

UTOPIA OR BUST: CAPITALOCENE, ANTIUTOPIA (2019, 13,350 words)^{1/}

Note 2020: This article was a major part of my keynote speech at the Utopian Studies Society (Europe) annual meeting in Prato 2019. It was published in Utopian Studies 32.1 (2021) after a long and excruciating series of discussions with the editor, in a final form that I'm not responsible for.

As a classical philologist... I do not know what meaning classical philology would have for our age if not to have an untimely effect within philology, that is, to act against the age and so have an effect on the age to the advantage, it is to be hoped, of a coming age. ... But then let this explanation, which I offer with some doubt to be sure, be replaced by better explanations....

Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*

PART 1: WHERE ARE WE IN TODAY'S CAPITALOCENE

Take heed therefore how ye walk circumspectly, not as unwise but as wise,

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Paul of Tarsus, *Ephesians* 5.15-16

In the introduction to the 2015 reprint of her classical *Partial Visions*, Angelika Bammer cites the pithy injunction of the American poet and feminist thinker, Adrienne Rich:

We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth [...] the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and *alter human existence* [...]. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meaning; thinking itself will be transformed. (Bammer xx – emphasis added by AB)

Bammer goes on a bit later to cite Rich's early and thus optimistic "[W]e stream into the unfinished the unbegun the possible." To these two quotes I can only add "every male" plus whatever other inter-genders you care to add.

Based on sustaining, consoling, and radically altering the present dire state of human existence, I am led to two sets of quite initial arguments: Where Are We in general, and What Are We here at the conference of Utopian Studies Society (Europe), in particular, Doing Wrong. You will, I trust, kindly realise that nobody can in 50 minutes even approach a full listing of either the general or the particular problems I see facing us. What I can give are samples, perhaps representative beyond themselves.

1.1. Where Are We: The Capitalocene

“What may I hope?” was Kant’s famous third question in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, after asking “What can I know?” and “What should I do?” Indeed, what can we know and what may we hope in the capitalocene, this overwhelming antiutopian tsunami we are drowning in, swimming desperately each and every moment in order to take hold of a bit of sustaining jetsam and flotsam or even to come within sight of an island – which, as John Donne told us, is “a piece of the continent,/ A part of the main./ ... For I am involved in mankind.”

Thus, to begin with, let us cognise. What is the geologically effective age of capitalocene whose bitter taste batters our days and invades our nights?^{2/} Historically, capitalist corporations engaged as of the mid-1970s in a large-scale offensive to depress wages per unit of production and boost profits from huge to monstrous. Using the fake slogans of free trade and globalisation, the rich organised bundles of radical interventions by major States and the roof organisations of international capitalism (GATT, WTO, IMF, and World Bank) to make themselves vastly richer, while multiplying the poor in their nations, eviscerating the middle class prosperity based on stable employment, and upping the income gap between rich and poor countries from 10:1 to 90:1. We are now in the epoch of huge and extreme plutocracy, where 1% of the world population appropriated 70% of the riches created in 2017, enforcing it by high-tech mass murders and fear-mongering ideologies of *divide et impera* to keep the 97% of losers at bay: NATO’s military budget for 2019 is planned at US\$1,400 billion, that is, \$4 billion per day! A large class of chronically poor was created, and politically neutralised by creating racist fears of even poorer immigrants. In this class warfare from above, ca. 2.5 billion people, the “global reserve army of unemployed, vulnerably employed, and economically inactive” (Foster “New”), struggle today to survive, failing fast, while more than half of them live in the most abject poverty, more or less quickly dying of hunger and attendant diseases (cf. Pogge); so that the hundred million dead and several hundred million other casualties of warfare in the 20th century seem puny in comparison – though their terror and suffering is not. If we add hydra-headed marginalisation and bureaucratic exclusion, in turn causing violent individual and collective retaliations, as well as the “slow” structural violence caused by destruction of the environment and the aftermath of war (cf. Nixon) this impacts a large majority of people in the world. Economic “growth” benefits only the rich, at the expense of everybody else, especially the poor and the powerless in this generation and future ones (for other sources see Suvin, *Leviathan* essay 9).

The capitalist economy is globally pursuing a cheap-labour economy on the one hand and the search for new consumer markets on the other; the former undermines the latter. It does not work for the great majority of people, us workers who live from their physical and intellectual work. Capitalism jettisons humanity in all its senses: civilised behaviour, interest of people, and even their bodies. I shall here insist only on two foci of the perfectly sinful capitalocene: war and ecocide.

- *War*: the Keynesian Welfare State of blessed memory finally succeeded only in tandem with “military Keynesianism” – the heavy rearmament that in the 1930s-40s primed the pump of business upswing and remained the precondition of a relative affluence – and its price was the Nazi regime, High Stalinism, and the 2nd World War. Under the Bush Jr. administration war expenses were 1,000 million dollars per year (Custers, Johnson). Imperialism is today healthy and thriving, with an important US embedded intellectual calling for a “thirty-years’ war” (cf. the two titles by Foster). As for fascism, it is doing very

well almost everywhere, thank you. If radically anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives of exiting from this predicament are not found, we shall have more ongoing wars in the South – including Northern ghettos – plus more refurbished 2.0 fascism in the North.

Clearly, war plays a structurally essential role in all monopoly capitalism (cf. Marcos 51 and 101). I have defined war as a coherent sequence of conflicts, involving physical combats between large organised groups of people that include the armed forces of at least one state, with the aim of political and economic control over a given (see chapter 1 in my *Communism* and chapter 9 in this book). Other aims may be securing advantages for coming conflicts – for example dominion over air, sea or oil resources – the destruction of commodities and people, and evading inner class tension. The ratio of military to civilian casualties in wars during the 20th century has “progressed” from 8:1 to 1:8 (eight civilians killed for each combatant), and the fighters diversified from regular armies into paramilitary groups, police forces, mercenaries, local warlords, and purely criminal gangs. The mass casualties have been mainly people marginal to “White” patriarchal capitalism: the poor, the women, the uppity “middle” States, the people of “colour.”

War is securely based in the central forces of antagonistic competition, the “essential locomotive force” of bourgeois economy and “generally the mode in which capital secures the victory of its mode of production” (Marx, *Grundrisse* 476 and 649); it is the surest way to realise capitalism’s GOD imperative (Harvey, “Grow or Die”). Continuous warfare has *never* ceased under capitalism: around 160 wars have raged between 1945 and 1993 killing more people than in World War 2; we know what has continued into this century. Capitalism came about in plunder wars; war financing set up its modern bureaucracy and central national banks; and there is no evidence it could climb out of economic depressions without huge military spending, a war mega-dividend. The political fallout is the spread of military rule that subordinates the civil society to its barbarity even in times of official peace – as today.

