalanx standing alone,” as Fourier writes, “and without the support of neighboring phalanxes, will, [encounter the] consequence of this isolation.” (Fourier 139) The interiority of the corporate campus is premised on what Mozingo calls a “separatist geography” for which this isolation is made possible by the displacement of social reproduction.



**Figure 5 – Googleplex 1**

The 2003-2005 architectural redesign process of the Googleplex entailed a study of Google employees and their use of space. In studying the spatial behaviors of the employees, the architects approached the redesign as a productivist model for creative labor. In conceiving of the design, the architects worked alongside a strategic design consultancy firm, and together they determined four main design priorities: “flexibility and adaptability”, “concentration and collaboration”, “work/life balance”, and “leveraged learning.” (Chang) Each of these design priorities is based on new models for measuring productivity in creative and intellectual labor.

As a result of these studies of Google employees, the redesign divided each floor of the building “into five or six flexible neighborhoods separated by ‘landmarks,’ the shared public spaces that are the center of Google life.” (ibid) These ‘public’ spaces include “kitchens full of snacks, lounges with pool tables and

comfortable seating, and libraries of stacked plywood box shelves filled with books and games that Googlers have brought in from home.” The notion of ‘public,’ in this sense, is instrumentalized for the production of intellectual property for the company. Throughout the Googleplex, the boundaries of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are distorted by the small-town effect of the corporate campus. Private space is simulated in the design of various meeting rooms, ranging in size and atmosphere. Striking a balance between enclosed and porous spaces was critical to the redesign, particularly to the reconception of the offices. While the cofounders were “dedicated to packing three or four people into an office,” with reminiscence for their years in graduate school at Stanford, they did not want to “[resort] to an impersonal warren of cubicles or a hierarchical system of corner offices,” as Chang explains. In response to these demands of the Google cofounders, the architects designed glass workrooms that exemplify this distortion of privacy and public space.





Figure 6 – Googleplex 2

The result of the 2003-2005 redesign of Google’s company headquarters is a kind of cruise ship office, in which employees have “free access” to massages, manicures, haircuts, teeth-cleaning, doctor visits, as well as foreign language classes and online courses. The Googleplex includes a bowling alley, basketball courts, three wellness centers, a bowling alley, a roller-hockey rink, ping-pong tables, arcade games, foosball tables, a rock-climbing wall, a putting green, and volleyball courts. The space also features an indoor tree house, manicured gardens, apiaries, and a sculpture garden. As Ron Friedman explains, “At Google, eating is serious business”:

Every meal brings with it the opportunity to try over two hundred artisan-crafted dishes. Among the more recent offerings: roast quail, steak tartare, lobster bisque, black cod with parsley pesto and bread crumbs, and porcini-encrusted grass-fed beef. For lighter eaters, there is a salad bar, a noodle bar, a cheese and charcuterie bar, crudité

platters, and seasonal *suis vide* vegetables. Between meals, Googlers are invited to visit one of the many microkitchens sprinkled throughout the campus, each open 24/7 and stocking organic fruit, yogurts, candy, nuts, and drinks. The goal at Google is for employees to be within three minutes of a food source at all times. (R. Friedman 228)

Every aspect described is “free” to employees – like the cruise ship, the campus is designed as a non-monetary fantasy world. Like the notion of ‘public space,’ this non-monetary system is a fantasy structure contained by the interiority of the campus. In human resources management discourse, this is conceived as “rewarding employees”: “At the Googleplex, employees can show up to work anytime they want, bring their dog, wear pajamas,” as Biswajeet Pattanayak explains, “this relaxed, fun environment has worked well for Google Inc., because it provides a psychological benefit to encourage employees to be more committed, more creative, and more productive.” (Pattanyak 325)

The 2003-2005 redesign of the Googleplex coincides with the emergence of a new creative class – a paradigm in which, as Sarah Brouillette describes, “creative work tends to be figured contradictorily by creative-economy rhetoric, as at once newly valuable to capitalism and romantically honorable and free.” (Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* 4) The ‘free’ benefits for employees of the company can be understood in terms of the larger ideological scheme of “creative freedom.” In her critique of Richard Florida’s problematically utopian conception of the “creative ethos,” Brouillette writes:

Indeed, a successful creative career is important because it means being granted the freedom to pursue creative inclinations without too much concern for market necessities. Thus materialistic motivations exist in tandem, rather than tension, with the desire for self-expression

and personal development; the wish to do creative work and identify with a community of creative people is perfectly reconcilable with the desire to live in prosperity. The creative process need only be organized in such a way that its essential indivisibility is respected, its autonomy assumed and structured into the workplace. (Brouillette “Creative Labor”)

These elements of creative “freedom” can be read into the spatial design of the corporate campus, as a model of productivism specific to this phenomenon of creative industry – the reimagining of the factory as a space of creative free play.

The architectural conception of the corporate campus reflects the psychological design of labor conditions for the contemporary creative worker. This psychological design lends insight into the false utopian dynamics of the space: the ways in which, through an ethos of creativity and even the cultivation of an anti-work atmosphere, the space maximizes a certain kind of productivity which is distinct to the paradigm of creative industries. These notions of “free” benefits for employment, and a “public” space through which to ostensibly collectivize intellectual property production, are produced out of the campus’s spatial containment. There is an outside to this containment, for which profit is always already the ultimate purpose. Marking a break from Taylorist forms of work, these “new mechanisms,” as Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello suggest, “integrating the contributions of post-behaviourist psychology and the cognitive sciences, precisely because they are more human in a way,” while also penetrating “more deeply into people’s inner selves – people are expected to ‘give’ themselves to their work – and facilitate an instrumentalization of human beings in their most specifically human dimensions.” (Boltanski and Chiapello 98)

Chang's account of the Googleplex reads in many ways as corporately curated, beginning and ending inside the office of a software engineer named Corin Anderson. According to Chang, Anderson represents "Google's ur-engineer." "His desk hides behind a complex Rube Goldberg-esque maze, built by Anderson out of a toy called the Chaos Tower, a sort of theme park for marbles," Chang writes. Every day, Anderson sits,

...in the midst of figurines, Legos, and stuffed animals, eyes fixed on his computer screen and earphones strapped on, for hours at a stretch. When he wants a snack, he walks to the fully stocked micro-kitchen, maybe breaking open a bag of organic potato chips or grabbing a handful of trail mix. (Chang)

Anderson's typical work day illustrates this new paradigm of creativity in the workplace, for which a vast range of activities constitute productivity – to the extent that, as Chang explains, twenty percent of the time, "with his employer's full approval," Anderson works on projects "of his own devising that are only tangentially related to his job." By the end of the day, Anderson "often has no desire to go home, preferring to get dinner, gratis, in one of the employee cafes, followed by a few hours playing a strategic card game with some colleagues in a small meeting room."



Figure 7 – Googleplex 3

The Googleplex can be understood as a complete spatialization of the “dissolving of most of the borders between private and professional time, between work and consumption,” necessary to the 24/7 markets for continuous work and consumption that Jonathan Crary describes of late capitalism. (Crary 15) The result is a ‘workplace utopia’ that produces, as Chang suggests, “a world beyond worlds where everyone is smart, and invention and necessity coexist. The impulse is both beautiful and endlessly arrogant, an adolescent’s willful dream.” Through all aspects of its architecture, as Peter Jakobsson and Fredrik Stiernstedt argue,

...[the Googleplex] manages its operation not only by transporting information, but also by turning people and objects into information or putting them in a position where they can be handled and organized as information,” as in the key features of “main street,” the transparency of the glass workspaces, and the hidden server halls. (Jakobsson and Stiernstedt, 114)

Organized as a town square, this reconceptualization of factory space for creative industry, works through replicating certain spatial configurations of the university campus.

The higher education experience determined much of the redesign for Google's company headquarters, as Googleplex architect John Meachem explains: "In a university environment, you typically have the option of self-directed work, a selection of work styles or work environments, independent study subject choices," Meachem writes, adding that university campuses typically offer "the concept of self-containment, so within the immediate area, all of your basis work / life needs can be met and the possibility of casual encounters with fellow 'students' for collaboration or recreation is possible anytime." (Meachem) Meachem's rhetoric of "community" captures the company's discourse regarding employee productivity: the appearance of a public in the village library's "repository of thought," for instance, as new and inventive ways of extracting and capturing intellectual labor. While drawing from a conception of productivity in the university system, the Googleplex's imitation of a university campus simulates parts of student life – "goals of personal education" – as a mode of knowledge production for the company's marketization.

Part of Google's replication of the 'student life' has included a vast range of online courses available for employees. In April 2012, New York Times journalist Caitlin Kelly wrote a feature on some of the Google curriculum, and describes one of the most popular courses, S.I.Y, "Search Inside Yourself." As Kelly explains, the reasons for this course's popularity are not mysterious: "Employees coming from

fast-paced fields, already accustomed to demanding bosses and long hours, say Google pushes them to produce at a pace even faster than they could have imagined.” (Kelly) These courses are focused on strategies of self-care for employees, with the ultimate purpose of increased productivity. The corporate campuses draw inspiration from a higher education experience that ceases to exist. While these campus spaces of Silicon Valley have been continually redesigned to contain the physical activity of intellectual and creative labor, the physical sites of the UC campuses are evaporating with increased privatization into a vastly digitized curriculum, no longer necessitating physical presence or the appearance of a “community.”

In response to this vision of the utopian workspace as a simulation of the university, artist Andrew Norman Wilson has done important work examining and documenting the ways in which the Googleplex remains structured as a factory. In his documentary “Workers Leaving the Googleplex,” Wilson provides an account of what he understands to be the informational proletariat of these tech campus corporate ‘utopias.’ Of the Googleplex, Wilson speaks of a class system among employees marked by color badges:

Using *Workers Leaving the Googleplex* as an illustration of these hierarchies, white, red, and green badge workers on the left side of the image are seen passing by, entering, and exiting a variety of buildings at the Googleplex. Some of them ride the Google loaner bikes, some of them enter a luxury limo shuttle headed towards San Francisco. Some of them may be leaving work, some may be walking to another building to pick up their laundry or exercise in one of the gyms, some may even be just arriving at the Google campus to eat a free meal from one of Google’s 20 gourmet cafes after a day of working at home. The yellow badge workers on the right side of the image are seen leaving the one building they are allowed access to... the yellow badge workers are leaving at the same time because their superiors have

asked them to. But their synchronized departure is not especially arranged for camera. They are leaving at 2:15 pm, like they do every day. (A. Wilson, “Conversation with Andrew Norman Wilson”)

Arguing that the movement of the yellow badge workers “is much closer to the industrial proletariat [than] the kinetic elite” of the other employees, Wilson reveals the ways in which the ‘utopian’ workplace is also a site which reproduces and further invisibilizes certain types of labor – more specifically, uncreative labors, which are not only outsourced to cheaper labor markets overseas but to a segregated class of workers even within the design of the corporate campus itself. In the filming of his documentary, Wilson’s access to the yellow-badge workers was continually shut down by the Googleplex’s private security force. Throughout the day, these laborers are exposed to footage of sexual assault, animal torture, and extreme violence. Much of this labor force is in the Philippines, where workers make between \$300-500 per month. At the Googleplex, much of the content moderation is done by recent college graduates as a measure against student debt.

Like any false utopia, the Googleplex functions through the marginalization and containment of a dystopia. In her short story “The Ones Who Walked From Omelas,” Ursula K. Le Guin describes an otherwise ideal community with a dark secret in common. It is this dark secret that holds together the seemingly utopian society of Omelas. What everyone in Omelas knows but consents to ignoring is the reality of a young child, trapped in a basement. As the narrator comes to reveal, “it is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their



science.” (Le Guin, “Omelas”) As a false utopia, Omelas is premised upon dystopia – and it is such a contradiction that we can locate in the spatial design of these creative industry workspaces, for which the immaterial labor performed by creative workers requires this dematerialization of forms of material labor. While Google has constructed an emergent geo-imaginary for the contemporary period – with the totalizing cartography of Google Maps and Google Earth – these dystopian enclaves are the conditions of possibility for such a utopian emergence.

In May 2014, after continual pressure from the press, Google released the diversity demographics of the company’s nearly 50,000 employees. The data confirmed certain cultural perceptions about the company and the tech industry more generally. Overall, the company is comprised of 70% men and 30% women. 61% of employees are white and 30% are Asian, while 3% of employees are Hispanic and 2% are African American. The demographic contrast between tech and non-tech employees and management is even more striking: 79% of employees with leadership positions are men, and 72% are white. Google paired the release of this data with a diversity campaign – “Making Google a workplace for everyone” – which is incorporated into a certain future-oriented rhetoric: “We’re not where we want to be when it comes to diversity,” the statement begins, “All of our efforts, including going public with these numbers, are designed to help us recruit and develop the world’s most talented and diverse people.” In addition to staging the frontier of a multicultural workplace, the statement integrates this critique of diversity into the company’s philosophy of management and production: “having a diversity of perspectives leads

to better decision-making, more relevant products, and makes work a whole lot more interesting.” (“Diversity at Google”)

What these statistics reveal is the interiority of the company, which can be traced into the features of the Googleplex’s spatial design. The illegibility of these racial and gender dynamics within the company demonstrates the extent to which this interiority operates as a mode of concealment. That it took so many years to acquire such insight into the company is a testament to the spatial operations of Google’s vast geo-expansion, which reflects processes of separation and isolation in the global supply chain of digital capitalism. Like any false utopia, this Googleplex could just as easily be framed as a dystopia – taking a conspiratorial vantage on a company’s embrace of multicultural utopianism. This is what distinguishes the ‘creative’ from the critical.

#### Mountain View ‘Intentional Communities’

The home-based incubator represents one of many ways in which the tech industry thrives from the domesticization of work-life. The corporate campuses increasingly appear as households for which reproductive labor is completely invisibilized, as a home without cooking or cleaning. The home-based incubators of Silicon Valley take the form of live-in start-ups, often described as messy and unkept. As one of the outcomes of increased rent rates during the tech boom cycles in the Bay Area, the proliferation of life-in start-up incubators take a particular adaptation of the business incubator, consisting mostly of young men living “in dorm-like conditions as they focus on their product and business,” as Dinah Adkins writes. (Adkins) In 2010,

the National Business Incubation Association estimated the existence of 7,000 business incubators worldwide, and the model of the business incubator “has adapted to various terrains and has targeted a number of different goals,” as Daniel Rouach, Steeve Louzoun, and Francois Deneux explain. While this model can be understood as “a factory that turns an idea into a firm,” the particular formation of this model in Silicon Valley reveals many of the most pervasive elements of the tech industry as a cultural milieu and engine of gentrification throughout the Bay Area.

The “dorm-like conditions” of these living situations is incorporated into the sustained satirization of the tech industry featured in the recent HBO series *Silicon Valley*. The show’s protagonist, Richard, is a socially awkward programmer who develops a music app in a live-in incubator, in which he cohabitates with three other young men with dreams of starting a company. The incubator is a typical suburban multi-bedroom household, with shag carpeting and outdated features. The space is sparsely decorated, cluttered by trash, recliner furniture, and an endless stream of monitors, keyboards, and laptops. The landlord, Erlich, has a contract with the tenants which trades rent for 10% in their company. In ultimately redeeming Erlich as a well-intentioned loser, the show makes sense of his arrangement with Richard as an extension of friendship rather than a highly exploitative rental agreement.

Y Combinator is the most successful business incubator in the vast terrain of Silicon Valley start-ups. After it was started in 2005, the incubator soon developed a reputation for its model of business investment during the second major Silicon Valley tech boom of the 2000s. Y Combinator presents itself as an alternative MBA,

and established from the start a model of incubation investing in multiple startups in semiannual ‘batches.’ In 2005, there were eight recipients of Y Combinator investments of \$20,000. By 2011, there were forty-four recipients. Each of the forty-four startups received a \$150,000 investment, after two Silicon Valley funds joined to create a fund just for the incubator’s startups – as Randall Stross writes, “The venture capital world had never seen blanket approval of so many companies in one fell swoop.” (Stross 18) After making the selections for these ‘batches,’ Y Combinator facilitates a three-month residency in Silicon Valley, which culminates in a Demo Day presentation of all the startups. The residency consists of collective living spaces which function as an extension of the business work space. Like many aspects of Silicon Valley’s culture of ‘innovation,’ these residencies represent the ways in which creative work for the tech industry has been rendered domestic.

Another version of this re-imagining of work life and domestic life in Mountain View is the “cohousing community” phenomenon, as an output of tech industry gentrification. In addition to being the co-founder of The Seasteading Institute and Future Cities Development Corporation, Patri Friedman is the co-founder of Tortuga, a “suburban retrofit cohousing community” in Mountain View. Tortuga comprises two adjacent 4-plexes, with a total of eight 2-bedroom apartments. There are 14 adults, and 2 children, the average age is 30, and most inhabitants are tech workers. (“Joining Tortuga”) Their “vision statement” explains “we strive to create intentional community – a place that we can not only call home, but that nurtures connection and an evolving community of old and new friends,” adding that

“we envision an environment where interesting people enjoy spending time with each other, engaging in fun activities, and that is kid-friendly.” (“Vision Statement”) The community describes itself as “not just a collection of neighbors,” but a clan with a “balance of sharing and freedom.” (“About Us”)

Before establishing Tortuga in 2006, Friedman lived for six years in the Alpine Butterfly Lodge in Mountain View, which he helped to purchase in 2000 with three others. In 1999, the group produced a mission statement, taking up the rhetoric of the ‘intentional community’: “It is important to note, right at the beginning, before you start thinking about communal property, tents, poor hygiene, and making pottery to support yourself, that this is *not* a commune.” They specify that “most property will be owned by individuals, and most people will earn their income outside the community,” stating that “our inspiration is dormitories, not communism.” (“General Information about the IC”) The Alpine Butterfly Lodge nevertheless has some of the atmospheric and countercultural ethos of New Communalism. The community includes a vast vegetable garden and other shared amenities, such as common lounges and a hot tub. While polyamory is not part of the community’s official ideology, all of the core members have blogs in which they discuss polyamorous practice in the community.

Established in 2009, the Mountain View Cohousing Community launched a multi-household building structure six blocks from downtown Mountain View, which became occupied in late 2014. According to a recent posting by the MVCC, the structure will include 19 condominiums ranging in size from 1360 to 2090 square

feet. At competitive rates with other nearby condominiums, little distinguishes this multi-house structure from the real estate development of the last several years in Mountain View.

Ranging from polyamorous “clans” to home-based business incubators, these tech industry communities describe elements of a broader process of redevelopment and gentrification in the Bay Area. What these communities have in common is not, however, a utopian drive, but an uncritical frontierism. While proliferative of future-oriented utopias such as the corporate archipelago of The Seasteading Institute, this ‘Silicon Valley’ consists of different zones of eradication – it is a horizon which folds into itself, erasing its own history while aligning with a regime of aestheticization that extends the workplace dynamics of corporate campuses to the suburban landscapes of an ever-expanding geography.

### “Fuck Off, Google”

In early 2013, as the Occupy movements evaporated from the cultural atmosphere, the shuttle systems of the tech companies became increasingly the object of political anxiety in the surrounding area of Silicon Valley – what Rebecca Solnit describes as a process of re-centering the Bay Area: “There are advantages to being an edge, as California long was, but Silicon Valley has made us the centre,” she writes. Frontierism accounts for this rendering of the “edge” into a center, for which the Google Bus, as Solnit suggests, “means that San Francisco... is now a bedroom community for the tech capital of the world at the other end of the peninsula.” (Solnit) While there are hundreds of luxury buses for tech mega-corporations throughout the

Bay Area, Solnit explains that “we refer to them in the singular, as the Google Bus.” As aspects of the local space, the Google Bus is part of a local dystopian imaginary: “Most of them are gleaming white, with dark-tinted windows, like limousines,” Solnit writes, “and some days I think of them as the spaceships on which our alien overlords have landed to rule over us.” (ibid) Later in 2013, New York Times opinion writer Timothy Egan wrote of a “dystopia by the Bay.” Like Solnit, Egan latches onto the rhetoric of ‘monoculture,’ describing the looming possibility of a “city without its nurses, its teachers, its artists, its waiters, its bus drivers . . . as sterile as forest of a single commercial tree species.”

While the liberal multicultural critique of ‘monoculture’ has been a dominant gesture against the tech industry, such critiques fail to engage with the material problems presented by this “dystopia by the Bay” – specifically, in articulations of an “anti-tech” movement. The notion of “anti-tech” provides a misleading account of what should be an anti-gentrification movement. The Google Bus protests have been important political gestures of the post-Occupy moment. In December 2013, an “increasingly assertive guerrilla campaign of disruption” would emerge from the ruins of the Oakland Commune, as the Guardian reporter Andrew Gumbel writes. These protests have taken the narrative of gentrification to a different degree of antagonism. Arguing that this narrative “only goes so far,” Oakland Commune argues that “a critique of development specifically, on its own and as a part of gentrification, is much more useful to the insurgent.” (“Oakland is for Burning? Beyond a Critique of Gentrification”) Though many have argued that the bus protests disproportionately

attack tech corporation employees – and by extension, fail to address the corporations themselves, even in terms of employee productivity – the protests antagonize precisely the processes of development driving this impending ‘monoculture’ of gentrification. More than just a symbol of gentrification, as Alexandra Goldman argues, the corporate shuttles “actively contribute to the city’s higher housing prices” and redevelopment. (Goldman) With the eviction rate of San Francisco tripling since 2010, the city lost 1,017 rent-controlled units in 2013 alone. “What’s particularly ironic and perhaps even troubling here,” Susie Cagle writes, “is how tech is obsessed with the notion of ‘city’ without realizing how little it understands it,” elaborating that a programmer defending the “controversial Uber surge pricing in a post at Medium,” compared the practice “to cities dispatching extra buses according to demand – a thing that city agencies can’t and won’t do, for good structural and citizenship reasons that go beyond clinical economics.” (Cagle)





Figure 8 – Google Bus

The Google Bus localizes a certain dystopian imagination of the company in the contemporary situation – yet “the company’s reputation is seemingly unassailable. Google’s colorful, playful logo is imprinted on human retinas just under six billion times each day, 2.1 trillion times per year,” as Julian Assange bemoans in his recent book. Assange elaborates this dystopian conception of the company, uprooting their corporate rhetoric:

Google is perceived as an essentially philanthropic enterprise – a magical engine presided over by otherworldly visionaries – for creating a utopian future. The company has at times appeared anxious to cultivate this image, pouring funding into “corporate responsibility” initiatives to produce “social change” – exemplified by Google Ideas. But as Google Ideas shows, the company’s “philanthropic” efforts, too, bring it uncomfortably close to the imperial side of US influence. (Assange 45-46)

Calling this a “utopianism occasionally bordering on megalomania,” Assange critiques the ways in which CEO Larry Page has “publicly conjured the image of Jurassic-Park-like Google microstates. “Maybe we could set apart a piece of the world,” Page fantasized in 2013, continuing:

An environment where people can try new things. I think as technologists we should have some safe places where we can try out new things and figure out the effect on society – what’s the effect on people? – without having to deploy it to the whole world. (Gallagher)

The corporate buses – as black boxes, tinted and invisible from the outside, articulate precisely this fantasy of autonomous interiority so endemic to the tech industry at large.

However, as Harry Halpin argues in his review of Assange’s book, such dystopian imaginaries of Google and the tech industry more generally operate under a problematic logic of conspiratorialism. Halpin connects this allure of conspiratorialism to the eventual downfall of Occupy Wall Street: “The surplus population of the occupied camps had been stripped of their own knowledge of how their world worked, and so slowly but surely the Occupy movement fizzled out,” Halpin suggests, “as it was unable to articulate a revolutionary strategy and so delved further into conspiracy theories involving the Federal Reserve.” (Halpin) In this sense, the function of conspiracies was “to justify their own weakness by shifting the blame for their problems to some mysterious global cabal” – a dystopian geo-imaginary that took over the popular imagination of the social movement.

While this dystopian brand of conspiratorialism exists both “everywhere and nowhere” in Assange’s account of Google, as Halpin suggests, the geo-imagination of

Google is nevertheless, as the Invisible Committee argues, “an explicitly political project”:

An enterprise that maps the planet Earth, sending its teams into every street of every one of its towns, cannot have purely commercial aims. One never maps a territory that one doesn't contemplate appropriating. “Don't be evil.” = “Leave everything to us.” (*To Our Friends* 105)

Yet to ascribe this dystopianism to the corporation itself – through the logic of conspiratorialism – is to ignore the systemic logic of uneven development under global capitalism. In a critique of recent anti-tech demonstrations, Cindy Milstein argues that too many protesters “were asking Google to be respectful, to do the right thing, to ‘develop a conscience not an app,’ as if it were a person who had briefly strayed from the path of goodness,” adding that:

Too many were asking the same force, the same lord and master, that is ruining most of the planet in the interest of power for the few to suddenly, somehow, create a world for us all, with food homes, health care, dignity, etc., for all. Indeed, the overarching demand of this protest was, “We call upon Google to be a good neighbor,” as if cozy coexistence with some of the greatest power consolidation in human history, and greatest inequality and injustice, is the neighborly aim. (Milstein)

What seems useful about the tendency toward conspiracy, in contrast with this appeal to be “neighborly,” is the antagonist impulse that describes the tech shuttle blockades. Yet this antagonism does not suffice as a utopian drive for the anti-gentrification movement, which resists the reformist logics of ‘coexistence,’ but must do so through a more coherent set of interventions to the tech industry as the infrastructure of redevelopment in the Bay Area. The symbolism of the tech shuttle bus is important

for precisely this reason, while at a tactical level, this symbolism is a limit-point for more extensive modes of interrogation and transformation.

After a surge of antagonism toward the tech shuttles in 2013, this symbolism of the shuttles has perhaps lost its political charge by the end of 2015. As figures of a dystopia in the Bay, the shuttles capture the dark side of the bright-colored utopian branding of contemporary tech corporations, while they have steadily become habitual, glossed with a sense of inevitability – a curiosity about what comes next. They crystallize the contradictions of Silicon Valley false utopianism, at the same time as narrowing and confining the conditions of imaginability within contemporary milieus of struggle. These shuttles are but the precipice of resistance to gentrification. What has become more pressing in this time, however, is the struggle against police brutality, in its various articulations of the Black Lives Matter movement and correlated protests and riots from 2014-2015, as the foreground of this process of gentrification. As a region increasingly designed to sustain the falsehood of this tech utopia, contemporary struggles must continue to take an orientation toward exposing this falsity – making comprehensible the correspondence between the black-tinted shuttles filled with invisible tech workers, and the everyday violence of racism and classism enacted in particular communities as an integral dimension of urban redevelopment.

## Part Three

### Utopia as the Idea of Post-Capitalism

This final section of the dissertation takes as its focus the problem of periodizing the present in terms of the idea of ‘post-capitalism,’ and the conditions of possibility for an imaginable end of capitalism. Out of this problem, I examine elements in the dystopian / utopian tendencies of recent popular cinema, and ask of the status of the idea of an end of capitalism in relation to questions of representation and revolutionary imaginability. I also pose a set of descriptive analyses of the spatialization of contemporary struggles, as well as the spatial imagination projected by recent anti-capitalist literature.

“Where do we stand now?” Zizek asked in 2012. Writing of the “revival of emancipatory politics all around the world” in 2011, he reflects that a year later, “every day brings new evidence of how fragile and inconsistent that awakening was, as the signs of exhaustion begin to show,” continuing that “the enthusiasm of the Arab Spring is mired in compromise and religious fundamentalism” and Occupy Wall Street “is losing momentum to such an extent that, in a nice case of the ‘cunning of reason,’ the police cleansing of Zuccotti Park and other sites of protest cannot but appear as a blessing in disguise, covering up the imminent loss of momentum.” (Zizek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* 127) While insisting that this loss of momentum does not, by necessity, mark the end of this period of vast and proliferative uprisings, Zizek poses a useful set of questions:

What are we to do in such depressive times when dreams seem to fade away? Is the only choice we have between the nostalgic-narcissistic remembrance of sublime moments of enthusiasm and the cynical-realist explanation of why these attempts to change the situation inevitably had to fail? (ibid)

These questions have been asked of the 1960s, making the post-60s historical imaginary a critical point of inquiry in thinking through the ways in which, as Žižek puts it, the present can be understood through expressions of an “emancipated future.”

For some on the “Left,” like Žižek, 2012 marks a period of foreclosure and political retreat – an “end” of the various social struggles that I discuss in my introduction as the long 2011. The events of 2011 did not come out of the blue, but emerged from a sense of alternate possibilities and historical transformation that had been building since the global financial crisis. By extension, the ostensible demobilization of 2012 can be understood, instead, as a period of latent and hidden radicalization – this ‘retreat’ may be conceived as a juncture of reflexivity and internal critique.

The following chapters will focus on the relation between this post-2011 period and post-capitalist imagination. To what extent does the “end” of Occupy, for instance, signal certain epistemological limits of the contemporary period? Beginning with recent dystopian film, I will discuss the conditions of possibility for imagining post-capitalist futurity in the fifth chapter, following this period of uprisings and mass social movements across the globe. Then, in the sixth chapter, I will proceed to elaborate a typology of the spatial imaginary of recent struggles. At stake in both chapters is the very idea of ending in the long 2011 – which I will problematize by way of my previous critique of the “end of the sixties” as a historical paradigm. What will happen to the political moment of 2011, and how will this juncture of

transformation and antagonism be historicized? While certainly, anti-capitalist politics have proliferated since this period, anti-capitalist energies have become dominated by a certain cynicism – an abating of revolutionary practice to a not-yet-realized future, leaving the present to symptomatize the not-yet possible more than reflecting the soon-to-be possibilized. The idea of post-capitalism is nowhere on the horizon. “No one knows what’s coming,” as Jameson recently argued, “and indeed no one knows whether anything is coming at all.” (Jameson “On the Power of the Negative”)

How do we make sense of this liminality which describes the contemporary period in relation to the revolutionary energies which exploded out of various episodes in this juncture of capitalist crisis. What can be done with this melancholia, endemic to a period political confusion. In a poem from 2015, Juliana Spahr describes this as “Non-Revolution”:

And during these moments of happening, of compassion and dedication, giggling exuberance, hands around waist, turning around and pushing into the wall for the deep moment of tongue against tongue, Non-Revolution was an uneven lover. At moments there. At other moments not. Often Non-Revolution was off with others. Tongue somewhere else in the corner of some other plaza somewhere. This hurt me and it didn’t hurt me. I was jealous. I’ll admit it. I wanted all of the possibility of revolution all the fucking time. I was willing to take it modified and negated even. But I was not jealous in the conventional way. I was jealous that I was not there with the exuberance at every moment. I wanted to be. I wanted to be there. I wanted to be there all the time, to be inside every moment, to always be on the lips of Non-Revolution and whomever Non-Revolution was touching with their tongue, whatever parts of bodies of Mexico City, Santiago, El Alto, Madrid, Cairo, Suez, Istanbul. I wanted to be everywhere that Non-Revolution was. I wanted to be with Non-Revolution and everyone Non-Revolution was with. (Spahr)

In this notion of “Non-Revolution,” Spahr captures the affective climate of this post-2011 period, through the decentralization of these phenomena – for which wanting “the possibility of revolution all the fucking time” provides a charge of impossible connectivity, a refusal of the separation among these bursts of simultaneity and resistance. What “Non-Revolution” likewise articulates, through this frenzy of contradictory affective registers, is the foreclosure of imagination and possibilism that describes the general tendencies of this post-2011 period. This period has also been conceptualized as a “nihilist turn,” as I will discuss in my conclusion.

At stake in this post-revolutionary conception of 2012 is not only an “end” of Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Winter, but the capacity to imagine an end of capitalism. Taking up Jameson’s repeated claim, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, it is perhaps more that between 2011 and 2012, a certain trajectory between post-capitalist possibility and anti-capitalist antagonism can be delineated. Whereas 2011 involved an indirect encounter with the historicity of a post-capitalist future, 2012 was dominantly a year of anti-capitalist despair and demobilization – a period of waning utopianism and overt cynicism.

Since 2012 in the United States, the ‘post-Occupy’ paradigm has mutated and revolutionary energies have re-emerged, with the Black Lives Matter movement and corollary social struggles against racist police violence in late 2014 and 2015. On a global scale, resistance has continued – this sense of foreclosure has subsided, only to return again once more. While some mistook the proliferation of organized protests and spontaneous riots following Mike Brown’s murder in Ferguson, Missouri as the



signal of a resurrection of Occupy, these attempts to create continuity are important aspects of more recent social struggles. The political moment of the long 2011 is not over, but it will have to be re-imagined, over and over again – it will have to make imaginable a different future, outside the telos of capital. This involves an understanding of the present as a terrain of indirect encounters with what is not-yet-imaginable.

In their recent communiqué *To Our Friends*, The Invisible Committee provides an apt diagnostic of this political landscape of foreclosed possibility:

The insurrections have come, but not the revolution. Rarely has one seen, as we have these past few years, in such a densely-packed timespan, so many seats of power taken by storm, from Greece to Iceland... But however great the disorders in this world may be, the revolution always seems to choke off at the riot stage. At best, a regime change satisfies for an instant the need to change the world, only to renew the same dissatisfaction. (*To Our Friends* 64)

The following chapters represent partial and speculative inquiries into this situation, in the sense that Jameson describes the process of cognitive mapping as an operation of “[producing] the concept of something we cannot imagine.” (Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping” 347) Figures like Žižek and Badiou sought confirmations of an already-formed ‘Idea of Communism,’ reflecting the enduring utopian problematics of preconception and programmatism. However, it would be a mistake to neglect the importance of utopian thought in terms of speculation and postulation – a dialectic of re-imagining and un-imagining most critical to the project of communization.

In contrast with the ‘Idea of Communism’ for which the struggles of 2011 became immediately recuperated, the following chapters will engage with different

elements of this period as a cultural moment and a terrain of social struggle. This requires a different approach to the idea of communism, which I will here explore in terms of the provocations and speculative work of communization theory.

“Communism is no more prophecy than communization is,” as Leon de Mattis writes, continuing that:

The possibility of speaking about communism is at stake within current struggles. That is why it is indispensable to seek out what, within them, could be the harbinger of communism – rather than dreaming about a state far off in the future which humanity might one day attain. Or, to put it differently: what is essential for the reconstruction of a communist horizon is above all the discovery of the ways in which communism might be able to emerge from the present situation – rather than describing what communism might be as a worked-out form of organization. (Mattis 93)

Taking up such an approach to the present situation, the final part of this cultural history will be ultimately concerned with ‘utopia’ as the problem of how to imagine communization – how to make thinkable this possibility through contemporary struggles, and how to make imaginable social conditions of post-capitalism. This is not to idealize the material conditions for an end of capitalism, but rather, to take seriously the project of communization not as a preconceived ‘Idea’ and instead as an actively pursued yet structurally unimaginable possibility.

While communization theory has been a complex terrain of utopian and anti-utopian discourse in contemporary anti-capitalist milieu, this should be distinguished from the false utopian imaginings of Paul Mason’s recent declarations of a post-capitalist horizon of possibility. As Mason argues, this “end of capitalism” has started

already, citing three major changes brought about by information technology in the last 25 years:

First, it has reduced the need for work, blurred the edges between work and free time and loosened the relationship between work and wages. The coming wave of automation, currently stalled because our social infrastructure cannot bear the consequences, will hugely diminish the amount of work needed – not just to subsist but to provide a decent life for all.