Armaments commodities are since World War 2 not only the source of greatest extra-profit but a system-pillar of capitalism. The yearly money value of the international armament trade oscillated in the last 40 years, according to the available faulty statistics, between 20 and over 30 billion dollars, and today it is more. The capitalist market systematically favours armaments commodities because of their uniquely high value-added price, their especially rapid rate of obsolescence and turnover, the monopoly or semi-monopoly position of their manufacturers, and the large-scale and secure financing of military research, production and of massive cost overruns – all taken from public taxation. By the time of the First Gulf War, world spending for military purposes was nearly a trillion US\$ annually or *between 2 and 2.5 billion dollars daily*, more than half of it attributable to the USA; and today it is way past this. This most profitable part of global trade is the strongest factor of both international violence and the colonisation of life-worlds and eco-systems by commodity economy. The tens of millions of dead in the two World Wars brought about tens of trillions of profitable investments in the huge reconstructions of destroyed homes and industries and ongoing rearmament: *a million dollars or more per dead body*. No capitalism without increasingly destructive weapons and wars which might still destroy the world: the marvellous technoscientific progress means that one nuclear submarine can destroy the peoples of an entire continent, yet eight new US nuclear submarines have been made since the fall of the USSR. One-quarter of the public monies which are expended on weapons commodities

would eradicate poverty, homelessness and illiteracy, as well as pay for the cleanup of all our major environmental pollution... (beside Marx, Luxemburg, and Lenin, cf. other sources up to 2003 in Suvin, *Leviathan* essay 3, where my definition also comes from).

Eric Olin Wright's verdict in 2004 (1-3 and 14), when worse was yet to come, was that capitalist class relations perpetuate eliminable forms of human suffering as well as deficits in human freedom and autonomy, largely based on domination of work and large inequalities of wealth; capitalism violated liberal egalitarian principles of social justice and (here I go beyond Wright) it is not only indifferent to mass middle-class democracy but mostly inimical to mass plebeian democracy, where people – a Gramscian civil society – control the State.

I could and should go on about migrants and social justice but must leave this to your imagination and another occasion. However, since the theme of this conference is about “climate change,” I shall continue about ecology.

- *Ecocide*: The capitalocene does not work for our ecological balance, sorely upset by over-consumption of energy; to the contrary, to prevent collapse we need a steady-state economy, with growth resulting from efficiency (cf. Chossudovsky, Daly, Daly and Farley). Capital uses nature as dead matter to make more dead matter, rather than as Spinoza's *natura naturans*, a permanently active ensemble of new potencies and potentialities.

A UN *Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services* was just published on May 6.^{3/} It was compiled by 145 experts from 50 countries, with input from another 310 researchers and authors, it draws on over 15,000 scientific and governmental sources and it incorporates the wisdom of indigenous knowledge. It should be taken seriously. It found 3/4 of the terrestrial environment has been “severely altered,” more than 40% of amphibian species and 680 vertebrate species have been driven to extinction; in the oceans, almost 1/3 of the reef-forming corals and more 1/3 of marine mammals are on the edge of extinction. In sum: *one million* animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades.

The report identifies two main and related reasons for this catastrophe: the “current limited paradigm of economic growth” and “climate change”; its language is cautiously non-political but the first syntagm means corporate capitalism, a system premised on private property and profit as the only reason and horizon for existence. Its reliance upon fossil fuel emissions to power its engines is what has ruined the climate and mainly led to global warming.

Also, in August 2018 six Finnish academics released their background paper for the chapter on *Transformation: The Economy* in the UN Global Sustainable Development Report, which will be released later this year.^{4/} They find that “the era of cheap energy is coming to an end,” and all potential replacements for fossil fuels are far less energy-efficient and will be far more expensive. Massive changes are needed in the very design of our societies to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050: “Market-based action will not suffice even with a high carbon price.” In other words, capitalism cannot solve the mass extinction of species and climate change, with ocean levels rising by meters or possibly dozens of meters soon (see K.S. Robinson's still optimistic SF novel *New York 2140*), the greatest rise since the dinosaurs. Quite different ways to manage life on the planet must be adopted and enforced. Transportation and housing need to rely upon public transport and co-housing. Current food distribution systems waste 1/3 of all food harvested. Resources for all this are available even if politically tabooed: tens of billions of dollars in subsidies given to fossil

fuel firms and agribusinesses that lead humanity toward annihilation, tens of trillions of dollars in tax havens. If this could be tapped, it would be sufficient to reconfigure energy, transport, housing, and food systems. “Economic activity will gain meaning not by achieving economic growth”, write the Finnish academics, “but by rebuilding infrastructure and practices towards a post-fossil fuel world with a radically smaller burden on natural ecosystems.” And the summary of the UN report notes that the transition would “entail a shift beyond standard economic indicators such as gross domestic product to include those able to capture more holistic, long-term views of economics and quality of life.”

Both the UN reports are, of course, “professionally” forbidden to totalise and name, and I shall return to these categories. But the only possible conclusion is that *capitalocene is a structured whole*: not only proudly global, but also instantaneous and capillary. The bind has however a name: Rosa Luxemburg’s “socialism or barbarism” (with apologies to barbarians). Alas, now this choice will be much more painful than when she wrote it, in the horrible but hopeful year of 1916. Thus we need to insist on an equally totalising eco-utopian thought, as persuasively addressed yesterday at this conference by the speech of Lisa Garforth.

1.2. What Are We Doing Wrong

To narrow the focus to our professional affairs, yet keeping very much in mind the above general context that shapes us all, I have three main beefs against what appears a successful tendency in much popular utopology of the last decade or two. I begin with an incident that shocked me and go on with a plea flowing from a Yiddish anecdote.

Of course there is no god’s eye view on any textual (or other) event or existent; any understanding or evaluation is historically delimited, “right” for a given social class, nation, epoch, and so on. Nonetheless, if it is difficult to say what is right, we can from collective experience often say what is wrong. While I remain persuaded that without formal analysis we are bound to be wrong, I am now increasingly concerned by any stance that hides its always already presupposed value-judgments. It seems clear there are no utopian studies without values: these can only be open or hidden, right or wrong. My example stems from a large exhibition called “Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World” at the New York Public Library and the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, 2000-2001, for which some of us were asked to supply a short text online. I did so too – though I was unhappy at the NYPL questions, mainly interested in internet as utopia (see chapter 5 in this book). I have recently been alerted by several sources, the main written one being Jacoby’s book cited (x), to the fact that the visitors could find *in the same room* photographs, documents, audio-tapes, and other artifacts from the Israeli collective farms (kibbutzim), from Martin Luther King and the US Civil Rights Movement, and from Nazi propaganda; I checked this also with the relevant pages of the exhibition catalogue, and it was confirmed by an e-mail to me by Professor Lyman T. Sargent after the SUS conference.^{5/} I gather that the exhibition also presented photographs from the Auschwitz liquidation camp but I do not know in which room. No information pointing out that any of these were included as contrary to utopia or utopianism seems to have been included, or Jacoby and Sargent would surely have mentioned it. I must therefore rue even my marginal participation on the fringe of the exhibition. As we ought to know, the kibbutzim, where a number of my friends lived for a brief time or permanently, were a sterling example of egalitarian and non-State communism, and were logically stifled by the surge of capitalism and militarism in Israel. To couple them as well as the Black movement against racism with Nazism

is an example of the deep wrongness of the totalitarianism concept that I discussed in chapter 22 and to which I shall return.

Thus, how is one to understand that room? My question is simple: *Why put Nazism into a Utopia exhibition at all?* Why in the name of all that is holy (including scholarship) put propaganda of the Nazi stance, which notoriously enabled Nazi practices of mass civilian murder and war crimes, into an exhibition called “Utopia”? Is a perverse permissiveness in order that draws no limit to what is Utopia as long as a group believes it is searching for its “ideal society”? Or is it not rather that, as the Bible told us, “by their fruits ye shall know them”? First of all, this is hardly a “search,” but usually a strongly held certainty. Second, *can you call utopia the violent infliction of torture and murder on huge masses of people* (possibly even on one single person)? I believe you can NOT: *direct or indirect mass murderings are always antiutopian*. If indeed, as even the great Ernst Bloch is guilty of sometimes inferring, utopia is equivalent to all dreams of any heart’s content, then we do not need the term of utopia because we have imagination or dreams or search, and you and I in the Utopian Studies are out of business.

To the contrary: we ought to think seriously about polar incompatibilities of horizon, stance, and value within utopia/nism, updating and sublating the dated dichotomies of Karl Mannheim into ideology vs. utopia as well as of Ernst Bloch into abstract vs. concrete utopia, yet retaining their razor edge (quite compatible with Occam’s). While I cannot do this here, a tentative approximation to these decisive incompatibilities informs this essay and speech.

Since I was as a child told I was Jewish, though this didn’t mean much to me – but it meant a lot to Hitler who wanted me dead at age 11, and was foiled by my very clever mother and the help of a sterling communist called Tito – I’ll introduce my focus with the Yiddish anecdote of *Rabbi Sean Fergusson*:

A new rabbi arrived to a mid-West US community. After the first celebration of *shabbes*, an excited community member approaches him: “Rabbi, how wonderfully you led this celebration and how happy are we that you came to us! But tell me, how come your name is Sean Fergusson?” The answer: “Well, when my family landed at Ellis Island, we had to be vetted singly, so my parents told me ‘Now don’t forget your name is Yitzhak Katzenellenbogen!’ But our wait was long and hot, and when I came to have my name inscribed, tears running down my four-year-old face and trying valiantly not to sob, I said: ‘*Schon vergessen* (I have already forgotten it)’. And he wrote down Sean Fergusson.”

So here is what my beefs are against – *lest we forget*:

1.21. *The pseudo-professional censorship or Denkverbot against “total” and “totality”* crudely identified with the Cold-War notion of totalitarianism, anyway outdated and abandoned by most scholarship. We cannot analyse anything unless it’s understood as a unit/y, a *provisionally closed structure for given purposes*. In language semantics this is what Barthes called a mega-text, which could for example be all the rhymed distichs in Shakespeare’s plays or, as I tried out once, the endings of half a dozen famous SF novels as the place where truth will out.

No doubt, the suffering and degradation of millions, from world wars and economic “depressions” through Dachau, Kolyma, and Abu Ghraib to those bombed out today all over West Asia, remains and must be taken most seriously as our measuring rods. I myself, whose

grandfather and grandmother plus dozens of further relatives were butchered at Auschwitz and Jasenovac, have taken antifascist prevention of such suffering and bestiality as the ground bass for my life's work. But we can for no cause abdicate from the disalienating dialectics of weighing the pros and cons, for we would degrade both our memories and ourselves should we replicate the butchers' horizons. Surely we should backstage, say, fascist rants against liberty equality and the pursuit of both individual and collective happiness for everybody, but even there one should be guarded: I would not like to be without some passages from Pound's *Pisan Cantos* or (to return to utopias) from Jünger's *On Marble Cliffs*, and even the violent and genocidal racism of Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* and *Starship Troopers* must be weighed in the balance with his brilliant New Deal beginnings. There I would be near to Orwell who utterly condemned Ezra Pound "as a Fascist, a war criminal and a most foul anti-Semite and racialist" (Crick 20), while still affirming his poetry merits a prize.

And when we consider the great Leninian season of Russia and many other places beginning in, say, 1917-28, and ranging from Blok, Zamyatin, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, and Platonov to Brecht – or should I mention Miroslav Krleža, Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, Hugh Mac Diarmid, and a dozen other great opuses from the US to China? – *then* what Bakhtin called monophonic and I would call pseudo-liberal mutilation of the contradictorily rich and stunted communist polyphony of those times is quite untenable. As Darren Webb reminded us: "Anyone reading the utopian writings of Charles Fourier, William Morris or Ursula Le Guin will agree ... that 'the good can accommodate difference'" (the internal quote is from the Mark Olssen essay "Totalitarianism and the Repressed Utopia of the Present: Moving beyond Hayek, Popper and Foucault"). The three colleagues met in flesh whom I would claim as my informal teachers, Lucien Goldmann, Raymond Williams, and Fredric Jameson, certainly recognised this. Conclusion: *it's better to refute than to ignore, for this means articulating your own presuppositions.*

The Webb quote leads into our particular utopological concerns – already present in the distinguished Russian and other names above – pinpointed by Phillip Wegner's review of Jameson's *Archaeologies*: "It is the 'passion for totality' ... which distinguishes the radically original invention that occurs in Book Two of More's text from the more tentative sketches we find in Book One.... And finally, it is the passion for totality that accounts for the great fear of Utopia expressed in the anti-Utopia (Jameson 202)." I shall return at length to the antiutopia.

1.22. *The split between narratology and ideology*: On the one hand, I've written enough about narrative and poetic form to be perhaps forgiven if I say it is by itself never enough to centrally characterise a piece of writing without taking into account the reader's normative presuppositions from the current societal encyclopedia. A famous example from SF is "They landed in the light of the blue Sun," which when filled out by the presupposition that our Sun is yellow, means "They landed in another solar system." No amount of formal inquiry can establish this. I am reminded of a disciple of Leo Spitzer in analysis of poetry who in my youth found a famous poem's metrics to reproduce heartbeats. While this is in itself a logical fallacy, confusing the particular heartbeat with the general possibility of rhythmic beating which could arise out of a dozen other sources, the main problem for me is: given the how, whose heart beats for whom or what? – which rhythm analysis can never tell you.

On the other hand, ideology in the wide and nobler sense of stance toward human existence and its determinants is our daily bread without which we would starve; yet if it is

simply the critic's opinion, without feedback and probably complicated modification from texts and their contexts, then it is authoritarian propaganda – in which case it is impossible to decide whether its effects are worse when done consciously or unconsciously.

I arrive at this from my basis in literary-cum-theatre studies and should face the objection that utopian philosophies and colonies are different animals. I would answer yes and no: of course there are serious differences, primarily in how you establish your mega-text and whether it won't have to deal with semiotic systems other than language, but in all cases you willy-nilly must have a text to analyse, be it document and reports about colonies, or even more clearly the rhetoric of utopianism as a concatenation of concepts or notions. We have sufficiently brilliant analyses of, say, the form of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* to know that without the highly metaphorical "tangled bank" and "survival of the fittest" passages it would not be understandable as the readers have understood it. Conclusion: a plague on the split between formal and ideational analysis of any such narratives, don't use one without the other! For then you do not isolate the text from its inly informing context – people, society, and ongoing life.

1.23. A denial and foreclosure of – or more hypocritically and insidiously, a domesticating lip-service only (see Webb) to – Great Ancestors in philosophy, which to my mind asks what are we and how are we to live, and particularly in epistemology, which asks how do we know what we think we know. Of course in a way the more the merrier, and I really should but cannot here go back to the greatest of our Ancestors: Marx, Diderot, Rousseau, Aristotle... However, to sideline for example Ernst Bloch, Fredric Jameson or Raymond Williams will much help the desertification of utopian studies into a wasteland of unargued presupposition plus empirical data (as has in the last 20 years been the case with some of its eminent European representatives). This also means castrating Thomas More's great invention – at the same time as Machiavelli – of conceiving society as a holistic system, not to speak of his applying communism for the first time to a whole population instead of a ruling elite (cf. Strier 143 and 145-46). Conclusion: as several famous people have said, whoever does not want to learn from history is condemned to relive it – and in our days this is the clearly open path to racist and macho Fascism 2.0 (see Suvin "To Explain").