Second, information is corroding the market's ability to form prices correctly. That is because markets are based on scarcity while information is abundant...

Third, we're seeing the spontaneous rise of collaborative production: goods, services and organizations are appearing that no longer respond to the dictates of the market and the managerial hierarchy. (Mason, "The end of capitalism has begun")

Mason conceives of the financial crisis as a site of utopian possibility from which this era of post-capitalism has emerged within a matter of years. Here, I want to take a very different stance on periodizing the present in relation to this possibility of an end of capitalism. To an extent, Mason captures in this passage a particular crisis in the utopian imagination of the contemporary moment. It is difficult, in other words, to disrupt the conflation between 'utopia' and naivety, in encountering this notion of 'post-capitalism.' However, there are other alternatives besides nihilism.

## Chapter Six

### Imagining the End of Capitalism in 'Post-Occupy' Dystopian Films

More than twenty years ago, Fredric Jameson would write of the “impossibility of imagining a secession from the new world system and a political and social, as well as economic, delinking from it” as spatial dilemmas that “immobilize our imaginative picture of global space today, and conjure up as their sequel the vision that Fukuyama calls the ‘end of history’, and the final triumph of the market as such.” (Jameson, “‘End of Art’ or ‘End of History’” 91) Jameson has famously and circuitously remarked that a characteristic of this period is that the end of the world is more imaginable than the end of capitalism. Did the uprisings of recent years manage to contest this diagnostic? Or is this the same “situation that blocks our imagination of the future,” as Jameson elaborates, in which “the entire world is suddenly sewn up into a total system from which no one can secede”? (90)

The following chapter takes up these questions in terms of the cultural imagination of revolution exhibited in recent popular cinema. Moreover, this is an attempt to think through the periodicity of contemporary dystopian films, as part of a larger cultural tendency that has dominated the historical imaginary of recent uprisings.

#### Against a ‘Cinema of the 99%’

Since 2011, a series of films have been taken up as artifacts of the cultural moment of Occupy Wall Street. Just over a month into the encampment of Zuccotti Park, James Pinkerton would describe the science fiction thriller *In Time* the first film of the ‘Occupy Wall Street era’ of Hollywood. (Pinkerton) Since then, film reviewers

have incessantly drawn from the populist discourse of OWS to articulate the stakes of what I will treat as a ‘cinema of the 99%.’ The reception of films has been incorporated into a populist imaginary of the Occupy movements, which I critiqued in my introduction as part of an attempt to bring political legibility to what was predominantly a cultural phenomenon. As Jason Smith writes, the “North American Occupy movement” – which has taken on the sloganry of the ‘99%’ – “was largely a toothless affair, swept away brusquely after a few weeks or months at most,” with the exception of “some aspects of Occupy Oakland.” (J. Smith) A ‘cinema of the 99%,’ in this sense, attempts to forge continuities where there is only discontinuity. What seems more noteworthy about this assortment of films is the dominance of the dystopian genre. Describing 2012 as the beginning of a “golden age of dystopian films,” Joe Queenan argues that “the message in all these films is identical: we have seen the future. And it looks bad.” (Queenan)

*Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) reflects some of the dominant tendencies of post-Occupy dystopias, as well as the ideological pre-conditions of the end of Occupy Wall Street – precisely the rupture from which encampments like the Oakland Commune emerged as radical alternatives to the project of re-claiming public space and de-privatization. The film imagines a near-future in which humans are approaching extinction, and an ape-dominated earth seems increasingly possible. Whereas the previous film in the series, *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), takes a global scale in its imagination of a fast-spreading virus that kills much of the human population, this more recent installment in the series has a far different spatial

imaginary of enclosures and total chaos. Taking place in a post-apocalyptic Bay Area, the film is mostly fixed to two barricaded encampments of warring humans and apes, while the space between these enclaves is a vast terrain of contingencies that becomes represented as a Hobbsian state of nature. Reviewer Tim Robery remarks that while the 2011 film “imagined the growing consciousness of apes in revolt,” the second 2014 installment “plunges us into a war of gorillas versus guerrillas – a form of strife without clear winners, and one in which we’re never forced to choose one side over the other.” (Robery) The blind field of post-apocalypse is dominated by the logics of tyranny and perpetual violence, to which the logics of state power and liberal pacifism emerge as the ostensibly utopian impulses of the film. As Robery writes, the viewer eventually “takes sides within,” rather than siding with the apes, as in the first installment. The film approaches the humans and apes as individuals, and ultimately and didactically promotes non-violence as the solution to the antagonism of formerly colonized subjects. These neocolonial elements are deeply dismissed in Economist reviewer NB’s pronouncement of the film as a “pacifist blockbuster,” that provides “a substantial and subtly acted examination of negotiation, leadership and the difficulty of diffusing tension and building trust.” (“‘Dawn of the Planet of the Apes’: Great apes”) Such readings seek to position the film as an extension of the populist imaginary of Occupy – specifically, the discourse of ‘non-violence’ mobilized by liberal contingencies within local encampments, as well as in the news media and contemporary literature of the movement.



Figure 9 – Dawn of *The Planet of The Apes*

While the film may be a “pacifist blockbuster,” *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* is certainly also a sustained engagement with the critique of radical militarism that, some would argue, brought on the dissolution of the Occupy movements in 2012. The notable critiques include Chris Hedges’s reactionary denunciation of Black Bloc tactics, “The Cancer of Occupy,” Rebecca Solnit’s moralistic essay “Throwing Out the Master’s Tools and Building a Better House,” each of which contributed to the commonsensical liberal discourses that were being mobilized on the ground level in the encampments. Moreover, in its division between encampments, the film privileges a form of liberal individualism that exceeds collectivities and rationalizes leadership. The most interesting part of the film is the building antagonism between apes Caesar and Koba, who represent the pacifist and militaristic extremes of their

encampment – and moreover, archetypes of the activist milieu of the post-Occupy period.

Released during the demise of Occupy Wall Street, David Cronenberg's long awaited adaptation of the Don DeLillo novel *Cosmopolis* resonated with audiences in 2012. As reviewer Philip French notes, this sense of historical resonance is the continuation of a certain pattern in the reception of both the novel and film: "*Cosmopolis* was published in 2003, and although on its first page DeLillo specifically states that the setting is April 2000, it was read at the time as a post-9/11 novel," as French explains, adding that in 2012, it is also possible to "see its account of Wall Street on the point of collapse and New York in a state of siege by angry anarchists as a prophetic anticipation of the banking crisis of 2008 and the Occupy Wall Street movement." (French) Like the novel, the film's prescience is an extension of its narrative of speculation. While the 'post-9/11' periodization seems altogether lost from the film's spatial imaginary of Manhattan, the financial crisis underpins the narrative's representation of a space – contained within a limousine inching through traffic jams. Inside the limousine currency speculator Eric Packer attempts to barricade himself from externalities, in an enclave that slowly collapses in on itself. Through the windows, Packer sees continual anti-capitalist protests, while his fortune disappears. Packer's self-destruction becomes a mode of imagining the end of capitalism in the film – and the film, more than perhaps any other of the past several years, attempts to understand the end of capitalism as a distinct historical juncture, rather than contingent upon apocalypse. The film's representational limit, however, is



the outside world. *Cosmopolis* interiorizes this historical process in the confinement of the limousine and Packer's self-destruction, but it cannot imagine beyond this contained space of collapse. The utopian impulse of the film is in this sense the imaginary of crisis and immanent destruction – a slow, crawling death in the limousine as a heterotopia in decay. All the while, the revolt remains occluded, illegible, and unknowable. The future is opaque and unactionable.



**Figure 10 – *Cosmopolis***

The problem with bringing together such films as ‘post-Occupy’ is that, in the attempt to locate continuities with the cultural moment of OWS, the historical conditions of the Occupy movements are nevertheless eradicated. Of the 2012 blockbuster *The Avengers*, J. Hoberman would argue that the film “recasts 9/11 in the Bush years’ dominant movie mode, namely the comic book superhero spectacular...

but more fundamentally, [it] demonstrates how completely 9/11 has been superseded by another catastrophe, namely the financial meltdown [of 2008].” (Hoberman) To what extent does the attempt to articulate a ‘cinema of the 99%’ distract us from the historicity of this dystopian revival? Here, I want to suggest that the dystopian genre is the “movie mode” of persistent crisis – rather than the cultural outlet of the end of Occupy Wall Street. While it is useful to develop different micro-periodizations of the dystopian genre’s ascendance, it seems far more important to think through the cultural dominance of dystopia as a mode of narrativizing crisis. The ‘post-Occupy’ period instead marks a critical juncture in this rise of dystopias in financial crisis cinema, at which the politics of dystopia may be radically re-examined.

As the cultural logic of the contemporary moment, the dystopian genre signals a set of representational problematics for which, as Jameson writes, “the conclusion to draw [is] not that, since it is unrepresentable, capitalism is ineffable and a kind of mystery beyond language or thought; but rather that one must redouble one’s efforts to express the inexpressible in this respect.” (Jameson *Representing Capital* 7) The dominance of dystopia in this period can be understood in terms of the genre’s mimetic function – its critical capacity as analogy to the present. As analogy, however, the dystopia is always partial – in the sense that, as Jameson suggests, representation cannot grasp at totality, and capitalism is only visible through its symptoms. Dystopia, like “any attempt to construct a model of capitalism,” Jameson argues, “will be a mixture of success and failure... Every representation is partial [and] every possible representation is a combination of diverse and heterogeneous

modes of construction or expression.” (8) While representation is never complete – while there is always a gap from totality – it seems crucial to disengage from the question of mimetic failure, and to reorient toward the question of political interpretation. At stake in a post-Occupy cinema is precisely the politics of interpretation which I discuss in my third chapter as a practice of reading for utopia.

In the case of *Cosmopolis*, it would be productive to reconceive of the film’s periodicity in terms of the financial crisis. This is why the film is the most thoroughly anti-utopian out of these dystopian ‘post-Occupy’ narratives – in its penetrating examination of capitalist collapse, *Cosmopolis* at once describes the crisis point of the financial market and the point at which futurity vanishes entirely. Although the film features perhaps the most incisive engagement with the possibility of an end of capitalism, this coincides with the impossibility of post-capitalism as a horizon of the political imagination. The outside remains unseen. For this reason, I would argue, the film does not politicize the dystopian genre, but rather draws upon dystopian tropes as a way to eradicate utopian possibility from the narrative.

How does the ‘post-Occupy’ framework attempt to politicize this problem? In what regard does the dystopian impulse itself come into crisis through these films? How can we engage with dystopia as a mode of representation that bares critical insights about the epistemological limits of contemporary capitalism? While dismantling the notion of a ‘cinema of the 99%,’ I want to take seriously the need to historicize the political imaginary of ‘post-Occupy’ films in relation to this ascendance of dystopia as the cultural logic of financial crisis. I want to suggest some

ways in which to approach these films as attempts to imagine post-capitalist futures, that make contact with a different set of possibilities, unhinged from the periodicity of ‘post-Occupy.’

More specifically, this involves asking of the politics of dystopia in this cultural moment. In treating dystopia as the cultural logic of this ‘cinema of the 99%’, I want to also suggest some ways in which to approach these films as engaging with the possibility of post-capitalist futures. While each of these films makes contact with this possibility, they diverge in their imagination of the future as a blind field of various processes of ending capitalism. What is the function of dystopia in this cultural imagination? How does dystopian speculation offer a mode of thinking through the conditions of possibility for revolutionary practice and anti-capitalist thought?

As in my third chapter, I wish to insist on a dialectical correspondence between the dystopian genre and utopian hermeneutics, rather than construct a distinction of structural opposition. The dominance of the dystopian imagination in this period should incite, I will argue, greater attention to the utopian dimensions of this genre. It would be a mistake, in other words, to approach this proliferation of dystopian culture as indication of a waning utopian imagination – instead, I will proceed to explore some ways in which these films require certain readership practices that approach utopia as a mode of negation. The point is not only to produce a political interpretation, but to consider the ways in which the practice of political

interpretation deepens an epistemological engagement with the conditions of possibility through post-capitalist speculation.

### The ‘Anti-Occupy’ Blockbuster

“You think this can last? There’s a storm coming, Mr. Wayne.” – Selina Kyle

In dismantling this notion of a ‘cinema of the 99%,’ it seems imperative to also intervene on the discourse of ‘anti-Occupy’ cinema, first attributed to the most recent of Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* series. *The Dark Knight Rises* has gained critical attention as a political commentary on Occupy Wall Street, and also merges superhero and dystopia genres – what Hoberman suggests are the cultural dominants of Bush administration and financial crisis era films. Released in 2012, *The Dark Knight Rises* was critiqued by David Graeber as a “piece of anti-Occupy propaganda,” (Graeber, “Super Position”) and by Slavoj Žižek as “[tainting] OWS with the accusation that it harbours a terrorist or totalitarian potential.” (Žižek, “The Politics of Batman”) The film features a hostage takeover of the Stock Exchange, among other terrorist acts in an uprising led by Batman’s latest nemesis, Bane – who begins a “People’s Republic of Gotham City,” enclosing the island and exploding or barricading all surrounding bridges. Filmed in Manhattan contemporaneously with the encampment of Zuccotti Park, *The Dark Knight Rises* is the first of a series of films to take up the cultural moment of Occupy Wall Street through the

representational logics of dystopia.



**Figure 11 – The Dark Knight 1**

*The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) is the third installment of Christopher Nolan’s adaptation of the Batman origin story, which incorporates dystopian tropes into its rendition of the super-hero narrative. In each of the films, Gotham City morphs between installments as an urban amalgamation of Chicago and New York. Between these films, we can observe a process of re-scaling “the strategic territories that articulate the new system” of what Saskia Sassen has called the “emergence of global cities” in neoliberal capitalism. Sassen describes the conditions of this emergence as:

...the partial unbundling or at least weakening of the national as a spatial unit due to privatization and deregulation and the associated strengthening of globalization [and the] conditions for the ascendance of other spatial units or scales... The dynamics and processes that get territorialized at these diverse scales can in principle be regional, national or global. (Sassen, *The Global City* 27)

The last of The Dark Knight series most strongly conceptualizes Gotham as a global city through the production of centralization – a characteristic which Sassen argues is the necessary spatial counterpart to the processes of dispersal in global networks. When Bane seizes power of the Stock Exchange, his group of revolutionaries proceeds to block off the bridges and subways to enclose the island of Gotham.



Figure 12 – The Dark Knight 2

In Graeber’s critique of *The Dark Knight Rises*, Bane is the central enigma – specifically as a revolutionary figure. While Bane’s revolt in Gotham brings power to a world of criminals and freed prisoners, what is unknown within the People’s Republic of Gotham City is that there is only a matter of months before a nuclear reactor will bring about total destruction. For Graeber, the central question is “why does Bane wish to lead the people in social revolution” in the first place? That this question is unanswerable within the narrative logics of the film only seems to suggest the ways in which its representation of Bane’s revolution comes with deep-rooted

anxieties about a post-capitalist social order. Rather than pursue these anxieties as points of critique, however, Graeber seeks to articulate the film as an anti-Occupy film – while I would suggest that the problem is really that the film is anti-utopian. As Graeber argues, in the film, “something like Occupy could only have been the product of some tiny group of ingenious manipulators who really are pursuing some secret agenda” – however this critique is launched in defense of a populist vision which Graeber claims is strongly at work in the political moment of Occupy.

Zizek’s analysis of the film provides a line of critique to pursue in Graeber’s reading, which focuses so intently on the staging of an anti-Occupy politics that it forecloses any possibilities to assess the political unconscious of the film. Graeber’s reading provides an external critique, “claiming that [the film’s] depiction of OWS is a ridiculous caricature,” which Zizek describes as insufficient – arguing that “the critique has to be immanent; it has to locate inside the film a multitude of signs that point toward the authentic event.” Unlike Graeber, Zizek locates a utopian dimension to Bane – “the source of his revolutionary hardness,” Zizek observes, “is unconditional love.” While recovering Bane from the fate of a villain, Zizek positions the character as “the mirror image of state terror, for a murderous fundamentalism that takes over and rules by fear, not for the overcoming of state power through popular self-organization.” In arguing that “the ongoing anti-capitalist protests are the opposite of Bane,” Zizek aligns entirely with Graeber’s populist conception of Occupy. Nevertheless, Zizek claims that such “common-sense objections suggest



themselves,” attempting to demystify the problem of violence at work in the social movement’s popular imaginary.

To an extent, Zizek’s reading of *The Dark Knight Rises* modifies elements of the non-violent discourse of Occupy, which the film unarguably mobilizes through “wrongly translat[ing] violence into murderous terror.” Zizek understands Bane as a revolutionary figure, whose “authenticity has to leave traces in the film’s texture.” The authenticity that Zizek describes is precisely Bane’s utopian function in the film, as the negation of Gotham. Zizek’s attention to Bane compels the following argument: “it is all too simplistic to claim that there is no violent potential in OWS and similar movements – there is violence at work in every authentic and emancipatory process.” Distinguishing between revolutionary violence and terrorism, Zizek claims that the rise of Bane in the narrative,

... changes things entirely. For all the characters, Batman included, morality is relativized and becomes a matter of convenience, something determined by circumstances. It’s open class warfare – everything is permitted in defense of the system when we are dealing not just with mad gangsters, but with a popular uprising.

Zizek’s defense of Bane, however, bares its own set of symptoms – a particular urgency to re-tell the narrative against the reactionary politics of the Batman vigilante figure, who Graeber describes as the ultimate right-wing superhero. And yet, in providing this critique of the film’s conception of revolution as terrorism, Zizek also states “the Occupy Wall Street movement in reality was not violent... In so far as Bane’s revolt is supposed to extrapolate the immanent tendency of OWS, the film absurdly misrepresents its aims and strategies.” Ultimately, his reading of the film

privileges the notion of a popular uprising – to the point of heroizing Bane as “the good terrorist.”

Both Graeber and Zizek critique *The Dark Knight Rises* on the basis of a populist imaginary of OWS, and it is precisely the way in which the film puts populism into crisis that remains under-theorized in their analyses. In contributing to this notion of OWS as a “popular uprising,” both readings reduce the utopian dimensions of the film and its capacity for post-capitalist imagination. While Zizek produces a symptomatic reading which recovers the utopianism of a dictatorship of the proletariat in Manhattan – the “event [which] is immanent to the film... its absent centre” – this reading marginalizes some of the more critical features of the film as a dystopia of the precariat.

Zizek and Graeber both organize their analyses of the film around the opposition between Batman and Bane, while neither accounts for the film’s conception of precarious labor, figured in Selina Kyle. As ‘Catwoman,’ Kyle is an unacknowledged counterpart to Bane and Batman – a figure of the feminization and flexibilization of precarious labor, who vacillates between these oppositional poles in the narrative. She describes her mode of class antagonism to Wayne: “I take what I need to from those who have more than enough. I don’t stand on the shoulders of people with less.” Kyle opens a third reading of the film, through the particular problematics of precarity and feminization explored in her relation to the revolution – her navigation between the film’s conception of anarchy, as Graeber describes, in the relationship between “violence and creativity.” As Kyle explains to Wayne, “You and

your friends better batten down the hatches, cause when it hits you're all going to wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us." Kyle articulates a revolutionary dimension of the film, through forms of feminized and instrumentalized criminality rather than necessary or irrational violence, as figured in Batman and Bane.

As superheroes, Batman and Catwoman differ from Bane in their articulations of a private self. While Bane cannot live without his mask – a figurative mouthpiece for the people – Wayne and Kyle are entrepreneurial subjects, whose alter egos express both expansion and flexibilization that characterize the correspondence between dynamics of privatization and precaritization in the neoliberal paradigm. As an extension of Wayne, Batman typifies the totalizing logic of private property in this narrative world – a 'self' that stands in for totality, that counteracts the withering of the state through privatization. Catwoman, to the contrary, represents an extension of Kyle as a precarious subject, whose peripheralization becomes instrumentalized in acts of criminal transgression. Marginalized by the masculinist dichotomy of Batman and Bane, Catwoman makes use of her invisibilization, and survives in Gotham through stealing and, implicitly, sex-work. Unlike Wayne, Kyle cannot compartmentalize her alter-ego – she lives in a world in which the private self no longer exists: as she explains to Wayne, "There's no fresh start in today's world. Any twelve-year-old with a cell phone could find out what you did. Everything we do is collated and quantified. Everything sticks." Kyle and Catwoman are inseparable – she is the ultimate flexibilized subject, who has to be both at once in order to endure the

conditions of contemporary capitalism. To the contrary, Wayne contains Batman to his private fortress, acting at once as vigilante to the corrupt and incapacitated police state, and as savior philanthropist to dwindling institutions of social resources. As Kyle asks Wayne, “You think all this can last?”

While Žižek’s desire for a cinema of the proletariat – and indeed, for a correspondence between the ‘99%’ and proletarianism – fails to recognize the centrality of the precariat in the film, Graeber’s critique of the film’s anti-Occupy polemics would be more usefully examined as anti-utopianism. Nowhere is this anti-utopianism more clear than when Wayne is captured by Bane, and placed in a remote prison, somewhere in North Africa, during the occupation of Gotham city. This is the prison from which Bane emerged – what he calls “hell on earth.” At the bottom of a deep pit, the prison is most hellish because of its principle of hope: above the prisoners, the pit opens to a clear sky – a symbol of both liberation and impossibility. “In here,” Bane explains to Wayne, “there can be no true despair without hope,” adding that “as I terrorize Gotham, I will feed it hope.” In this sense, the prison encapsulates the film’s anti-utopian conception of the dystopian structure of feeling. Whereas the dystopian genre, as Peter Fitting suggests, expresses a “critique of contemporary society” and “implies (or asserts) the need for change,” anti-utopianism “explicitly or implicitly [defends] the status quo.” (Fitting 138) The film works out of what Kathi Weeks calls a “familiar logic” of anti-utopianism, which “makes it easy to write [utopian] demands off as unrealistic, and therefore potentially dangerous distractions from the necessarily modest and small-scale parameters of political

reform.” (Weeks 175) Wayne, throughout the film, figures this necessity for small-scale modifications to the privatization of Gotham – it is merely a matter of a charity from the elite class. Bane, in his illegibility as a revolutionary terrorist, articulates the film’s foreclosure of utopian imagination and post-capitalist possibility.



Figure 13 – The Dark Knight 3

Throughout the prison sequence, Wayne observes a tradition among the prisoners, in their attempt to escape. In this tradition, one man attempts to climb to the desert surface, while the rest of the prisoners stand below him chanting “Rise! Rise! Rise!” After many fatalities, Wayne finally escapes the prison – achieving what Bane perceives to be impossible – by climbing without a rope. While all the other men had failed, ultimately being pulled back by the rope, Wayne succeeds in his embrace of darkness, stating that he no longer feels fear but only anger. As Bane explains to Wayne, referring to himself, “sometimes the pit spits something back up.” Wayne’s

escape is individualism conquering collectivity – the rise of a man who cannot be weighed down by the masses from below. What defines the film’s conception of heroism is the absence of collective possibility. Nowhere does it seem possible for the masses to collectivize, and escape by some other means than sheer individual will.

Whereas Zizek and Graeber fixate on the question of whether *The Dark Knight Rises* is an anti-Occupy film, it seems perhaps more productive to follow this question of how the film articulates the anti-utopian tendencies of this post-Occupy period. In its conception of Bane as terrorist, and its conception of class as a measure of heroism, the film has been read as an “instant conservative classic,” as Jerry Bowyer writes. In his review of the film for *Forbes* magazine, Bowyer argues that “the film is not without... sympathy for the foolish young idealists of OWS. Selina Kyle [is] a morally confused young woman who wages class warfare through jewel thievery,” adding that the militarized occupation of Gotham was “exactly what she [had] been calling for, but now that it’s here, Selina sees that it is far worse than what it replaced.” (Bowyer) Here, I want to offer a different reading of Kyle as the utopian unconscious of the film – which is otherwise anti-utopian, in the sense that “the elision between perfection and impossibility,” as Ruth Levitas writes, “[serves] to invalidate all attempts at change, reinforcing the claim that there is no alternative, and sustaining the status quo.” (Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* 3)

Between the End of Capitalism and the End of the World

The unimaginability of a post-capitalist future is a structuring principle throughout this new dystopian turn in ‘post-Occupy’ cinema. In *Cosmopolis*, this structural principle generates an atmosphere of containment and claustrophobia. While the film cannot imagine the outside world where the logic of financial capital is deteriorating, this deterioration penetrates the interiority of the limousine and can be made sense of indirectly. The indirectness with which such possibility exists in these films must prompt a certain set of interpretive tactics. Whereas *The Dark Knight Rises* quite directly articulates a post-capitalist future in Bane’s self-described “necessary evil,” other films feature a more complicated struggle to break through this epistemological limit – resulting in a different dialectical correspondence between dystopian and utopian modes of thought in mass culture.

Adapted from the French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige*, Bong Joon-ho’s *Snowpiercer* was released in South Korea in 2013, reaching the United States the next year. The film is Bong’s first to be predominantly in English. For the film’s speaking roles, Bong cast mostly actors from the US and UK – such as Tilda Swinton, Ed Harris, John Hurt, Octavia Spencer – and perhaps most notably Chris Evans, of *Captain America* fame, as Curtis, the film’s central anti-hero. Upon its international release in 2014, the film was quickly taken up as an allegory about the ‘99%’, begging the questions posed by Matthew Snyder’s essay “*Snowpiercer*: Speak, Memory, Occupy”: “What if Occupy Wall Street... had not only spread, but taken systemic root against the ruling class?” (Snyder) Snyder describes the original graphic novel, by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette, as “the occupy before

occupy,” arguing that the novel’s concern “about resources, access, and social stratification are even more relevant to our times” than when it was first published in 1982 – at the beginning of the dystopian turn discussed in my third chapter. Upon its release in 2014, *Snowpiercer* was quickly heralded, as Jason Read remarks, “as a new film about the 99% and the 1%”. (Read) What is at stake in such a reading of the film? While taking on the appearance of a Hollywood blockbuster, *Snowpiercer* was absorbed into this dominant trend of a ‘cinema of the 99%’ – but it could also be interpreted as a critique of such a phenomenon.

Read convincingly takes up the film as part of this phenomenon, arguing that *Snowpiercer* “openly invites such readings,” while exploring what he understands to be the more important question of “what it means to make or interpret a film as allegory of the present, recognizing of course that the line between making and interpreting can never be rigidly defined.” (ibid) The premise of the film establishes this allegory – to an extent that many have critiqued as heavy-handed – in its vision of the year 2031. The film begins with a climate engineering scheme in 2014 – a last resort against global warming – that causes a global ice age which only a few survive on the ‘Snowpiercer,’ a massive train that travels across the frozen globe. As the opening sequence of the film explains:

SOON AFTER DISPERSING CW-7  
THE WORLD FROZE  
ALL LIFE BECAME EXTINCT  
THE PRECIOUS FEW  
WHO BOARDED THE RATTLING ARK  
ARE HUMANITY’S LAST SURVIVORS



The train is organized as a class-based hierarchy, with the elite positioned in the front of the train, and an increasing surplus population contained in the “tail section.” In this sense, the film easily imagines the end of the world, while meditating on the limits of possibility for imagining the end of capitalism. In the static hierarchy of the train, the ‘Snowpiercer’ preserves the class system of late capitalism in the post-apocalypse. By extension, as Read argues, the film demonstrates the ease with which the culture industry can conceive of “some dystopian tyranny” without “[coming] to grips with actually existing capitalism.” (Read) This is precisely the risk of reducing the film to an allegory of the Occupy movement – what reviewer Stephen Garrett calls “the 99% on steel wheels.” (Garrett) And yet, the extent to which the film offers itself as such an allegory can also allow us to consider the desire for such an allegory in the first place. Where does this allegorical reading lead us? How does it illustrate certain tendencies of this ‘post-Occupy’ period?

Of the allegorical reading of *Snowpiercer*, Read concludes, “it is easy, perhaps too easy, to see the train as an image of contemporary capitalism,” continuing that, “The inequality is acknowledged by nearly everyone except for the lucky few, but as long as the world outside of it appears frozen and hostile, a gulag in the waiting, then the train just goes on and on.” (Read) When a revolt begins in the back of the train, the film becomes a far more provocative meditation on revolutionary strategy than it could ever offer as a diagnostic of class struggle. It is in this sense that Read takes up the problem of revolution and its limits in the film:

That the train is the necessary condition of existence, or at least appears to be so, puts any revolution [on] narrow tracks. The

revolutionaries can seize the train, but seizing the train risks all too easily reproducing the same relations. In fact we learn that these revolutions are nothing other than the dynamic actions that keep the order intact. They reduce the population, functioning as a kind of unnatural selection, and they occasionally bring new leaders to the front of the train. Successful revolutionaries are bribed into becoming new leaders, or at least offered the chance. The only solution then is not to seize the train, to claim its engine, but to begin to imagine a life outside of it. (ibid)

This leaves the film with two competing conceptions of revolution: the seizure or the destruction of the state. Throughout the film, this divergence is explored in two characters. While Curtis takes a teleological orientation – moving from the back to the front of the train, toward its engine – Namgoong Minsu, the Korean specialist who engineered the security features of the train, continues to plot against Curtis’s revolt in order to escape the train. As they sit beside the gate to the engine car, Curtis tells Namgoong to open the gate, but Namgoong refuses: “You know what I really want? I want to open the gate, but not this gate. That one,” he explains, pointing to an exit hatch. As Namgoong argues, this hatch is “the gate to the outside world. It’s been frozen shut for 18 years. You might take it for a wall. But it’s a fucking gate.” While life on the train has been de-temporalized – with many inhabitants addicted to a drug called kronole – Namgoong has traced certain changes in the landscape, in observing the outside world through the windows. Curtis hardly looks out the window in his journey through many train cars, always pushing forward toward the engine. He is the realist – compelled by the ostensible necessity of the train, and convinced that there are no alternatives for survival. Namgoong, on the other hand, is the idealist driven by the question, “What if we could survive outside?”



Figure 14 – Snowpiercer 1

Curtis's journey to the engine compels the plot, while Namgoong's scheme to escape remains peripheral. Yet throughout the film, there is a central tension between these ideological constructs of the realist and idealist, through a sustained critique of the notion of impossibility. While certainly adapting many of the tropes of post-apocalyptic nihilism, the film nevertheless resists the conditions of possibility and impossibility of the dystopian genre. It is in this sense a persistently utopian film, which – in decentering the Captain America analog of Curtis – makes available a whole different set of interpretations through Namgoong. By the end of the film, Curtis confesses to Namgoong that in his first months in the tail section, he had cannibalized other passengers:

... a thousand people in an iron box. No food and no water. After a month we ate the weak. You know what I hate about myself? I know

what people taste like. I know that babies taste best. There was a woman. She was hiding with her baby and some men with knives came. They killed her and they took her baby. And then an old man of no relation – just an old man – stepped forward and he said ‘give me the knife.’ Everyone thought he’d kill the baby himself, but he took the knife and he cut off his own arm. And he said ‘eat this. If you’re so hungry, eat this. Just leave the baby.’ I had never seen anything like that. Me and the men put down their knives... and then one by one, other people in the tail section people started cutting off legs and arms and offering them. It was like a miracle. And I wanted to. I tried.

When he reveals that he was the man with the knife, the film begins to problematize Curtis’s heroic realism – rendering him paralyzed by his sense of impossibility and desperation. Here, the film offers a compelling critique of human nature – a ‘miracle’ that exceeds Curtis’s realist expectations of what is entailed in survival in this most dire of situations. When the tail passengers begin to offer their own limbs, a collective possibility emerges – what eventually brings Curtis to the gate of the engine car in the end of the film. After this miracle, the tail section begins to receive protein bars from the Wilford Industries – the tyrannical inventor of the Snowpiercer, who Curtis eventually reaches in the engine. In this period of “chaos,” however, they discover that it is possible to survive without reproducing the violence of their oppression on each other, and by making that violence an instrument of their collectivization.

When Curtis finally makes it to the engine car, only to discover that a missing young boy from the tail section has been imprisoned by Wilford to literally become a cog in the engine, he comes to the realization that the train cannot be seized. If it cannot continue in perpetual motion without the exploitation of the boy, Timmy, then the train is structurally dysfunctional. It turns out that the train depends on the mechanization of young children, who are trapped beneath the engine, part of the tail

section's purpose as a reserve army of labor. Curtis decides to save Timmy, but in doing so, he must destroy the train. Curtis and Timmy clutch onto Namgoong and his daughter, Yona, as the train decomposes, with cars exploding off the tracks and spreading across the snowscape. A common and reductive reading of this scene interprets Yona and Timmy as the only survivors. While indeed Curtis and Namgoong are killed with the train's destruction, the film includes a long sequence in which various train cars are scattered and in each contains the possibility of human survival. Yet the film's conclusion lingers with indeterminacy, rather than providing heavy-handed narrative closure – along the terms of its supposedly heavy-handed allegorization. It is at this point that the allegory no longer holds up – when Yona and Timmy emerge from the remains of the engine, to discover the tactile experience of life outside the train. Both “train babies,” Yona and Timmy figure a different set of possibilities from those imagined in the opposition between Curtis and Namgoong, whose deaths are hardly a plot-point of this final scene. As Yona and Timmy take their first steps in the snow, they hold hands and look out to an undiscovered country – a terrain of new possibilities, for which the terms of impossibility must be re-imagined. As Read explains, “In the end the future belongs to those who can imagine a life outside of the train and can realize it.” (Read) While it is possible to read this last scene as a sequence of impending failure, what is most remarkable about the film's conclusion is precisely its indeterminacy – the way in which it problematizes the limits of possibility, “[staging] the dystopia of our current imagination,” as Read insists.

Against the reductive reading of the film as a heavy-handed allegory, I want to instead suggest that the film indicates a waning of the allegorical function in this most recent dystopian turn, especially articulated by this ‘post-Occupy’ cinema. The film’s most effective mode of critique is its visual language, which generates this dimension of indeterminacy so foregrounded in the final scene. When Yona and Timmy see from the wreckage a polar bear on the horizon, this is at once a symbol of immanent danger and persistent survival. The audience is left to decide what will happen next – whether the polar bear is indeed a refutation of extinction. At stake in this final question is what Mark Fisher has termed capitalist realism – what he describes as the “widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.” (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* 6) Between Curtis and Namgoong, the terms of this impossibility are thoroughly problematized, while the end of the film explodes from the containment of this binary opposition between competing conceptions of revolutionary possibility.