With this in mind, I shall devote Part 2 of this keynote to a main focus on antiutopia, which has lately persuaded me to abandon some cherished beliefs about utopias and utopianism, so that I'm much in need of feedback from colleagues like you. It was arrived at jointly with an analysis of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (chapter 22 in this book).

Notes to Part 1

1/ My warmest thanks for indispensable bibliographic guidance go to Lyman T. Sargent and Tom Moylan; for clarifying discussions and sending me their works to Fredric Jameson and the first two names, without whom Part 2 could not have been written; last not least, to Raffaella Baccolini, Antonis Balasopoulos, John Clute, Zorica Đergović-Joksimović, Peter Fitting, Saša Hrnjez, Richard Ohmann, Patrick Parrinder, Tamara Prošić, Bülent Somay, Victor Strazzeri, Pavla Vesela, Darren Webb, and Phil Wegner.

I couldn't have done this without the kind and efficient help of the Clare College and Cambridge University Library staff, also of Jake Culank from Cambridge.

For the invitation to deliver the keynote speech at the Utopian Studies Society in Prato 2019 and much help on that occasion my thanks go to Andrew Milner.

2/ I read culpably late Miéville's article, but entirely agree with most of it (except the final reflections what to do now). He rightly points out that "The very term 'Anthropocene', which gives with one hand, insisting on human drivers of ecological shift, misleads with its implied 'We'. After all, [what warranted] a new geochronological term [was] a shift in the political economy by which it and we are organised, an accelerating cycle of profit and accumulation... Which means ... standing directly against military power and violence. Three times as many land-rights and environmental activists were murdered in 2012 than a decade before..."; and he points to Jason W. Moore's 2017 coinage of the term "capitalocene" (see much more on this in chapter 24 of this book).

3/ *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. [subtitles] "Nature's Dangerous Decline "Unprecedented" – Species Extinction Rates "Accelerating"" – "Current global response insufficient; "Transformative changes" needed to restore and protect nature. Opposition from vested interests can be overcome for public good." – "Most comprehensive assessment of its kind; 1,000,000 species threatened with extinction."

www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment?utm_source=Tricontinental+subscribers+single+list&utm_campaign=44d16e48d7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_15_06_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bb06a786c7-44d16e48d7-190620865

I acknowledge the stimulus of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research's Newsletter "We Are the Shadow-Ghosts..." (2019) that led me to these two reports, and from which I have appropriated, in my own way which differs from theirs, many formulations.

4/ *Governance of economic transition: a scientific background document for the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* [21.8.2018]. https://bios.fi/en/economic-transition-governance-a-scientific-background-document-to-the-un-global-sustainable-development-report-2019/?utm_source (see full url end in note 3).

5/ I have been queried by the *Utopian Studies* editor, Professor Nicole Pohl, about the passage beginning "My example stems from a large exhibition called UTOPIA...." as to the correctness of the Jacoby quote, and asked why didn't I ask the curators of the exhibition, either Lyman T. Sargent and/or Gregory Claeys, "If this indeed was correct and the intention." She also contacted Professor Lyman Sargent, who responded to me in a longish e-mail from which I excerpt two central passages. First, he wrote "I find it hard to believe that anybody who actually saw the exhibit could say that either the kibbutz or National Socialism were presented as viable ideals. The name of the exhibit was *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, and ALL the exhibits were about the search with no implication that any of them were viable.... Since we included photographs of Auschwitz, I simply can't believe that anyone actually at the exhibit could use the phrase viable utopia." Second, he clarified that "In NY both the kibbutz and National Socialism were in a room that also had listening posts so that people could hear King's I

Have a Dream speech while view[ing] photographs and artifacts from the Civil Rights Movement.”

My answer is that as a critic and scholar I am not at all interested in an author’s – or a group of curators’ – *intent* or personal belief; that is the business of their friends and relatives (or political friends and enemies). I am interested exclusively *in what is actually written or presented for others to see* – on the effect of any work on its consumers. To understand this, one must know what was being presented. From Professor Sargent’s words above, I understand that the same room presented photographs, documents, audio-tapes, and other artifacts from the Israeli collective farms (kibbutzim), from Martin Luther King and the US Civil Rights Movement, and from Nazism – the latter included Nazi propaganda and it seems also a photograph of the Auschwitz “concentration” or more properly liquidation camp. No information pointing out that these were included as a contrary to utopia or utopianism seems to have been included.

How is one to understand that room in an exhibition called UTOPIA? True, this does leave it to the viewers to decide whether these were “viable” utopias or not. “Viable” is Jacoby’s ambiguous term, to my mind conflating success of a project (could it have been accomplished?) with its right belonging to a category (was it right to call it utopia?) and I would not defend it too far. But I do share the main point of indignation with Jacoby: *Why put Nazism into a UTOPIA exhibition at all?* It strongly suggests that what any “identity group” chooses for its horizon and goes to search for can be called Utopia. This is to my mind plain wrong, and I discuss it in the main text on that basis.

Please remember that my paragraph begins by saying that it seems clear to me “there are no utopian studies without values.” What is at stake here is first of all axiological: can scholarship be without values, which turns it into a pure affirmation of the status quo? Not to my mind – witness the telling “Western World” part of the exhibition title, which myopically refused the surely essential confrontation with what happened “East” of it, say in Russia and then China, Cuba, and so on... But secondly, it is also epistemological: how can we have a unified field of studies if it is unlimited, and anybody can put into it whatever he or she pleases? The answer is, I’m afraid, nohow – not a valid field of studies, anyway, in terms of categorical clarity and intellectual success.

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All the url-s were accessed between April and June 2019.

Section 1.1

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PART 2. WHAT EXISTENTIAL ANTIUTOPIA MEANS FOR US

God has chosen things which are not (*tà mè ónta*) to abolish those which are.

2.1. On Theory of Utopia and the Event of a Mega-Novum: The What

2.11. History: Advent of Alternative Totality

I agree with Ruth Levitas: “Utopia is born out of a conviction and two questions. The conviction is ‘it doesn’t have to be like this.’ The questions are ‘how then should we live?’ and ‘how can that be?’” (48).