Figure 15 – Snowpiercer 2

Though it is perhaps a danger to suggest that this final sequence in *Snowpiercer* is a meditation on indeterminacy – risking the implication that the conditions of possibility for survival are a matter of ‘personal interpretation’ – I mean to suggest, to the contrary, that this indeterminacy should be read as an attempt to extend anti-capitalist critique to post-capitalist imagination. “Capitalist realism,” as Fisher explains, “is very far from precluding a certain anti-capitalism... Time after time, the villain in Hollywood films will turn out to be the ‘evil corporation’,” and yet, as he continues, “Far from undermining capitalist realism, this gestural anti-capitalism actually reinforces it.” (12) The marketability of anti-capitalist films since the 2008 financial crisis bares important lessons. While measuring political antagonism in this period, these films have also demonstrated the weakness of post-

capitalist imagination. Certainly, following the Occupy movement in the United States, such dystopian films have appealed to a certain cynicism that has come with this political antagonism. And yet, while making the case for change, these films dominantly symptomatize the inability to think the end of capitalism as something distinct from apocalypse. This is why the indeterminacy of *Snowpiercer*'s final scene is so crucial – leaving the audience with a blind field of possibility. I take this scene to be a challenge to the utopian impulse, and more specifically, to the idea of life after capitalism.

Whereas *Snowpiercer* ends with a vision of total destruction – an anarchic utopianism glimpsed in the last sequence – *Mad Max: Fury Road* ultimately imagines the possibility of re-claiming the dystopian city from which its heroes fled. The film begins with Max's attempt to escape the Citadel, which is tyrannically governed by warlord Immortan Joe. Water and gasoline are scarce in this post-apocalyptic desert wasteland, but the Citadel consists of an elaborate infrastructure that Joe hoards for himself and his worshiping army of War Boys. In addition to agricultural production, the Citadel also consists of a vast infrastructure of reproductive labor, ranging from sex slaves to breast-feeders and blood-suppliers. After Max's failed escape, the film follows Imperator Furiosa, who sabotages a mission to obtain resources from nearby cities Gas Town and Bullet Farm, in an attempt to liberate five of Joe's pregnant "wives." Driving a large war tank, Furiosa stores the women as cargo, while they fight off Joe's War Boys in pursuit of the "Green Land" – a matriarchy from which Furiosa was stolen and brought to Joe's citadel in her youth. Much of the film



consists of an ornately carnivalesque chase, in which Furiosa becomes comrades with Max, and the wives become more adept using guns. Furiosa, Max, a rehabilitated War Boy, and Joe's wives eventually reach a collectivity of women in the desert, but they are told that the "Green Land" could not be maintained, and eventually became a swamp where nothing could grow. At first, Furiosa and the women part ways with Max, furthering their distance from the citadel. Max catches up to them, however, and persuades Furiosa – in a decidedly un-feminist scene, despite much of the film's reception – that they should instead return to the citadel and assassinate Joe. In the end of the film, when the surviving heroes return to the citadel with Joe's corpse, they are celebrated by all the citizens. While Max vanishes among the masses, the women are raised on a lift up to the top of the citadel, in order to re-establish social relations with already existing modes of production and social reproduction.



Figure 16 – Mad Max: Fury Road 1

*Fury Road* is a fascinating meditation on the possibility of post-capitalism, for which the decisive moment is this turn back to the citadel. Not only is their return a demand of the impossible, but an attempt to think through the already existing possibilities of post-capitalist social reproduction. Under Joe's tyranny, the resources of the citadel have been privatized. Scarcity is rather an ideological construct – the precondition for Joe's power, and the condition by which Furiosa and Max diverge in their sense of possibility. While in *Snowpiercer*, the train's dysfunctionality is conceived as unsalvageable, Joe is the site of dysfunction in *Fury Road*, kept alive with an elaborate respiratory machine and plastic-encased armor.



Figure 17 – Mad Max: Fury Road 2

The consistent attempt of *Fury Road* is to imagine the breakdown of patriarchy, as an integral logic of capitalism. A month before its release in May 2015, Men's Rights activists began a boycott against the film as "feminist propaganda." Such attacks on the film only strengthened the desire for a feminist dystopia, expressed by many critics. In an interview with *Vagina Monologues* author Eve Ensler, who was a consultant for the film, TIME Magazine writer Elaina Dockterman would call *Fury Road* "very feminist." In her promotion of the film, Ensler describes the female characters as "willing to give up enslaved comfort for liberation and risk death to do it. It's the rising feminine rebelling against patriarchy." (Dockterman) From a marketing perspective, the feminist branding of the film is perhaps a point of curiosity, while it leads nowhere in terms of an analysis of the film. Instead, as a 'feminist dystopia,' it is far more productive to think through the political unconscious of the film, precisely through its anti-patriarchal utopian impulses. That the film cannot think outside the logics of patriarchy reflects a more systemic problem of the contemporary imagination – what I have been discussing as the waning of utopia, and more specifically, of the possibility of life outside of capitalism. Within the narrative world of the film, this possibility becomes activated by the desire for feminist collectivity.

Counter-arguments citing the film's failure to be feminist seem beside the point as well. It is more the film's feminization of the dystopian genre that seems noteworthy – marking a critical juncture in this most recent dystopian turn of 'post-Occupy' cinema. *Fury Road* does not succeed at a total estrangement from patriarchy,

but how could it? The dominant feminist critique of the film appears to fixate on the characters. Joe's wives – the most nubile women of the citadel, we might presume – are anomalous to the post-apocalyptic landscape in their alignment with contemporary standards of beauty. Their fashion-model-aesthetic contrasts with that of Furiosa, who takes on the appearance of a contemporary action hero instead. Whereas the film is incredibly imaginative in its orchestration of an elaborate and mobile terrain of struggle – from the citadel to the long journey on the “fury road” – it fails to incorporate women into its aesthetic world. As a dystopian film, the film takes the structure of an analogy to the present, while the wives represent a break from this structure. Everyone else in the film is dirty, and most of them will snack on a live desert lizard or beetle. Immortan Joe and his fellow warlords are both animalistic and crippled by nuclear catastrophe, the products of presumably generations of inbreeding, and his War Boys are hairless and painted in sand. The wives are aesthetically preserved from this narrative logic, and are thus *relatable* rather than analogical. As characters in a film uncommitted to character development, however, the wives do feature an interesting transformation from their existence as “objects” and “property,” as they discuss explicitly, to warriors who risk and lose their lives for the purpose of revolution.



Figure 18 – Mad Max: Fury Road 3

While being uninterested in its own characters, *Fury Road* is also uninterested in its own allegory. Like *Snowpiercer*, the film demonstrates a waning of the allegorical function in the dystopian genre, instead developing an intensely spatialized imaginary of subjugation as an analogy to the present. Like the train, the road must be destroyed – or at least, decapitated as an allegory. The road’s purpose of escape is reversed – the characters are driven by revolution over retreat. The

intricately conceptualized citadel, featuring the various enclaves of Joe's caste system, makes intelligible the logics of patriarchy, as part of a broader scheme of domination. Joe's wives and children live in a locked safe. In another locked safe, he and his adult son drink fresh breast milk among a dozen women strapped to vacuum pumped suction machines. The spatial imaginary of the film elaborates this vision of post-apocalypse as a world of false scarcity. Outside the citadel, Joe's impoverished subjects surround a large water spout that opens at the tyrant's mercy onto a bright, desiccated landscape. Within the citadel, the locked enclaves of Joe's caste system feature their own contained aesthetic, conceived as a hierarchy in the vertical organization of the structure. Class division is made visible predominantly through color – measuring the distribution of water throughout the citadel. Joe's wives and children are clean and hydrated, surrounded by vibrant and lush colors. Through this contrast between the exterior and interior, the citadel shifts from the site of a dystopian order to that of a false utopia – a post-scarcity existence for an elite class contained from externalized scarcity and subjugation.

While *Snowpiercer* and *Fury Road* both stage the structural necessity of surplus population for the false utopia of an elite class, *Snowpiercer* mostly fixates on this dynamic as a source of antagonism and impending uprisings. In this sense, *Snowpiercer* reflects all the limitations of Occupy Wall Street's popular imagination of class division, while insisting on a more nuanced conception of revolution and recuperation. *Fury Road* conceives of the seizure of state power, but through a far more complex vision of reproductive labor as infrastructure. Yet in the spatial

imaginary of *Fury Road*, this infrastructure is seized precisely because it is containable – reflecting the fantasy of the polis so inherent to the social movements and uprisings of the long 2011. At stake in the conclusion of *Fury Road* is precisely the cultural imagination of the movement of squares. “[Besides] chasing a few ageing dictators down from their protests,” as the Endnotes collective has argued, this movements of squares “achieved no lasting victories. Like the 2008-10 wave of protests, this new form of struggle proved unable to change the form of crisis management – let alone to challenge the dominant social order.” (“The Holding Pattern”) This is the possibility haunting the final sequence of *Fury Road*. With Max disappearing into the masses, the film’s matriarchal uprising is an approximation of post-patriarchal power – indeed an attempt to imagine beyond the social relations of private property – while it is likewise structured by a hierarchy of sexual difference, a vision not premised on the abolition of gender, but on the re-structuring of gendered labor, along with the polis.

### A ‘Post-Occupy’ Cinema?

Through the course of this chapter, I have analyzed a set of recent dystopian films that have been taken up as part of what I am terming a ‘post-Occupy’ cinema, or a cinema of the 99%. Rather than provide continuity for this cultural moment of the end of Occupy, however, these films symptomatize the variations and discontinuities among the localities of the Occupy movements in 2011. The desire for a post-Occupy cinema is a conservative impulse – aligning with the anti-utopianism

of Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*, however implicit or unintentional its indictment of OWS might be. Here, I want to suggest that these films are more productively engaged as part of a resurgence of dystopia in the contemporary imagination, for which a series of micro-periodizations could be explored.

Another account of the periodicity of this most recent dystopian turn is the financial crisis – a compelling force in films such as *District 9* (2009), *Never Let Me Go* (2010), *In Time* (2011), and *Elysium* (2013). This is also a period of resurgent interest in the 1980s dystopian turn, with sequels *Terminator Salvation* (2009), *Repo Men* (2010), and *Total Recall* (2012). Whereas disasters and superheroes dominate the popular imaginary of the Bush administration, these post-financial crisis films show an increasing desire for what Mark Fisher describes as “precarious dystopias”: “Dystopia has returned to cinema,” as Fisher writes, and “class and precariousness [have been] forced into the foreground.” (Fisher, “Precarious Dystopias”) In Fisher’s analysis of three such films, he argues that “to be in the dominant class... [is] to achieve a certain liberation from precariousness; for the poor, meanwhile, life is harried, fugitive, a perpetual state of anxiety.” For Fisher, what is most remarkable is the way in which these dystopian films do not naturalize precarity as a “state which the rich are fortunate enough to rise above,” but on the contrary, “precariousness is deliberately imposed on the poor as a means of controlling and subduing them.” This is certainly the case for *Snowpiercer* and *Fury Road*, as more recent iterations of this phenomenon within the dystopian turn of contemporary culture. While precarity has become a more central theme of this recent dystopian turn, post-financial crisis



dystopias have featured some of the most reactionary tendencies of this period as well.

In the 2009 film *The Road* – adapted from the post-apocalyptic novel by Cormac McCarthy – a dystopian future is imagined in which the remnants of capitalism are the only redemptive elements. As a post-financial crisis film, *The Road* conceives of a future transformed by an unknown catastrophe. A boy and his father travel through a landscape of perpetual war among survivors reduced to cannibalism, pushing a shopping cart through the ruins of late capitalism. The dystopian narrative is driven by a utopian vision of this irretrievable past, a vision of post-capitalist possibility that goes hand-in-hand with even greater catastrophe.



Figure 19 – The Road

Another feature of the periodicity of this recent dystopian turn is the cultural imaginary of urban uprisings and riots, which have proliferated with anti-austerity movements since the onset of the ‘Great Recession.’ *The Purge* (2013) and *The Purge: Anarchy* (2014) represent two such dystopian films. Set in 2022, *The Purge* begins as a false utopia of the “New Founding Fathers” – unmistakably a dystopian new social order of the Tea Party – that completely suppresses criminal activity with the exception of a 12-hour period that comes once a year. This ‘purge’ is a controlled anarchy that is animalistic and horrifically violent within the narrative logics of the film. Rather than a contact zone with utopian imagination, the purge articulates an anarchy that cannot be imagined outside the liberal framework of ‘non-violence’ – a hellscape of rape and torture, which colonizes the private sphere in a suburban home-invasion plot. “No Hollywood film in recent memory,” Willie Osterweil argues, “has taken on the social inevitability of riot and class violence so directly as *The Purge*.” (Osterweil) Osterweil’s reading is predominantly concerned with linking *The Purge* to the 2011 London Riots, stating that the film’s response to the rioters “recognizes in their actions something natural, even righteous.” The dystopianism of the film, he argues, “is not this naturalization of unrest, but rather that the system could recognize and capture this instability in order to totalize its control.” (ibid) However, in its naturalization of social unrest, *The Purge* depoliticizes the utopian elements of such phenomena as the London Riots – refuting the question posed by Jasper Bernes and Joshua Clover, of “How [such] acts of expropriation and free taking [can] be extended and deepened, and what other practices might go along with and help the

extension of these expropriations?” (Bernes and Clover) The conditions of possibility to pursue such questions are unavailable in the narrative world of *The Purge*, in which there is no outside to the recuperation of anarchy -- a future emptied out of utopian potentiality.

In 2012, Paul Mason would argue that 2008-2011 marks an end to the “period of capitalist realism,” citing Mark Fisher. As Fisher would retort, “The (non)events of 2012 show that judgment to be a little hasty,” describing 2012 as a year of “restoration and reaction.” (Fisher, “Capitalist Realism”) Fisher continues,

Instead of capitalist realism ending in 2008 (or 2011), it could be argued that the austerity measures that have been implemented have constituted an intensification of capitalist realism. Those measures couldn't have been introduced unless there was still a widespread sense that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The various struggles that have blown up since the financial crisis show a growing discontent with the panic-neoliberalism that has been put in place since 2008, but they have yet to propose any concrete alternative to the dominant economic model. Capitalist realism is about a corrosion of social imagination, and in some ways, that remains the problem: after thirty years of neoliberal domination, we are only just beginning to be able to imagine alternatives to capitalism. Why is this still the case? (ibid)

This recent dystopian turn – which I am tracing as an emergence of this period of 2008-2011 – should be considered in terms of these dialectics of anti-capitalist antagonism and post-capitalist imagination. While, as Fisher and Mason both agree, this period marks a critical juncture, the ‘dystopian turn’ articulates both the intensification of capitalist realism and the desire for an end of capitalism.

Although there are a number of approaches to account for the periodicity of this recent dystopian turn, what seems most crucial is the imperative to locate in it the

desire for a post-capitalist future – however indeterminate, and occluded such a future might seem. To recover such an orientation means not only to pursue a dialectic of the dystopian genre and utopian imagination, but to direct anti-capitalist impulses toward post-capitalist possibility. This is not to conceive of ‘post-capitalism’ through some programmatist or blueprintist methodology. Nor is it to deny problems of transition, which should be raised to develop a sense of collective possibility in terms of a political practice.

## Chapter Seven

### Notes on the Spatial Imagination of Contemporary Struggles

“... there is no theory without utopia. [There] is no theory that neither explores a possibility nor tries to discover an orientation.” – Henri Lefebvre, “Reflections on the Politics of Space”

“The alternative: utopia and revolution, utopia or revolution is a petty bourgeois question.”

-- Utopie, Paris-Turin, April 1969

The following chapter offers a partial and preliminary inquiry into recent anti-capitalist spatial imagination and practice. This is partial in that it makes no attempt at totalizing. The notes developed here each concern the problem of utopia in different respects. The aim of these notes is not prescriptive, but descriptive – rather than a utopian program, the aim is instead to elaborate a utopian methodology. In focusing on the spatialization of these struggles, these notes are ultimately concerned with

temporality. This is the question of how to imagine the future – more specifically, of how to make contact with different modes of futurity through political practices that are grounded in the present.

### I: A Geo-Imaginary of Riots

In January 2011, Glenn Beck forewarned the conservative right of “a coming insurrection” – a vast conspiracy of revolutionary communists, with the threat of imminent financial collapse and a vision of the future in which “the whole world starts to implode.” Beck maps out a ring of fire, connecting sites of anti-austerity struggle in Europe to the synchronous uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and Egypt. In mapping out this coming insurrection, Beck describes the inevitability of uprisings throughout the Middle East. “I have told you that this is a global movement,” he claims, citing previous conspiratorial accounts of Latin America, continuing that “there are too many people who want to have their dream world.” Conspiratorialism aside, Beck’s account of this insurrectionary moment captures the dynamics of an impending global image of the contemporary period – a geo-imaginary of riots and uprisings, linking sites of struggles through fire and destruction. While for Beck, Tunisia marks the beginning of a coordinated global movement that brings together Marxism with radical Islam, the synchronicity of these uprisings and the proliferation of urban riots seem central to this impending geo-imaginary, as a spatial conception of the current situation and its conditions of possibility.

Writing in 2012, Slavoj Žižek would distinguish 2011 as “the year of dreaming dangerously,” defined by the “revival of radical emancipatory politics all around the world.” (Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* 127) By the next year, as Žižek insists, this geo-imaginary of uprisings has not disappeared, but rather become a latent force of struggle:

...the subterranean work of dissatisfaction is still going on: the rage is building up and a new wave of revolts will follow. The unnatural relative calm of the spring of 2012 is more and more perforated by growing tensions announcing new explosions. What makes the situation so ominous is the all-pervasive sense of blockage: there is no clear way out, and the ruling elite is clearly losing its ability to rule. (ibid)

Here, Žižek describes a terrain of transformation, for which conditions of possibility are rapidly changing. This global image comprises various contingent futures, possible encounters, and hypothetical junctures. As Žižek emphasizes, it is imperative to “learn the art of recognizing, from an engaged subjective position, elements which are here, in our space, but whose time is the emancipated future.” (128) For Žižek, this is more specifically the future of the ‘Communist Idea,’ requiring a certain hermeneutics of the present: “while we must learn to watch for such signs, we should also be aware that what we are doing now will only become readable once the future is here,” Žižek elaborates, “so we should not put too much energy into a desperate search for the ‘germs of Communism’ in today’s society,” arguing instead for a political practice of reading the present for a hypothetical future. (ibid)

To what extent does the riot articulate this futurity? For Alain Badiou, this is a matter of distinguishing between different types of riots, rather than treating the riot

as a homologous formation. In proposing a typology of riots, Badiou specifies a transformation from what he calls an “immediate riot” which is “more nihilistic than political,” into what he calls a “pre-political riot.” (33) The result of this transformation is what he calls an “historical riot,” which articulates the futurity imagined in Zizek’s account with three categorical criteria. The historical riot, Badiou clarifies, must exhibit a “transition from limited localization (assemblies, attacks and destructive acts on the very site of the rebels) to the construction of an enduring central site.” (ibid) The threshold of historical riot, according to Badiou, is crossed by “established localization, possible *longue duree*, intensity of compact presence, multifaceted crowd counting as the whole people.” (Badiou 34-35) In addition, Badiou argues that it is “necessary to make a transition from the nihilistic din of riotous attacks to the invention of a single slogan that envelops all the disparate voices.” (35) In this sense, “a riot becomes historical when its localization ceases to be limited, but grounds in the occupied space the promise of a new, long-term temporality.” (ibid) The riot’s capacity to make imaginable post-capitalist futures, in other words, is a matter of its historicity. However, the terms of historicity specified by Badiou seem problematic in their potential as a template for social movements to find political legibility. As Badiou reiterates, a riot becomes historical when “its localization ceases to be limited, but grounds in the occupied space the promise of a new, long-term temporality,” and when its “composition stops being uniform, but gradually outlines a unified representation,” and when ultimately “the negative growling of pure rebellion is succeeded by the assertion of a shared demand.” (35)

The necessities of centralization, unification, and singularity in Badiou's conception of the historical riot – as a means of revolution and post-capitalist possibility – problematically homologize the uprisings. This category of the historical riot seeks coherence and continuity in a geo-imaginary of heterogeneous-yet-linked struggles. Badiou's "age of riots and uprisings," in this sense, defies this heterogeneity, rather than theorizing it.

Badiou and Žižek both represent a contemporary leftist impulse toward the construction of a coherent narrative of the "movement of squares" in terms of the Communist Idea. As Endnotes has argued, "in reality there were more differences than similarities among the many square movements, such that it might seem foolhardy to try to generalize across them," while this connection is drawn by "the movements themselves, both in the form of their emergence and in their day-to-day practice." While resistant to generalization, this movement of squares marks an "internationalist phenomenon from the beginning," as they insist, which consists of "linked struggles across a mosaic of high- and low-income countries. Oakland and Cairo suddenly were 'one fist.'" ("The Holding Pattern" 3) These struggles are linked but not homogenized – articulating a phenomenon of both synchronicity and variability. According to Badiou, however, "for the moment these protests are not generating the idea on whose basis fidelity to the riot can be *organized*." (Badiou 47) What would such organization entail? What does organization look like, for such a variable terrain of struggles?



While arguing that the historical riot “does not by itself offer an alternative to the power it intends to overthrow,” Badiou calls for organization as a future-oriented politics. In their critique of *The Rebirth of History*, Jasper Bernes and Joshua Clover take up this call for organization, asking if “the very concept of an alternative belongs to the now-outmoded politics of party, state and program.” (Bernes and Clover) They argue that the solution that Badiou “imagines emerges from beyond history, from the rational process of the Idea [of Communism] and its faithful adherents, who translate the truth of present struggles into winning organizational structures and disciplines.” (ibid) Like Zizek, Badiou takes a utopian orientation toward the Idea of Communism, which Bernes and Clover argue precedes the outburst of riots and uprisings. In this sense, Zizek and Badiou are both invested in this geo-imaginary of riots as validation of a theory already in the contemporary discourse – the “Idea of Communism” for which a program of organization must be developed. This is utopianism in the programmatist sense – problematic and even dangerous in how it perceives the role of ideas in contemporary struggles. As Bernes and Clover suggest, “Rather than seeing theory as a lesson we must teach to the participants of today’s uprising, we might see it as something immanent within what they do,” adding that as an alternative to this orientation toward the Idea of Communism, “we might adopt a listening posture with regard to the world we live in.” (ibid) It is precisely this posture of listening that I am taking up as a utopian orientation: that is, a utopianism that is not driven by the particularities of an Idea, but rather practiced and refined as an exercise of political imagination in a period of transforming conditions of possibility.

Badiou's typology of riots is an attempt to imagine continuity in the movement of squares, whereas the historicity of the riot form in this period represents a more important line of inquiry explored in his text among many others in the last several years. While riots have proliferated in many different historical contexts, riots today are linked in a geo-imaginary of immanent catastrophe and uprising. Riots are localizations of this geo-imaginary of crisis. "The daily profusion of news, whether alarming or merely scandalous, shapes our conception of a generally unintelligible world," writes the Invisible Committee in their 2015 communique, *To Our Friends*. Of this general unintelligibility, they provide a portrait of the contemporary geo-imaginary – the world after the movement of squares:

Its chaotic look is the fog of war behind which it is rendered unassailable. Its ungovernable appearance helps to make it governable in reality. There is the ruse. By adopting crisis management as a technique of government, capital has not simply replaced the cult of progress with the blackmail of threatened catastrophe; it has arrogated the strategic intelligence of the present, the general assessment of the operations that are under way. This move must be countered. As far as strategy is concerned, it's a matter of getting two steps ahead of global governance. There's not a crisis that we would need to get out of, there's a war that we have to win. (*To Our Friends* 17-18)

The 'age of riots' emerges from this world of unintelligibility. The riot does not bring intelligibility to this world, but rather brings legibility to the unintelligibility of it.

Riots make perceptible what is otherwise diffuse and intangible – this state of war in contemporary capital. In cultivating a geo-imaginary of unintelligibility, this 'age of riots' reflects this as the basis for a critique of totality, as opposed to a postmodern embrace of chaos. The riot produces a double effect, in the sense that Jacques Ranciere describes political art in terms of the "readability of a political signification

and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification.” (Ranciere 59)

Instead of depoliticizing the riot form through a rhetoric of ‘irrationality,’ it seems critical to engage with the historicity of riots in different terms. Locating the historicity of the riot as a “form of struggle proper to an era of circulatory capital,” Joshua Clover argues that riots “will be an ascendant feature of hegemony unraveling, regarding which moral scolds, condescending strategists, and bourgeois opinion can have little to say.” (Clover, “World System Riot,” 13, 16) The generalization of riots in the end of 2014, mobilized by the murder of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, has fueled conservative and liberal reactionism, while also bringing continuity to already existent yet spatially dispersed antagonism against police. Riots have counteracted the post-racial imagination of the Obama administration with an expansive and rigorous critique of white supremacy. Writing in the midst of the riots in Ferguson, theorist R.L. argues that this critique extends to the question of black unity as “the essential basis of cohesion of the riots”:

How could one affirm the very thing that was also the basis of one’s domination? This very question has come to internally split the series of riots and demonstrations in Ferguson. The participants themselves have attempted to answer this question in a variety of ways, and are consequently heterogenous in both composition and perspective.  
(R.L.)

In refuting this cohesion of black unity, R.L. elaborates a different set of problems posed by the riot – demonstrating the extent to which denunciation of the riots is always already structured by black immiseration. While R.L. argues that “in the absence of a positive horizon, black youth are left to engage in a struggle based solely

on retribution,” it is precisely this absence which accounts for the momentum of the riots. Treating the riot instead as a spatial practice of territoriality and a form of “counter-circulation,” R.L. asks how the “circulation of resources and people that appropriates and subverts the circulation of capital [can] be drawn between the nodes of insurrectionary activity?”

Taking up these conceptions of the riot as re-territorialization and counter-circulation, it seems possible to develop a different set of problems concerning the riot as what many have described as a “flashing point” – what Erin Gray describes as a vantage from which to “historically illuminat[e] structural problems” existent throughout the United States. (Gray) I want to refine this in terms of utopian problematics. Arguing that territoriality “has increasingly come to play a major role in the determination of the shape and extension of struggles today,” R.L suggests that “we can perhaps attune our sensibilities to the way that struggles have come to address the problem of spatial composition,” as being structured by capital accumulation. (R.L.) Such an attunement requires a utopian orientation toward the problem of spatial composition. Out of these spatial conditions, the riot’s generalization can be understood in terms of the negation of circulation and the territorial logics of capital – as Phil A. Neel elaborates,

The rioters... can mesh into the residential surroundings much easier, and new centers of rioting are formed in areas by as few as four or five people setting something on fire or breaking some windows, after which others gather. The rioters are highly mobile and not dependent on public transportation, which can easily be surveilled, constricted and redirected in urban areas, hamstringing the ability of the riot to spread. (Neel)

While these dynamics of the riot's generalization articulate the dystopia of the present, they likewise express a critique of anti-utopianism, as resignation to the status quo of state violence. The resistance to anti-utopianism is the underpinning of what I want to pose as a utopian epistemology of contemporary struggles. Whereas the post-Occupy landscape has been plagued by nihilism in anti-capitalist milieu, this resistance to the logic of anti-utopia offers the contradictory basis from which to elaborate a conception of 'utopia' in terms of critical negation and strategic antagonism. This is a conception of utopia premised on this collective visibilization of the present as dystopia.

## II: Centrality, Coherence, and Continuity in the Movement of Squares

In the uprisings of 2011, the cartography of the movement of squares emerged as a geo-imaginary linking regions of struggle. While consisting of many distinct contexts, this cartography brought together elements of a revolutionary imaginary, including the production of centrality. The proliferation of encampments and occupations across town squares, for many, reactivated a revolutionary imaginary of the world sixties – what David Harvey calls the “quest for centrality” in Lefebvre's post-68 turn to urban revolution. By now, as Harvey indicates, “the traditional centrality of the city has been destroyed. But there is an impulse towards and longing for its restoration which arises again and again to produce far-reaching political effects,” as in the central squares of Cairo, Madrid, Athens, Barcelona – to which Harvey includes Madison, Wisconsin and Zuccotti Park. (Harvey, *Rebel Cities* xvii)

These urban centers mark a defining feature of this political imagination, while the spatial strategy reflects an outmoded form of social organization. While observing this nostalgia for the traditional centrality of the city, Harvey makes the case for this spatial imaginary of centers, as part of what brings continuity to contemporary struggles across and against the uneven development of global capitalism.

These centers cannot hold – they are doomed to collapse in a world of vast decentralization. Centrality is imagined as a mode of both containment and spectacle. The idea of a ‘center’ performs an insularity for the sake of externalization. As a spatial practice, this production of centers is about the optics of social transformation. For many contemporary leftists, the occupation of town squares in 2011 marked a necessary transition, as Badiou describes, “from limited localization (assemblies, attacks and destructive acts on the very site of the rebels) to the construction of an enduring central site.” (Badiou 33) To what extent could such a site endure? What accounts for the endurance of centrality? The logical correspondence between “limited localization” and this objective of an “enduring central site” must not be taken for granted. What distinguishes the town square from a “limited localization”? Where does this logic of centrality lead?

What is often at stake in visions of town squares is precisely the spatial reproduction of a polis – a site of political legibility that is premised on the necessity of direct democracy. This is certainly the case for some of the dominant histories of Occupy Wall Street – as in David Graeber’s account of the movement:

It wasn’t because occupiers brought the politicians specific demands and proposals; instead, they’d created a crisis of legitimacy within the

entire system by providing a glimpse of what real democracy might be like. (Graeber, *The Democracy Project* 5)

The purpose of these centralized sites of town squares and parks, in this sense, is to collectively practice direct democracy as an alternative to representative democracy. In Graeber's account, Zuccotti Park is taken up as a model for such centralized sites across the United States – conceived as one of the many epicenters of the movement of squares as a globalized phenomenon.

While functioning on a performative level, resonating with previous revolutionary paradigms, these centers are not counter-logistical, in the sense of a “logistics against logistics,” as Jasper Bernes describes:

Alongside the predictive models of finance, which aim to represent and control the chaotic fluctuations of the credit system and money, logistics... manages the complex flows of the commodity system through structures of representation. We might imagine [a counter-logistics] which employs the conceptual and technical equipment of the industry in order to identify and exploit [logistics]. (Bernes “Logistics, Counterlogistics and the Communist Prospect” 46)

What these centers articulate most of all is the need to further develop a counterlogistical spatial imagination from which to generate strategies – a way to counteract “capital's own project of cognitive mapping.” (ibid) Although the squares have been important sites for visibility, mass organization, and historical continuity, these visions of direct democracy do not counteract the logistics of finance capitalism, but rather resort to a nostalgia for the traditional city center.

Taking Zuccotti Park as the model for such centrality, Graeber problematically offers direct democracy as a *solution* for contemporary struggles. The nostalgia for city centers at work in such occupations makes visible the absence of a

‘public,’ while being nevertheless staged as a reclamation of public space. In the case of Zuccotti, this was epitomized by the fact that the park was privately owned. What this nostalgia illustrates is the need to develop counterlogistical strategies against the centrality of finance. Rather than a template for other occupations across the United States, the Zuccotti Park occupation could have developed a more site-specific set of counterlogistics. As a financial center, New York is an emergent urban formation of contemporary capitalism which Saskia Sassen describes as a ‘global city’ – playing “a strategic role in the new form of accumulation based on finance and on the globalization of manufacturing,” based on the emergence of a “whole new arrangement... for accumulation around the centrality of finance in economic growth.” (Sassen, *The Global City* 338)

### III: Fixity and Unsustainability in Occupations and Encampments

Occupations and encampments are designed in terms of spatial fixity, but not imagined in terms of temporal unsustainability. This gap between expectation and actuality accounts for periods of melancholia and atomization that follow the dissolution of such formations. Whereas such accounts tend to pronounce impossibility, they fail to engage with the actually existing conditions of possibility for such spatial practices.

As a result of the limited imagination for the production of centrality in social movements, the town square and park occupations have featured a certain dialectic between expectations and inevitabilities, or between possibility and actuality. The construction of central sites provides the state with a contained terrain for its war



zone. To localize a struggle in this way is to also submit to its control – the conditions of possibility for this localizability are determined entirely by state power. In this sense, these centers are politically galvanizing in bringing visibility to their impossibility, while being necessarily unsustainable for this purpose. To imagine these sites – or to experience their loss – in terms of failed sustainability is in this sense a tremendous mistake.

In their false interiority, these centers feature a set of distinct characteristics.

As Endnotes describes:

As the occupations unfolded, occupiers' own activity became the main topic of debate. What should they do to defend the squares against the police? How could they extend the movement into new areas? The popularity of such discussions, even outside of the occupations themselves, suggested that a growing portion of the population now recognised that the state was powerless to resolve the crisis. At the same time, no one had any clue what to do with this knowledge. The occupations became spectacles. The occupiers were spectators of their own activity, waiting to find out what their purpose had been all along. ("The Holding Pattern" 3)

To such an extent, the occupations have an epistemological function more than a practical one. Strategies of centrality and containment result in pressurized environments, structured by this break between knowledge and what to do with it.

#### IV: Blockades as Counter-Logistics

Blockades and barricades illuminate the flows of capital – what is otherwise a vast, placeless place, both everywhere and nowhere, the utopia of financial capital. These are breaks from the invisibilization of circulation. When more than twenty thousand people blockaded the port of Oakland on November 2, 2011, this was not an

act of solidarity with the ILWU – rather, as the Bay of Rage collective argues, “They did it because they hate the present-day economy, because they hate capitalism, and because the ports are one of the most obvious linkages in the web of misery in which we are all caught.” (“Blockading the Port”) Identifying blockades and other acts of sabotage as the “highlights of the Occupy movement in the Bay Area,” they conclude, “Let’s recognize this antagonism for what it is, and not dress it up in the costumes of ideologies of a bygone world.” While conjuring a set of historical resonances with maritime trade and war strategies, the ‘blockade’ insists upon a different historical orientation toward the contemporary period – demonstrating not only this twilight of unions, but also bringing into the present what Allan Sekula and Noel Burch describe as the “forgotten world” of the sea, as a crucial space of globalization that is nevertheless invisibilized by the fantasy world of financial capitalism.

In a period of advanced globalization, structured by this geo-imaginary of financial capitalism, “the very concept of distance is abolished,” as Sekula and Burch describe:

More than 90% of the world’s cargo moves by sea, and yet educated people in the developed world believe that material goods travel as they do, by air, and that money, traveling in the blink of an eye, is the abstract source of all wealth. [And yet] the sea remains the crucial space of globalization. Nowhere else is the disorientation, violence, and alienation of contemporary capitalism more manifest, but this truth is not self-evident, and must be approached as a puzzle, or mystery, a problem to be solved. (Sekula and Burch)

The fantasy of contemporary capitalism is the peripheralization of the ocean, whereas acts of sabotage like the port blockades demonstrate the extent to which the ocean remains integral to circulation. Sekula and Burch elaborate a geo-imaginary of

amnesia and invisibilization for which port shutdowns are sites of contestation: “the cargo containers are everywhere, mobile and anonymous: ‘coffins of remote labour-power,’ carrying goods manufactured by invisible workers on the other side of the globe.” (ibid)

Beyond the immediate purpose of sabotage, these port shutdowns have helped to forge a geo-imaginary of anti-capitalist struggle, bringing legibility to the blockade systemically, in relation to the instrumental invisibility of processes of circulation. The blockade can be understood in terms of an aesthetics of legibility, for which the processes of capitalist circulation are made perceptible through an aesthetics of saturation. The blockade is a point of saturation – conjuring experiences “of suffusion and density – of saturation and stasis – that unfold as decline,” as Marija Cetinic describes of an aesthetics of terminal crisis and contradiction in late capitalism. (Cetinic) The blockade, in this sense, responds to the problem of how to “think a rupture of that immobilization of our imaginative capacity,” as Cetinic elaborates, that “insists upon a material intervention, an attention to the thread of fabric and its forms of binding.” (ibid) As a temporary closure, the blockade “does not indicate that we are closed to the imagining of any other possible alternative... but precisely that closure is itself an alternative.” (ibid) Through the production of closure, Cetinic locates a political possibility in what she articulates as an aesthetics of saturation, “[indexing] a kind of sabotage, a threat posed by the halting of movement.” The aesthetic formalization of density, blockage, and immobility de-habituate the

experiences of terminal crisis and contradiction – what Fernand Braudel describes as “signs of autumn,” in the era of financialization.