It is of utmost significance that in the Renaissance utopianism underwent a sea change or metamorphosis from Platonic philosophical argument and blueprint, and then Augustinian theological devaluation of mundane existence, to a *narrative genre*. Within the belly of the new, increasingly totalising and dynamic Leviathan, bourgeois democratic and if you wish capitalist storytelling – that is, the imagination of alternative actions by agents in an alternative Possible World – developed a key novum with two aspects:

- The first aspect was *the freedom inherent in relatively wide* – eventually mass – *reading*, from the very beginning structured as a more or less free market competition for the readers’ attention and choice. This was accompanied by a rise of published utopian items in a faster and somewhat more literate society. On the down side this was always *for books* countered by illiteracy, misery, and repression of publishing and circulation, down to Nazi book burning, Stalinist censorship, and post-1989 neoliberal book destructions (the State-ordered mass book destruction in Croatia happens to be documented in Lešaja, but it is surely one among many); and *for mass media* it is countered by high costs, oligopoly, and severe top-down controls in TV and movies.
- The second aspect was a flexible use of narrative as cognitive means to convey a “thicker” overview of life and its experiences with, against, and in lieu of Leviathan. Such narrative amalgamated notional and sensual evidence centered on deputised protagonists moving and learning in realistic spacetime. From More on, all utopianism reposes on two central, cognate and imbricated imaginative activities and formal procedures: *map-making* and nomination or *naming*. Utopianism is a space-creating machine, inconceivable before the space-eating inventions of economic enclosure of lands and transoceanic ships, and in some ways a desperate attempt to use these huge weapons of domination for freedom (as can be clearly seen in some first stirrings of air travel notions). Consubstantially, space becomes a sense-making machine by means of nomination, turning imperial conquest and colonisation into a possibility of humanising power relationships. There might be additional general procedures or devices, such as a deviant listing or categorising of main human relationships under power (the full survey that L.T. Sargent insists upon in “Utopia” 140-41), but I think these too function by way of the first two. For one example, Morris’s taking over in *News from Nowhere* the names and map first of London city and then of the Thames valley serves his purpose of palingenesis, the rebirth of human simplicity and esthetic joy in classless society, but it also marks his proximity to Earthly Paradise rather than to utopia proper, that needs a strategically believable politico-economical overview.

Thus utopian texts – and following them, all utopianism including attempts at philosophy and colonies – were born as political animals wedded to a possibility of freedom, to be negotiated between the individuals and various power currents in the collectivity. At times,

“utopia is a matter of innermost urgency, something we are pushed into as a matter of survival, when it is no longer possible to go on within the parameters of the ‘possible’” (Žižek, cited in Sargisson 32). True, there were authoritarian utopias galore, most significantly the early ones by Bacon and Campanella, and even More oscillated between democracy and patriarchy, but these were particular choices within an epistemologically open horizon: if America exists, all is possible! – all kinds of freedom and even a new elite authoritarianism. I have been insisting now for almost half a century that “Though formally closed, significant utopia is thematically open: its pointings reflect back on the reader’s ‘topia’” (“Locus,” in Suvin, *DBH* 120), and I cited Barthes to the effect that the utopian *écriture* must mobilise at the same time an image and its contrary (*MOSF* 51).

It is also to my mind incontrovertible that all such Possible Counter-Worlds are modelled upon our everyday Possible World as a *totality*, a however provisional and experimental *world*: despite modest early avatars as an island or colony, the space and its meaning is always an exemplary and radical counter-project aiming at a different way of human existing. Near the beginning of the best modern survey, Jameson’s *Archaeologies*, he writes that “Totality is then precisely this combination of closure and system that presides over the forms of Utopian realisation: the Utopian city, the Utopian revolution, the Utopian commune or village, and of course the Utopian text itself” (5). By means of the “passion for totality” the utopian impulse blossoms into the utopian alternative project (cf. Moylan, “Transgressing” 312), sprung forth full-blown from the pen of Thomas More, as Athena from the brain of Zeus. The paradigm can be grasped, Jameson argues, in the qualitative jump from the preliminary sketches of strange countries in Book One of *Utopia* to the radically original, totalising invention of Book Two: “The [countries in Book One are] ... imagined as enclaves within our existent world; whereas, despite the positioning and the supplementary explanations, Utopia is somehow felt to replace our world altogether” (38).

Amid our age of “weak thought,” let me disambiguate: here total does NOT mean all-exhaustive (though it is a temptation some utopographers succumb to, witness Campanella – as well as some pernicious bureaucratic meddlers in many capitalist or pseudo-socialist agencies); nor does it mean that everything is planned from above and violently enforced, as in Mussolini’s favourite adjective of “totalitarian.” Rather it entails a radically different Possible World – that is, a notional totality that for the cognitive purposes of feedback resembles our encyclopedic idea of our world. No image or notion is graspable except as a (provisional) totality. Yet finally, many major utopian writings are in curious and ingenious ways *open-ended totalities*, from More’s final sentence and Bacon’s unfinished fragment to, say, the multiplicities of choice in K.S. Robinson’s Mars trilogy (cf. Wegner, *Imaginary* 54); and I have been worrying at open-endedness since reading Bloch, who tied his “concrete utopia” to an open system (say in my “Brecht vs. Ibsen”).

2.12. Modern Times: The Politics of Generic Forms

On top of the two aspects broached above, the strategic factor for grasping the readability of modern utopias is their *division into subgenres*, beginning with the mega-split between *eutopia* and *dystopia*. This came about under the existential pressure of the division in and after the three main bourgeois revolutions – in England, America, and France – between the eutopian *citoyen* face and the dystopian bourgeois face of the new rulers. After the additional shocks of the Russian Revolution and fascism were digested, and amid the youth and New Left revolt of the

1960s-70s, this division was recognised by a group of scholars, astraddle between humanities and sociology, within a theory of literary genres (cf. chapter 1 in this book) – most notably by Lyman T. Sargent, Fredric Jameson, and Tom Moylan (see also Suvin, for example in “Tractate,” and from the sociological side Bauman and Levitas); it is by now an accepted presupposition. The good meaning of eutopianism is a presentation, orientation, and striving toward the horizon of radically better forms of relationships among people, an affirmation and annunciation. The bad meaning or dystopianism is a presentation of radically worse forms of relationships among people, a negation and denunciation. I defined eutopia as the construction of a particular community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and relationships between people are organised according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, and symmetrically, for dystopia “more perfect” is to be changed into “less perfect.” In both cases, what is radically better or worse is judged from the point of view and within the value-system of a suffering and discontented social group or fraction, as refracted through the writer (if you are content, you enjoy or rhapsodise)^{1/}. This duo of eutopia plus dystopia, which was up to the last decades the factually and axiologically main body of utopian writings and horizons, is on the whole Jeffersonian: an affirmation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – but it had small but sometimes significant wings to the right and left of such bourgeois democracy.

The dystopian Possible Worlds show and show up the horrors of human relationships becoming more repressive, exploitative, and alienating; in Hegelian language, dystopia as an ideal type is a denunciation and negation of *negating* eutopian orientation and strivings. If we follow Sargent, as I do, then *antiutopia as an ideal type is* precisely the opposite: *a denunciation and negation of affirming eutopian orientation and strivings*. It is of two kinds, rosy and black, both of which share a switch from politics or history to ontology or “nature.” I shall develop this at length later.

No doubt, dystopia, so powerful from Zamyatin, Čapek, Pohl-Kornbluth, and early Heinlein to Piercy or K.S. Robinson and still alive, needs more discussion. I have a feeling Jameson is on the right track when he pleads for a sub-genre of apocalyptic fiction (*Archaeologies* 199 – whatever we might then call it): however uncouth and internally contradictory, its huge popularity in fiction and all media demands to be taken seriously. However, what I am now concerned with is to disentangle the generic model of dystopia from that of antiutopia: for while dystopia is an unruly or boomerang-flight brother of eutopia, antiutopia is the enemy or family wrecker.^{2/} What is literary antiutopia? As above, it is a significantly different locus explicitly designed to refute a currently proposed eutopia. It is a polemic nightmare that proposes to reveal how an eutopia pretended to a more perfect organisation than any thinkable alternative, while our narrative “camera eye” and value-monger finds out it is significantly less perfect. It was written to warn against utopias, not – as dystopias do – against the existing status quo, and in fiction perhaps culminated, if that's the word, in Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. As Tom Moylan discussed at length (*Scraps* 194-96 and passim), dystopia's mobilising pessimism entails that the reader should do something about it; while now antiutopia's demobilising pessimism entails that nothing could or should be done.