As a site of possibility, the blockade brings out contradictions. In the sentencing hearing of the Santa Cruz HWY 6 – who created a blockade with metal pipes and concrete trash cans across the fishhook merging highways 1 and 17 for more than four hours on March 3, 2015 – featured a testimony from a local business owner, complaining of lost profits. When asked by a defense attorney whether he had lost profits from accidents or tourist traffic on the 17 – a two-lane highway prone to frequent bottlenecking – the business owner remained insistent that “this time was different.” And this is fundamentally true. As opposed to multiple fatalities, or a booming weekend for local businesses, this traffic jam had a political message attached to it – “a refusal to get out of the way for the inexorable logic of capitalism,” as Cetinic articulates. (ibid) The ideological contours of “this time was different” stimulate both a reactionary tendency – a mode by which to rationalize highway aggression, as well as profit-driven logics – and a radical possibility for reflexivity and critique.

Beyond the immediacy of the blockade as a tactic of sabotage, it seems crucial to think through these aesthetic and political dimensions of the blockade as a site of utopian imagination – both in terms of posturing alternate possibilities, and in terms of negating existing actualities. While it would “simply be idealistic revisionism to impart a much more radical reading of Occupy potential” in the proliferation of blockades, as Alden Wood suggests, it is still possible to take from Occupy’s demise:

...the fragmentary remains of certain tactics in their stillborn form... While they failed to become extensively generalized both within the moment and the immediate aftermath of Occupy (hence aborting their ability to become communizing measures), the tactics... possess a certain dormant potentiality. (Wood)

It is out of the post-Occupy context that the blockade would reach a greater peak of generalization with the waves of anti-police brutality protests. The Black Lives Matter movement extended experimentation with this tactic to the highways.

All the while, this tactic is often theorized as a means without an end. What emerges from the blockade as such a site of radical experimentation is the limit point of imaginability. When mistaken for something other than a tactic, the blockade gesture precisely toward the blockage of an unthinkable future. How can this articulation of unimaginability be made useful on a broader, epistemological level? Beyond the level of tactics – a domain that often unravels in blueprints and blueprintist thinking – what does this encounter with the limit point of anti-capitalist imaginability offer to contemporary struggles? These are questions that will have to be pursued with nuanced thinking about the status of utopian imagination in the present – a mode of thinking that rejects, quite extensively, the hegemony of anti-utopianism in the present.

#### V: Collective Living

In a time of increasing precarity, debt, and contingent labor, collective living situations have become a matter of necessity for many, far more than a matter of political engagement or personal choice. Moving beyond the reproduction of

collective domesticity, and toward a practice of communality and mutual aid is part of a long process of politicizing such living situations as counterinstitutional projects.

Yet counterinstitutional projects are often reliant upon – and derailed by – the need to establish a physical space through the logics of property.

Already existing collective living situations have the possibility of un-imagining the distinction between household and school – between domestic and pedagogic space. In post-industrial contexts, such situations are otherwise dominated by the non-distinction between home and work, as the household increasingly becomes the space of immaterial labor. The point of such a process is not to design new forms of communality, but to politicize already existing formations. Whereas the practice of squatting places great emphasis on the securing and protecting of spaces, it seems likewise possible to cultivate squatting as a radical pedagogical spatial practice.

Collective living must be reconceived, in other words, through the production of dialogic space. Dialogic space is imperative to this pedagogical imagining of the household – what could be elaborated here through Paulo Freire, who writes:

Critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation. The content of that dialogue can and should vary in accordance with historical conditions and the level at which the oppressed perceive reality. But to substitute monologue, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication. Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflexive participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated. (Freire 65)

While collective living situations have different material conditions, they share this possibility to integrate a pedagogical practice into everyday life, precisely through the production of dialogic space.

First and foremost, to engage with the domestic as a site of pedagogical practice is to acknowledge the ways in which household labor has been historically gendered. Beyond the recognition of the history of patriarchy, this involves the consistent development of anti-patriarchal domestic practices, which seek to undermine and counteract the ways in which labor is invisibilized by the household. These trappings are discussed in my first chapter, in its exploration of the sexual division of labor in the rural hip communes, while they continue to plague contemporary struggles in the attempt to transpose the political project of social movements onto the everyday spaces of domestic life.

As a response to precaritization, ranging from labor conditions of unemployment to contingent employment, and living conditions of gentrification, collective living may be interpreted as a form of ‘disaster community.’ In their elaboration of Rebecca Solnit’s term, the radical collective *Out of the Woods* provides a useful framework for thinking about the political possibilities of such social formations: “Importantly, disaster communities are not intentional communities, drop-out communes, or activist temporary autonomous zones. They’re self-organized, non-market, non-statist social reproduction under adverse conditions.” (“Disaster Communism”) While demonstrating the ways in which such communities are both politicizing and re-socializing, the collective argues that “no amount of

disaster communities will lead to revolution. Revolution would only happen when the self-organized social reproduction of disaster communities came into conflict with existing property relations, the state, and so on, and overcomes these limits.” (ibid) To conceive of disaster communities as revolutionary would be a mistake, as they suggest, stating that “No widespread movement will become revolutionary without a qualitative shift from an ameliorative to a transformative horizon.” And yet, it would also be a mistake to therefore discount such communities as counter-revolutionary – as “part of that which is to be abolished,” as Endnotes describes of any “social form implicated in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation” (“What are we to do?”) As Endnotes writes, “communization does not signify some general positive process of ‘sharing’ or ‘making common’. It signifies the specific revolutionary undoing of the relations or property constitutive of the capitalist class relation.” (ibid) Rather, Out of the Woods suggests that disaster communities “offer a glimpse of what non-capitalist social reproduction can look like under abnormal conditions.” (“Disaster Communism”) Structured by totality nonetheless, it would be “impossible to account for disaster communities degenerating back into capitalist [logics] if they hadn’t at some point operated on at least a partly different logic to that of value and capital accumulation.” (ibid) As they contend, “the mistake Endnotes make is to take the totalizing tendencies of capitalism for an already-totalized capitalism.” (ibid)

In this intervention to the discourse of the communist measures of such formations, what is critical is the conception of utopia put forth by Out of the Woods – distinguishing, in Blochian terms, between the abstract and concrete. In “showing



how present-at-hand technologies, knowledges, and infrastructure can be rapidly repurposed to meet human needs” against the forces of their recuperation into capitalist logics, the authors suggest:

We could go further still, and insist on the need to rediscover a concrete utopianism. Increasingly, it is capital which relies on abstract utopia – for instance building new ‘clean’ coal power plants with vast empty halls for carbon capture technology that doesn’t exist. By contrast, a concrete utopianism looks to the already-present possibilities which are frustrated by the prevailing social relations. (ibid)

While such communities have been criticized for their interpretation as revolutionary formations, it seems all the while critical to think through the utopian function of these communities in concrete terms. The alternative is debilitating. The alternative is ‘no alternative.’ In approaching the concept of a disaster community not as a revolutionary strategy, but rather as having the utopian function of politicizing the everyday – as a site of ‘disaster’ in contemporary capitalism – it seems possible to make such formations useful to the project of communization, which requires collective imagining. “In this way the question is not ‘to take it over or to abandon it?’ considered as a whole,” as the authors continue, “but how to pull it apart and repurpose its components to new ends: an ecological satisfaction of human needs and not the endless valorization of capital.” (ibid) While it is obvious, as they insist, that warehouses and ships could be put to other uses, we must approach such problems not paralyzed by totality but attuned to conditions of repurposing.

At stake in the repurposing of collective living situations is the idea of cultural revolution. Rather than critique such formations in terms of their function as

revolutionary strategy – that is, whether they are or are not sites within the logics of capitalist totality – it would be helpful to approach communization as likewise a problem of cultural revolution. This is precisely the problem, as Barbara Epstein writes, of how to transform “[not just] economic or political structures but [the] ideas that govern social life as a whole.” (Epstein 21) Rather than a revolutionary strategy, collective living offers a site of possibility and experimentation to political acculturation.

## VI: Communization and Spatial Imagination

“The outside about which I have spoken is not to be understood mechanistically in the spatial sense but, on the contrary, as the qualitative difference which overcomes the existing antitheses inside the antagonistic partial whole... and which is not reducible to these antitheses... the force of negation is concentrated in no one class. Politically and morally, rationally and instinctively, it is a chaotic, anarchistic opposition: the refusal to join and play a part, the disgust at all prosperity, the compulsion to resist. It is a feeble, unorganized opposition which nonetheless rests on motives and purposes which stand in irreconcilable contradiction to the existing whole.” -- Herbert Marcuse, “The Concept of Negation in the Dialectic”

“We would have nothing to object to the concept of transition if it simply stated the obvious,” Troploin writes, “communism will not be achieved in a flash. Yet the concept implies a lot more, and something totally different: not simply a transitory moment, but a full-fledged transitory society.” At stake in this distinction is the temporal status of communism in the spatial imagination of communization. As Troploin suggests, communization is a process, which “will take time to be completed, but it will start at the beginning of the revolution, which will not create the preconditions of communism: it will create communism.” Communization is often defined in terms of the temporality of revolution – as *Theorie Communiste*

contends, “revolution is communism; it does not have communism as a project and result, but as its very content.” They continue that “it is the mere becoming of this theory that allows it to be, more and more, the critical theory of ever more theorizing struggles.” ‘Transition’ imposes a spatio-temporal problematic of how to make communization – as a process – thinkable and imaginable in the present, such that the present becomes actionable and charged with the futurity of communist possibility. “From the commune to ‘commoning’, from cyber-activism to new ‘forms-of-life’,” as Benjamin Noys explains, a dominant position on the process of communization is that “we can’t make any transition into communism but must live it as a reality now to ensure its eventual victory.” (Noys, “The Fabric of Struggles”) The other dominant tendency critiques this prefigurative orientation toward communism, such that “communization implies the immediacy of communism in the process of revolution.” These tendencies in communization theory are caught as a standstill between dynamics of imaginability and unimaginability in a shared critique of totality.

To this problem of transition, the category of utopia seems most useful, not as a principle of hope, but as a device of negation. In approaching communization as a utopian problematic, in other words, a process of negative prefiguration can be further elaborated and conceived. To imagine requires unimagining. The basis of this question is not a voluntarism, but a strategic antagonism in contemporary struggles. On a strategic level, however, how is this antagonism to be spatially conceived? What is the geography of communization?

For Tropolin, the process of communization includes the “revitalization of old community forms, when by resurrecting them people get more than what they used to get from these forms in the past.” Arguing that to revive “former collective customs will help the communization process by transforming these customs,” they mobilize a certain spatial imagination of the expansion of communes. “An insurrectional surge may be nothing more than a multiplication of communes,” the Invisible Committee writes, “As events unfold, communes will either merge into larger entities or fragment.” (*The Coming Insurrection* 15) The expansion of communes is conceived as part of a process of decentralization, as IC describes: “Communes must be extended while making sure they do not exceed a certain size, beyond which they lose touch with themselves and give rise, almost without fail, to a dominant caste,” at which point it would be “preferable for the commune to split up and to spread in that way, avoiding such an unfortunate outcome.” (ibid) The expansion of communes is imagined as a decentralizing process, through the logic of territorialism. This expansion depends on the securing of physical spaces, as active territories that produce a counter-logistical cartography with which to resist the totality of capitalist infrastructure.

Rather than as a process of decentralized expansionism, communization could be conceived instead as the production of social space, unbound to the logic of territory. *Theorie Communiste* writes of dissemination as a communizing measure that could be distinguished from the territorial logics of the expansion of communes. “The dissemination of the concept of communization will be the unification of more

and more self-critical struggles and of theoretical production in a formal sense,” TC argues, specifying that dissemination “will make polemics possible [and allow] the emergence in struggles of a possible expression of the perspective of overcoming which will not be, as is often the case now, something implicit to be deciphered.” (“The Present Moment”) As opposed to a utopian hermeneutic by which to unlock the code of a communist horizon, this notion of dissemination could be elaborated in a variety of spatial practices. However, in TC’s conception, this process is limited to “writing, journals, [and] meetings.” While providing an important intervention to territorialism, this notion of dissemination captures the limits of the spatial imagination of communization. If the basis of communization, as declared by the authors of *Call*, is that “communism is possible at every moment,” how can it then be made imaginable?

The “communizing current” is one way in which dissemination has been further elaborated. “The development of the concept,” as Bernard Lyon writes, “that the communizing current undertakes permanently, is also the development of a network of small groups and individualities.” (Lyon) Rather than homogenizing, this current incorporates differences of opinion and becomes continually re-theorized – “The theory of communization,” he explains, “produces the water in which it swims.” TC writes of the ‘cycle of struggles,’ which provides “the link between the daily course of class struggle and revolution,” as Roland Simon describes. Simon elaborates this process as one of “inner contradictions of the capitalist accumulation process”:

The daily course of class struggle is a movement which, against capital, calls for its overcoming, because if it becomes up against its own limits it is because capital subsumes contradiction in its own cycle, it is its own dynamic. (Simon)

As Simon argues, this is not immediacy but instantaneity – not something which can be willed into existence but which must arise from historical conditions. These conditions reflect the “communizing current” as a means of theoretical dissemination and accelerated antagonism. The “current,” in this sense, offers a critique of both voluntarism and programmatism, while nevertheless articulating a utopian orientation toward communist possibility.

The geography of communization, as Danny Marcus argues, must be understood in terms of oscillation. Rather than a fixed set of spatial models, communization requires attention to the spatio-temporalities of revolutionary processes. It is precisely through negative prefiguration that we engage the spatial poetics of communization, as an object of the imagination and an active possibility in the present. What remains more imaginable, as TC elaborate, is destruction:

... this means the workers attacking the banks which hold their accounts and those of other workers, thus making it necessary to manage without; this means the workers communicating their ‘products’ to themselves and the community directly and without market; this means the homeless occupying homes, thus ‘obliging’ construction workers to produce freely, the construction workers taking from the shops at liberty, obliging the whole class to organize to seek food in the sectors to be collectivized. (“The Present Moment”)

Yet what is at stake in this vision of destruction is the status of utopia in the contemporary period. The tendency toward apocalypticism and the longing for “end

times” is itself produced out of the anti-utopian ideological conditions of the present moment.

## VII: Utopia and Destruction

What we find throughout the contemporary period, in the attempt to recover a utopian imaginary of the present, are destructive impulses that must in themselves be interrogated as part of the colonial impulse of ‘utopia’ as an object of thought. The tabula rosa fantasies of contemporary communization theory indicates some of the ways in which ‘utopia’ remains under-theorized. A critical utopianism must be cultivated, which counteracts these dominant trappings of utopian imagination – the desire for a ‘new Eden,’ for instance, points to the absorbed logics of colonialism, which remain inherent to utopian longing without the counteraction of immanent critique.

The post-60s generated an ethos of accelerationism, which has had several phases, including a most recent resurgence since the 2007-2008 financial crisis. “The very point of accelerationism is going too far, and the revelling and enjoyment engendered by this immersion and excess,” as Benjamin Noys explains, adding that accelerationism pushes “into the domain of abstraction and speculation which, with the financial crisis, is evidently the space of our existence.” (Noys, *Malign Velocities* 16) In this sense, accelerationism is the logical counterpart to “no alternative,” in the sense that there is no alternative to capitalism but total destruction.

Transition remains a lacuna of this discourse – that which cannot be theorized, or, what inevitably divides otherwise cohesive elements of contemporary anti-capitalism. At stake in this is the relation between utopia and revolution, which is so often and problematically conceived in a binary logic. The question is not utopia or revolution, but rather, how to make use of utopian problematics and critical interventions to the tradition of utopian imagination in the revolutionary possibilities of the present period of post-financial crisis dystopianism.

## Conclusion

### ‘Utopia’ After Occupy

“Why do they need to preserve the privileged permission White supremacy gives them to return to a ‘meadow’? Why are we so happy about the Meadow? There are no meadows in the mind of the oppressed. There are only slums, factories, forced-labor fields, border detention facilities, Guantánamos, Abu Ghraib, cops, devastated streets and jails. Meadows?...

I HATE MEADOWS.

NO GEO-SOCIAL JUSTICE NO WHITE MEADOWS!” – “Confessions on Crosstalk, Color, Composition: A Berkeley Conference”

“In my mind I feel the soft darkness of a spring night. It is May 1871, and I see the red reflection of flames. It is Paris afire. That fire is a dawn, and I see it still as I sit here writing. Memory crowds in on me, and I keep forgetting that I am writing my memoirs.” – Louise Michel, “Life During the Commune”

The birth of Occupy Wall Street in Zuccotti Park is a minor event in this cultural history. While Zuccotti Park will mark the origin for many historical accounts of the social movement to come, the occupations of university anti-privatization movements in 2009-2010 will likely remain ignored by the populist



narrative of OWS. Soon after the Manhattan encampment began on September 17, 2011, a populist history of ‘Occupy’ began to congeal – as in an early October article by Joe Lowndes and Dorian Warren, who write that the movement’s “surprising initial success owes much to a novel expression of what we might call an open-source populism.” They continue:

OWS and its slogan “we are the 99 percent” have antecedents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when populists framed their struggle as one of the common people against a tiny moneyed elite. Such dreams of unity always elide real differences both demographic and political. Yet in this case the economic crisis has had such far-reaching effects, and the culprits are so clear, that the fantasy of unity is understandable and credible. Indeed, what could better affirm its broad, hegemonic quality than the endorsements of Russell Simmons, Slavoj Zizek, and Suze Orman?... While OWS draws a lot of its style from the New Left, substantively it resembles movements from the 1930s or the 1890s more than the 1960s. (Lowndes and Dorian)

In positioning OWS within this genealogy of populist movements, Lowndes and Dorian also articulate a critical distancing from the countercultural history of the 1960s. More importantly, however, this populist rendering of OWS occludes the cultural impact of the university anti-privatization movements, which generalized the occupation as a tactic throughout the United States in 2009-2010.

While certainly, OWS mobilized the rhetoric and the optics of populism, such histories of the movement – though often characterized by reformism – are overly reliant upon this narrative of spontaneous materialization in Zuccotti Park. These mythical renderings of OWS are products of the movement’s cultural conception of populism, which fail to reckon with the anti-privatization movement and the international network of student radicals which grew alongside European and South

American anti-austerity movements following the global financial crisis. “In some sense the series of transfigurations between the antagonistic call of 2009 and the variegated response of 2011 is entirely understandable via a clear-headed account of what populism is, and how it must always turn away from any hint of nihilism, much less political-economic eschatology,” as Joshua Clover writes of the connection between the university occupations and OWS, “But I think these concepts around ‘the future,’ or more accurately about the possibilities that retain actuality within the present situation, are significant.” (Clover, “The Coming Occupation” 98) Within the framework of my particular project, at stake in “the future” is more precisely a reassertion – and a reinvention – of ‘utopia’ in the spatio-temporal imagination of Occupy. It is out of the rejection of political-economic eschatology – a refusal to fully engage with conditions of crisis as such – that the utopian problematics evaporate from the populist account as well. The problem, however, is the misconception of utopia as precisely a symptom of this populist allergy to nihilism. To the contrary, this period of antagonism and anti-capitalist energies insists upon a different conception of utopia as a mode of critical negation.



Figure 20 – Oakland Commune 1

In contrast with this populist narrative of Zuccotti Park, the Oakland Commune represents a distinct epicenter of contemporary anti-capitalist antagonism. What took place in Oakland during the explosive months of Occupy Wall Street was the result of a convergence of elements from the university anti-privatization movements and the growing anti-police movement that came to a head in 2009, with the assassination of Oscar Grant. On May 16, 2012, the Oakland Commune published the following critique of OWS, in an attempt to re-narrate developments in the social movement:

Vague populist slogans about the 99%, savvy use of social networking, shady figures running around in Guy Fawkes masks, none of this played any kind of significant role in bringing us to the forefront of the Occupy movement. In the rebel town of Oakland, we built a camp that was not so much the emergence of a new social movement, but the unprecedented convergence of preexisting local movements and antagonistic tendencies all looking for a fight with capital and the state

while learning to take care of each other and our city in the most radical ways possible. (“Occupy Oakland is Dead”)

At stake in the populist imaginary of OWS, the authors suggest, is the imposition of “white liberal politics [from afar] on a diverse population already living under brutal police occupation.” (ibid) In spite of the lineages generated by this populist imaginary, and “regardless of Occupy Wall Street’s shortcomings and the reformist tendencies that latched on to the movement of the 99%,” the authors argue, “the fact that some kind of open revolt was rapidly spreading like a virus across the rest of the country is what gave us the political space in Oakland to realize our rebel dreams.” (ibid)

Following numerous evictions and arrests in the winter of 2012, the ‘Oakland Commune’ was reinvented to comprise many spatialities. ranging from the actual space of Oscar Grant Plaza – the reclaimed Frank H. Ogawa Plaza at 14<sup>th</sup> St. and Broadway -- to the possible spaces imagined as ‘days of action.’ In August 2013, a group calling themselves “Some Oakland Antagonists” produced what remains the most incisive account of the Oakland Commune:

The consistent process of eating, sleeping, and organizing with many others in a liberated zone at the heart of a struggling North American city had proved to be a challenge for which few were prepared. At times, the Commune was a veritable inferno—a place of fistfights, constant emergencies, injury, illness, miscommunication, and stress. At other moments, it offered a kind of freedom and beauty unlike anything else. There were times when each person seemed full of limitless creativity, compassion, and dedication, matched by hatred of capitalism and the state. We could see the experience changing people day by day, hour by hour, and we could feel it changing us. The camp was a place of joy, laughter, and care, almost psychedelic in the confusion it provided to the senses. But mostly, it was a place that

teetered on the edge of breakdown, a place in which none of the usual buffers and mediations that mask the daily violence of contemporary America were present. All the misogyny, homophobia, racism, and other poisonous dynamics that form the foundations of capitalist society rose to the surface in this liberated zone, challenging the Commune's ability to sustain itself. We were ill-prepared for the problems the camp raised, though people made heroic attempts to respond to each new emergency. ("The Rise and Fall of the Oakland Commune")

Many accounts of the Commune describe a process of resocialization that occurred in the camp. Every moment lived in the Commune was political. Every moment contained the possibility of conflict. "Call out" culture became increasingly prevalent, as communards continually worked through ideological conflicts. Radical theory was being practiced, worked through, and re-imagined on the level of everyday life.

The camp was not a utopia in the sense of a perfect space – or even a laboratory site outside of capital – so much as a contact zone for anti-capitalist antagonism. The camp was a site of containment, in which the possibility of life outside capitalism emerged through contradiction. The camp was not a utopia, but a locus of utopian practice – a social space produced out of critical negation. Besides providing the most convincing immanent critique amidst the decline of the Occupy movement, "The Rise and Fall of the Oakland Commune" gives a compelling analysis of the spatial form of the camp and the spatial practice of encampment.

The strength of "the camp form" was its ability to carve out material zones of political antagonism that were not organized around petitioning the authorities for concessions through symbolic demonstration but directly providing for our daily needs through the repurposing and reclamation of urban space. This was one of the most appealing aspects of the camp: it offered the opportunity to explore ways of relating and surviving together that did not rely on the usual mechanisms—money, the state, police, predefined social hierarchies

and categories—though the banishment of those things was always partial and provisional at best. This enabled the participants to bypass some of the more tedious ways in which activists develop political projects, equipping people to organize around their own survival, in their own cities, on the basis of their personal experience of oppression and need, rather than according to essentially moral objections to this or that injustice. In the context of this contagious form of revolt spreading through the communal liberation of space, the movement's rejection of the need to issue any specific demands to authorities made perfect sense. Occupy's power came from the proliferation and reproduction of these oppositional zones, not from its political sway. (ibid)

The material zones produced out of the camp form not only bring about the repurposing and reclamation of urban space – something akin to the occupation strategy of the universities – but carried out a utopian demand for the “communal liberation of space.” The camp therein articulates both the spatial and temporal registers of the two primary utopian functions – as Kathi Weeks writes, “to generate estrangement from the present” as well as “to provoke the desire for, imagination of, and movement toward a different future.” (Weeks 213)

Along with offering many insights into the early climate of the Occupy movement in Oakland, Louis-Georges Schwartz' November 2011 essay persuasively treats the Oakland Commune as an anachronistic dimension of the OWS phenomenon. Unlike Lowndes and Warren, Schwartz writes, “The current series of occupations can be traced to anti-austerity activism in California two years ago.” (Schwartz, “The Oakland Commune”) In a later account of OWS, Schwartz goes further in arguing that “The campout at Zuccotti Park largely co-opted these events for the sake of a ‘mass movement.’” (Schwartz, “0%”, Occupy and/or Evacuate) In

“The Rise and Fall of the Oakland Commune,” it is the continual re-imagining of the camp form which characterizes the particular trajectory of the Oakland movement:

Occupy Oakland became the Oakland Commune once it took the camp as the model for a project (barely realized) of reclamation, autonomy, and the disruption of capital on a much wider basis: neighborhood assemblies reclaiming abandoned buildings for their needs; social centers that could serve as hubs for organizing offensives and sustain all kinds of self-organization and care; occupations of schools and workplaces. These were the horizons that the Oakland Commune illuminated, in the positive sense, despite its limits. We believe it is likely that future struggles in the US will follow this trajectory in some way, using Occupy’s attempted offensives and space reclamations as the foundation upon which something much larger, more beautiful and more ferocious can begin to take shape. (“The Rise and Fall of the Oakland Commune”)

As “the model for a project (barely realized),” the Commune represents a site of radical experimentation that demands utopian imagination – a drive to negate and counteract the totalization of everyday life under capitalism. In Jasper Bernes’ account of the Oakland Commune, this is conceived as the encampment’s capacity to “perform a certain negative prefiguration.” As he elaborates,

The real value of these experiments lay not in developing tactics and methods which could be used in a future revolutionary situation but in making clear what the problems and challenges are. The camps, in this sense, manifest how little we know, how little we can do, how tremendously unprepared we would be for the opportunity to reconstruct social life. If there is a moment of positive prefiguration, it lies in the fact that the camps attest to the incredible practical ingenuity and enthusiasm which people bring to such situations. (Bernes “Square and Circle”)

In placing the camp “at the center of the narrative,” Bernes makes the case for a spatial analysis of Occupy as “not only or not just a protest movement... [but rather]

about the dispossessed and disenfranchised developing new ways of meeting their needs, of taking care of each other in a situation in which no one else will.”

As a struggle against the social conditions of global capitalism, Occupy is therein an active re-working of the spatial organization of social life. While drawing from the contemporary anarchist discourse of prefigurative politics, this notion of negative prefiguration posed by Bernes might also be taken up in a utopian framework – requiring a certain spatiotemporal dialectics that operates on these registers of negation and prefiguration at once. As the camp ceased to exist, the Commune became at once nowhere and everywhere – a discursive contact zone of anti-capitalist critique and post-capitalist imagining.



Figure 21 - Oakland Commune 2



‘Occupy’ becoming the ‘Commune’ marks an important transition in Oakland in many respects. The historical imaginary mobilized around this transition invokes the Paris Commune as a source of political and cultural energies. In her writings on the Paris Commune, Kristin Ross attributes an important degree of flexibility and porousness to “Commune” – which she takes up in Rimbaud’s poetry as “a number of linguistic practices – working-class slang, revolutionary discourse, caricature, invective.” (K. Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space* 136) In Ross’s conception, the spatial imaginary of the Paris Commune encompasses such linguistic production, beginning with the abundance of textual production. Of the term “Commune,” Ross writes that “As with all slogans, affectivity destabilizes semantic content,” continuing:

...what is transmitted is not a precise meaning but rather the desires that mobilized a particular situation, and that have survived, in compressed or frozen, lapidary form, only to be reawakened and reanimated decades later. (150)

The Oakland Commune performs such a reanimation of the Paris Commune, precisely in the enactment of social space that exceeds the material space of the encampment. In this sense, the ‘commune’ is an inclusive framework that continues to negotiate the various spatialities of the Occupy movement – specifically, between the physical sites of occupations and blockades, and the digital and textual spaces of radical milieu.

Such a history of the cultural moment of Occupy – oriented toward the residual utopian energies of the long 2011 – seems possible with a radical shift out of the populist imagination of OWS. However, what the Oakland Commune shares with

the populist vision of OWS is a particular historical amnesia – a forgetting of the post-60s, which is itself symptomatized by the invocation of the Paris Commune.

The role of poetry and poet-activists in Oakland is particularly significant to this historical invocation of the Paris Commune, while also articulating a rupture from the 1960s counterculture as an element of the historical imagination of the Bay Area Occupy movements. As in Ross’s account of social space in the Paris Commune, the situation in Oakland requires certain conceptions of poetry and poetic practice to be challenged. Oakland poet David Buuck explains that “shortly after the establishment of the Occupy Oakland camp in October 2011, several Bay Area poets started the Occupy Oakland Poets affinity group,” and that several poets also organized “the Raheim Brown Library and Free School, the Oscar Grant Plaza Gazette, and a weekly ‘Poetry for the People’ open-mic at Oscar Grant Plaza.”

(Buuck) However, as Buuck recalls,

The call went out for poets to come and read ‘work from the radical poetry tradition’ (i.e., it’s not a talent show but a way of connecting our moment with historical struggles and poetic traditions). However salutary the call (and subsequent readings themselves), it did make me begin to ask where *our* radical tradition is? What does it mean that when we hear the words ‘radical poetic tradition,’ we can only think of poets from several decades ago...? As wonderful as it is to hear someone read Ginsberg’s *Howl* or DiPrima’s *Revolutionary Letters* in the plaza, are these the poems that most fit our times, our predicaments, our questions? (ibid)

Both *Howl* and *Revolutionary Letters* represent an attempt to construct coherence and continuity with the countercultural energies of the long American 1960s, articulating a certain limit in the historical imagination that Buuck locates in the Occupy movement’s relation to the Oakland milieu of radical poets. As Buuck suggests, the

role of poet-activists as crucial actors in the Occupy Oakland movement must be distinguished from the role of poetry, as a vehicle for this countercultural imaginary of a return to the 1960s. This countercultural imaginary expresses a constraint to the historicity of the Oakland context – a constraint that compels this invocation of Paris in 1871, as the desire to occlude the inheritance of another ‘radical tradition.’

During the anti-privatization movements of universities in 2009-2010 and the encampments of 2011, the popular imagination of the 1960s counterculture was romantically conjured by liberal activists, adding to this particular conflation between anti-utopianism and the rejection of the post-60s recuperation of the counterculture. In its initial weeks, Occupy Santa Cruz drew in local jam sessions and young democrats, rhetorics of non-violence and ethical consumerism, baby boomers with stories about communes, as well as hacktivist libertarians, green anarchists, and university Marxists. Once the park encampment became a homeless tent city, the heterogeneities of this ‘99%’ became even more apparent. The countercultural ‘utopianism’ of the 1960s was entangled with the rejection of liberalism that brought continuity to the anti-capitalist milieu in this period. And yet, the historical residues of the 1960s had to be ignored, marginalized, silenced. There was no time for reflexivity.

The long 2011 represents a point of disjuncture from the post-60s paradigm of neoliberalization and the political foreclosure of anti-capitalist possibilities, in which the idea of communism becomes increasingly conceptualized through elements of a utopian orientation toward capitalist crisis. Communism, as Jameson argues, “can

only be posited as a radical, even unimaginable break... Communism is that unimaginable fulfillment of a radical alternative that cannot even be dreamt.” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 13) Against the dominant tendencies of recuperation that describe the status of utopia in the post-60s, my project takes up the category of utopia as a problematic of the conditions of imaginability for anti-capitalist thought. Rather than locate in the Occupy movement a testament of this utopian impulse, I want to instead suggest that the encampments of 2011-2012 articulate a certain insufficiency in utopian imagination – an epistemological limit in contemporary struggles, which is nevertheless engaged as an active contradiction. This insufficiency is precisely the positivism of what Sasha X describes as an “at first [amusing] and novel form of utopianism” – a “march of the ants out of their anthills out to an empty square, demanding everything from nobody.” As they continue,

There was a skirmish or two, and thanks to the combined “powers” of the now redundant (i.e., incredibly boring) sphere of corporate media and the increasingly banal world of the Internet, a fleeting image of possibility passed across the screen of consciousness. Once it passed, the situation again became a matter of time, a time that we no longer possess, but has, in the world’s last autumn, returned to possess us once and for all. What we rose to occupy had already occupied us: the thousands of tents reflecting not a poverty of vision, but an unconscious admission: The World Is Ending: Bring Tent. (X)

‘Utopianism,’ to such an extent, signals this poverty of the imagination – for which the utopian impulse must be reconstructed in terms of what Jameson describes as the “power of the negative” in the post-Occupy period.

The notion of a post-Occupy period might itself be contested or modified, to account for a range of tendencies that describe the dissolution of OWS as a decisive

juncture in contemporary anti-capitalism. This period has been conceived as a nihilist turn, which the Research and Destroy collective critiques as a form of contemporary Bartlebyism:

Most of the theoretical expressions that emerge from this confused condition share a fundamental misidentification of effects as causes. Identifying the source of their unhappiness in their own naïve optimism and commitment, their investment in some political project or process, they reason that, in order to spare themselves future suffering, they must cease to hope, to commit, to desire, they must treat each new event as dead from the start. They conclude not only that disaffection and pessimism will cause us to suffer less in the face of the failure of struggles, but that optimism, earnest commitment, investment, are the source of these failures. In other words, they reason that the reason we lose is because we keep trying, despite the fact that it is obviously the other way around. (“HIC NIHIL, HIC SALTA!”)

At stake in this critique is the prevailing anti-utopianism of this period, for which nihilism emerges as a predominant ideology premised on a presupposition of impossibility and the inevitability of failure. Through the course of this cultural history of utopia, I have discussed these modes of anti-utopian thought as symptomatic of the more general political foreclosures of the post-60s. While the political stakes of the ‘post-60s’ have changed with the revolutionary energies of the last eight years, these problematics of utopian imagination remain crucial to the contemporary period, as a cultural terrain of anti-capitalist longing, melancholia, confusion, and conflict. The problem illuminated in this critique of nihilism deploys the rhetorics of anti-utopianism as a case against the naivety and optimism that nevertheless structures this turn – it is a nihilism for which the pre-condition is precisely an uncritical utopianism.



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