The pedigree of antiutopianism has been little explored, but my hypothesis would be that, except for possible precursors like Aristophanes' *Women in Parliament* (cf. Sargent, *Utopianism* 25), it began in ideological horror at the French and similar revolutions, in England by Burke and the conservative romantics.^{3/} Such reactions in part rightly sensed the dangers of State-worship among both capitalists and communists, but then used it to oppose the horizon of human

disalienation and radical democracy in the 19th Century. This became neuralgic especially after the 1917 Russian Revolution and its direct or indirect fallout, within which utopianism was often wedded to communism or socialism: the Welfare State.

In terms of literary history and narration, antiutopia was mainly confined to two reactionary clusters, the anti-Bellamy one in the 1890s and the anti-Leninist one in the 1920s-30s, reprised from the 1950s on. As a rule, it was poor. The writer and style were less important; absent were all the usual qualities by which, first, not only the great ancestors, from More to Percy Shelley, but also Wells or Zamiatin or Lem or Le Guin or the Strugatsky Brothers were great writers *tout court*. But second, those qualities also characterised a thick supporting substratum of what I'd call a "2a class" of considerable writers supplying stimulating ideas, alternatives, and plots – from Jack London, A.T. Wright, Olaf Stapledon, Stanley Weinbaum, Aldous Huxley, the US 1940s-50s "new maps of hell," and Orwell to (say) Brunner, Russ, Mitchison, Callenbach, Piercy, Dick, Atwood, Macleod, and a dozen other SF writers. Antiutopia gets its force from outside fiction, from obsessive inculcation of its ideological points in all aligned media and think-tanks and from the whip of obscurity and hunger (where not drone liquidation) for dissenters. However, I am concerned with its existential embodiment rather than its narrative form here.^{4/}

2.13. The Event of Existential Antiutopia

Politically and ideologically, antiutopianism is an embattled adoption of the point of view and value-system of globally ruling capitalism and the class – or classes – bearing it. *Antiutopia is a targeted ideologico-political use of a closed horizon not simply to refute or ridicule, but to render unthinkable both the eutopia of a better possible world and the dystopia as awful warning about the writer's and readers' present tendencies*, thus to stifle the right to dissent and to strive for radical novelty, to dismantle any possibility of plebeian democracy. It is always "a political reply to the political project of realizing utopia" (Jacoby 81). The intertext of antiutopia has historically been anti-socialism and anti-communism, as this was the strongest "currently proposed" eutopia after ca. 1915-75. It is no longer, as heretofore, consubstantial with radical criticism of the intended reader's present but celebratory of it, so that any criticism is only perfective and marginal – though often touted as "revolutionary" – amounting to: how can we or I profit more?

My central socioformalist and historical thesis is that a world-historical novum or Badiouan mega-event hit humanity after the end of the Cold War, like the Yucatan comet that extinguished the age of dinosaurs: in a ruse of history, the ideologico-political development of capitalism (that had all along produced fake novums galore) morphed into an encompassing monster – *the existential antiutopia*. This is in our scholarship a scandal, in the original Biblical sense of a stumbling stone to be disbelieved into (cf. Suvin "Parables"), for any theory of utopia/nism worth its oats after ca. 1968 made it crystal clear that utopia is an epistemological and not ontological beast. The argument that an approximation to eutopia (or even dystopia) may be found or constructed in reality, as in blueprints or colonies, disregarded why they all necessarily fail – as Marx told Cabet when the latter was founding his US colony. We all concluded utopia cannot be realised or not realised; it can be only imagined as a contrast and/or yardstick, a Fata Morgana in the desert of the oppressively real, a memento for the downtrodden or a stick for beating one's ideological opponents.^{5/} But history is slyer than any theory yet invented by poor human singletons, and in our stress on values we should have remembered that

axiology also entails finality (*telos*), so it spills over from epistemology to ontology. We were right to oppose Stalinist and right-wing simplifications by insisting that meaning is conveyed only through forms, yet I have to acknowledge we were finally wrong that utopia/nism cannot have a political embodiment. A powerful approximation to antiutopia, armed to the teeth, can and is being globally realised by present-day capitalism, its banks, States, and ideologies. This unprecedented emergency, whereby we are living in and being existentially shaped by this most corrupt or “perfectly sinful” (Fichte) form of utopia/nism, must be considered and articulated.

Given the very small role and poor quality of antiutopia in literature, I earlier thought it was a weird variety of the “black” utopia, but this turns out to be wrong. All of us now live within a leaden existential global closure where we are threatened by antiutopia as Destiny of subjection within a long-duration collapse of capitalist structures of accumulation – Lehman Brothers, Trump or Brexit, anyone? This introduces a radical reversal, or more precisely eversion, from a situation in which interested readers looked *from outside* at utopia/nism as a choice of freedom, an exhilarating Possible World, to a situation whereby all of us are willy-nilly *inside* antiutopia in our empirical, more and more decaying Zero World. This antiutopian world functions rather like the mathematised models in capitalist financial speculation designed to make the modelled state of affairs more like the model. In it, imaginative understanding is being pre-empted by myopic and malevolent doing, while our choices are diverted from root – that is, radical – problems to fickle fashion. We are being forcefully and often forcibly lived by antiutopia, a growing restriction of possibilities to work for life-enhancing change. This is physically obvious when entire parts of the world are being thrust into destruction by capitalist and/or its complementary nationalist armies, and even for the richer enclaves (just so nobody should be spared) in the capitalocene climate change. *This changes all* – including utopia/nism, its theory and practice. And our analytic tools have to be adjusted to this victory of ideology over utopia. One guideline: this cannot be done unless accompanied by thorough and explicit analysis speaking against the central features of antiutopia – that is, today’s capitalism sliding into more or less fascism: sexism, racism, terror, ecocide, and perpetual mega-warfare. To use critical dystopias and eutopias in order to roll back antiutopia is a matter of life and death for most of us, possibly for humanity as a whole.

2.2. On Antiutopia as Ptolemeian Counterrevolution: The How and the Why

So what happens when, in a most radically bad novum, all of us find ourselves thrust inside antiutopia, a kind of demented *Tron* or *Matrix* movie we cannot get out of, increasingly more bitter if not impossible to live in? If we are to think about getting out, what are the events behind the events (Brecht) or some approximation to deep causes? Whence the rise of antiutopia as closed horizon to politico-existential dominance or hegemony, beginning with the breakthrough of Thatcher and Reagan and fully affirmed by the 1990s?

As suggested above, there is a central existential difference between *a life-world one is necessarily inside of* and *a secondary creation (Tolkien) one is as a rule outside of*. In any really existing situation people willy-nilly live, work, die, and (often) get children: their body and psychophysical interest is fully engaged in their location. To the contrary, a piece of utopian fiction, a Fourierist blueprint or even a Disney World does not fully enclose a person: one may visit it, but not live in it, one may dwell on but not in it, one is never completely inside. Utopian colonies attempting to span this abyss regularly cracked up. The Book of Nature is not really a book, whatever hieroglyphs it may contain; the Theatre of the World (or of Society) is not really

a theatre, whatever plays or games may come and go on it, for we are not an audience but on stage. The relationships and traffic between virtual and actual reality, between the Life World and secondary virtual creations or Possible Worlds are multiple and complex, since all of them partake of human imagination in differing ways, but most of the time the entities themselves remain distinct; as Freud noted: “nobody can be killed *in absentia* or *in effigie*” (“Transference” 107, translation amended). Traffic piles up unless it proceeds between two distinct places.

I would argue that every significant work of art is a kind of – non-notional – truth that opens up both its own possibility and “the formal possibility of *other* possibilities, ones as yet unsuspected by us” (Badiou 12). Both egalitarianism and possibility are thematised and foregrounded in utopia/nism’s overt appeal to critical reason. Antiutopia pre-empts and enforces denial of these contracts. It denies and occults what Jameson rightly saw as the “stereoptic” quality of the utopian imagination that “places the utopian fantasist in two distinct worlds at the same time and generates a unique kind of discomfort by the seemingly irreconcilable demands it makes to disengage absolutely from what is at the same time that one cleaves absolutely to the being of the world as some ultimate limit” (*Seeds* 161; I would read the final mention of “the world” as what I call a Possible World). Antiutopia effects as it were a counterrevolution within the utopian revolution by flattening all possibilities of radical alterity or novum into the dominant “one-eyed” capitalocene hegemony that absolutely takes the structure of what is as the ultimate limit.

However, there are two ideological variants of this antiutopianism, both violent. The cheery one is peddled by think-tanks and governments supported by billionaires and most of their world media; it is as a rule gung-ho, pretending we live in Social-Darwinist eutopia. It says “we live in the best of all possible worlds, you just gotta be competitive!” However, among intellectuals that usually hate eutopia and dystopia, one often finds the gloomy one; it says “life is hell and nothing can be done, we live in the best of all possible BAD worlds” (cf. Baggesen); this too is frequent today in movies or TV serials – *Game of Thrones* anyone? The black horizon can often pose as opposition to the idiot smile of the first one, but they are Siamese twins inasmuch as both propagate acquiescence in what obtains. In practice a number of “black” texts meld critical dystopia and various kinds of unsurmountable antiutopia, to my mind at the expense of their quality, most prominently Orwell’s *1984*.

In grim Post-Fordism, where compromise with the ruled by means of co-opted consumerism is no longer very necessary, the welfare measures – developing public health, education, housing, and other services for the people as well as controlling savage capitalism – are replaced by measures to monitor, penalise, and sequester the poor (cf. Wacquant, also Brown). The Ayn Rand supermen operate by means of either direct physical killing or total precarisation with a permanent threat of hunger and destitution. The totalised control as well as the intensification and celebration of being commodified is extended over the whole globe, a new Borgesian map identical to the territory. As in the “American Dream” [picket fence](#) appearance of *The Truman Show* movie and in similar fakely ideal sets in a number of SF stories by Philip K. Dick, antiutopia can only be maintained if the inhabitants are persuaded it is the only reality. The utopia of personal-cum-collective freedom, as ideal or protest, is simply made unintelligible. As Debord told us, “Modern economic production extends its dictatorship extensively and intensively” (Debord, point 42; see also Foucault in section 3): there is no different present or future, time duration has for almost all of us shrunk to the next financial deadline for survival.

Most briefly, this is my hypothesis: *Capitalism has by now grown fully parasitic* – profit is no longer accompanied by rising accumulation or productivity, it comes increasingly from political manipulation of “rents” rather than from production (except in China). The system survives only by continuously increased extortion of surplus labour from the 95% of lower classes and nations to the rulers. It is by far the biggest manmade threat to liberty, cognition, and creativity invented by our species. Or simply to survival.

The existential antiutopia was historically brought about as a global ruling-class counter-project to the post-1917 Welfare-and-Warfare State, which first lost its welfare wing and was as of the 1970s rapidly devolved to Warfare-and-Bamboozery State. Warfare was exported outside the State-system of the metropolitan (capitalist, patriarchal) North, represented at the end of 20th Century by the “trilateral” group of North America, west-central Europe and Japan plus a smattering of their outcrops – the “little tigers” of East Asia, the “White dominions” of ex-British Empire. And warfare grew into a new norm in strict parallel to the dismantling of the (sometimes spotty or unwieldy) solidarity and justice that had brought about and sustained the Welfare State in its Leninist as well as – reactively – in its Keynesian wing; thus violence as war abroad also meant increasing violence as repression within, needed to quell the rising despair over, and possibly protests against, the sabotage of public health, education, housing, and all other services for people and controls over savage capitalism without a human face, spearheaded by the rising exploitation of immigrant workers without civic rights.

Beside warfare, the new supertechnological capitalism is centrally developing through an in-depth *attack on life*. The pulsating heart of capitalism was always the unequal exchange of life (people’s time and labour-power) for money, well compressed by Ben Franklin 250 years ago as “Time Is Money.” Now private property, having exhausted things, annexes also relationships – prominently including vital relations between things, to which people are reduced (reified) as equally strip-mined “human resources.” A strategic link is private property on knowledge that exploded with the right to patent living matter for profit, from genes to species, as decided by the US Supreme Court in 1980; it is estimated there are by now more than 100,000 such patents. The true owners of life today are, besides the armed forces, the pharmaceutical companies, agrochemical monsters, and information profiteers, all connected through international mega-banks.

In sum, the specter haunting us today is the Police State or indeed a reborn Fascism 2.0, where bamboozling is replaced by outright Social-Darwinist cynicism – the Warfare and Repression State. As a rule these repressions returned from US-organised dictatorships around the world to roost in the native soil, first hypocritically and then openly as of the Bush Jr. administration “war on terror”; the old imperialist nostalgias of France and UK, and then the rising State capitalist power of China and the somewhat reconstituted Russia follow the same oppressive pattern, while providing some opportunities to maneuvering for smaller States and groups. Each listener can fill in the list of moral and political reasons for our indignation at such a huge impoverishment and militarisation of our lives.

This poses an epistemological problem. Since I do not believe in Original Sin, and especially not that the Devil rules on Earth, I have to – all of us have to – explain this slide from epistemology to ontology, from a thirst for understanding to a fetishism of the oppressively existing. At stake is after all what Ernst Bloch called “the principle of hope.”

2.3. Antiutopia as Constituted Absence: The Deeper Why

As to our theory of utopia/nism, we could salvage it by assuming *eutopia is in antiutopia latently present as a constituted absence*: the sinister hollow is defined by a possible threatening plenitude – as in the superordinate constitutive relation between death and life.^{6/} This calculated though mostly unacknowledged absence is all-pervasive, it determines all defining traits of antiutopia: not only the usual fake novums foreclosing radical ones, but also quantity instead of quality, closure instead of openness, fake ontology instead of modest epistemology, point-like inescapability instead of fertile traffic between past present and future, monologism instead of contradictions, impotent horror instead of intervening hope and indignation, cynicism instead of belief, vertical leadership and horizontal identities instead of polymorphic diversity enforced by recall democracy: Mussolini, Carl Schmitt, and von Mises as Great Ancestors instead of Rousseau, J.S. Mill, and Marx. Such traits culminate in the subsumptive unholy trinity of antiutopia – *hatred of plebeian creativity and roaming intelligence (Denkverbot)*, *the State as repressive violence instead as public power*, and *annihilating warfare instead of creative emulation*. These traits amount to an antiutopian “mythological machine” (Jesi), blending degraded numinosity, power, and commodity esthetics. It does not aim for truth – indeed truth is repressed and left in obscurity, somewhere far behind – but for performativity, a fascistoid effect on corruptible masses. In relation to the light of a disalienated humanity, it is, to cite Milton, “No light, but rather darkness visible” (*Paradise Lost* I: 63). Sociologically, it is an imperious reality concretised as capitalist mass media shaping mass opinion, with economic whips and militarised violence enforcing it. It entails a thoroughgoing abolition of free choice, on which any worthwhile culture, and within it the system of literature and its genres, reposes – quite analogous to the lack of meaningful choice in elections for the US Presidency or the Council of Europe or the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, or in the fate of bombed out millions. Its ultimate horizon is not freedom but a Police State, kept up by what cannot be thought of:

FIGURE.1



As Foucault, despite some central waffling on neo-liberalism, never tired to argue, governing in his time comports “a formidable extension of the control and coercion procedures.... [of] the major disciplinary techniques that take in and take care of (*repandre en charge*) the individuals’ everyday behaviour up to the smallest detail” (98). The pretense at inclusion of people into power and meaning is in fact a most frustrating exclusion, where the body or “naked life” is the final and often only “capital” left. The brunt of denial is aimed at the category of revolution and any claim to fertile universality or open-ended totalisation (Wegner, *Imaginary* 121-28).

A surface example: Rancière notes that “the pseudo-European Constitution testifies to [hatred of democracy and egalitarianism] *a contrario*”; the absence of “the irreducible >power of the people<” is then constituted as ultra-elitist “expert management of monetary and population flows” (*Hatred* 95). In sum, democracy as freedom for individuals how to choose meaningful lives and pursue happiness is evacuated.

A middle-range glocal example: the global neoliberalist market imposes its “intelligibility grid” on all non-economical human affairs, so that whatever cannot be used as “human capital” and subjected to “cost-benefit” and “supply-demand” criteria (Foucault 249 and 252, cf. also 250-53 and 272) becomes simply non-intelligible – irrational and indeed inhuman – and is ruled out of court by power. Its perfect local complements are the carefully manipulated mini-nationalisms of globalisation that mean, most clearly in Africa and eastern Europe, “linguistic unhoming, the deaccession of archives [including their physical destruction, DS], the eradication of historical memory, internal colonization...” (Apter 195) – a creeping version of Newspeak.

A central depth example: the frantic interlocking planning, usually for a year if not less, of all capitalist bureaucracies – financial, political, military, corporative – with the goal of maximum profit is an absencing of a plebeian, workers’ control system of flexible planning extending to long-duration coordination, where human welfare overrides profit. To generalise: the ideal-type eutopia does not know the categories of profit or servitude, dystopia shows them as crazy and inhuman, antiutopia argues how to get more profit through servitude. Its mantra is

There Is No Alternative; its biggest fear is freedom – while hypocritically invoking it in a castrated version: “like unto white[washed] sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23: 27, *King James Version*). In sum, Marx's “profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation,” once nakedly visible only in colonies (*On Colonialism* 88), has now been globalised. Where he identified the reduction of the working day as the prerequisite for the realm of freedom, antiutopia is a whirling turbine of unceasingly frenzied activities on pain of instant failure: no wonder the German term for our age is turbocapitalism.

Finally, what about affects? I see around me in late capitalocene two opposed main ones: the officially required manic cheer on the road to success is always threatened by the much vaster reservoir of naked reactive *fear*, which when shunted off by the hegemony into the grey matter of subaltern brains becomes fear for naked survival. At the genetic and structural core of antiutopia, in my feeling, lies the rulers' fear of radical change that would mean plebeian self-empowerment (that is, revolution in and around production). Wegner noted that it is the passion for totality that accounts for the great fear of utopia which engendered the antiutopia.⁷¹ Only the panic fear, rage, and loathing at the supposed Leninism – communism come to power – can explain the last 40-odd years of finally triumphant capitalism. Its allegorical emblem is the “terminator gene” introduced by mega-corporations into seeds to ensure they cannot be renewed, thus constituting the absence of thousands of years of human crop cultivation, of the utopian horizon of “bread for all” (cf. Matvejević). Fear, as Bloch repeatedly explained, was the negative affect we share with animals, to which hope, only present in humans, is opposed; furthermore, hope “allows for logical and concrete correction and sharpening,” it is an “act of cognitive orientation (*Richtungsakt*)” (126 and 10, see also 83).

Today we are blithely returning to the mere animality in us. Centrally, the whole emancipatory panoply of capitalism's radical bourgeois beginnings – from humanist culture and Enlightenment through revolutions and Romanticism – is being ruthlessly and systematically scrapped, up to the shark-like liquidation of traces of welfare for (the) people. As Marx piercingly observed: when events force upon the bourgeoisie a democratic constitution, this helps the proletariat “and *threatens* the very foundations of bourgeois society” (*Class*). To give one weighty example: the abolition of torture, the favourite feudal and Church tool against rebelling lower classes, was the crown jewel of Enlightenment and bourgeois liberalism; it is now taken back (cf. Hobsbawm 143 and passim). Rewinding history *à rebours*, the revolutionary and liberatory *citoyen* (citizen) aspect is being thoroughly expunged. The result is the relentless deepening and broadening of the “zone of non-being” identified by Fanon for the racialised and colonised subject (7). As Le Guin's protagonist in *The Dispossessed*, to my mind the best piece of utopian writing since Wells, if not More and Swift, tells the ambassador from a totally antiutopian Terra: “You would destroy us rather than admit out reality, rather than admit that there is hope!” (350)

Notes to Part 2

1/ Cf. Moylan, *Demand* 1 and passim. Here I part company with the inclusiveness of the useful Sargisson title, from which I have learned a lot: for example, the Dubai architecture it discusses can be used as a typical component or indeed paragon of our existential antiutopia, akin to the Iron Heel's super-cities in Jack London, so that calling it utopia (in either eutopian and dystopian senses) means repeating Ernst Bloch's major mistake, the desire to equate utopia/nism and

reality. I should add that to accept the use of “utopia” as a swearword – as in the massive anti-Obama campaign cited in Sargisson 22-24 – is the symmetrical obverse of accepting utopia as perfection.

2/ Antiutopia was brilliantly diagnosed in Part 1 of Jameson’s *Seeds* in the early 90s, and I shall use aspects of his argument, but those were still early days. Cf. also McAlear on how dystopia and antiutopia share the urgency of a *de facto* near-future story – whatever their ostensible spacetime – but remain incompatible because the former is to be understood as preventable, resistance is possible even if it fails in the plot, while the latter “seeks to shut down a discussion of alternatives” (30, and see 40 and passim; I should mention that he sees hope in the Newspeak segment of *1984*, where I do not).

The whole complex of differentiating antiutopia from dystopia and utopianism in general is insufficiently explored. Let me mention here only two further foci for testing: language and memory, and the relation of utopianism to death. A characteristic difference may well be the battle over language, memory, and expression that usually develops in dystopia (cf. Baccolini “Gender,” also “Finding”) vs. the monophonic refusal of intricate contradictions in favour of black-and-white adversariness in Ayn Rand or, for example, on all world media. Further, as I argue in “Using Negativities,” utopia and death are akin as enemy brothers (*frères ennemis*) that share “the point of view of the species upon human history,” which denies atomic individuality in favour of “our species being, our insertion in the great chain of the generations, which we know as death.” Therefore, personal death is if not easy then much easier to bear if there is a believable hope for such a linked humanity going on and even advancing. Where death *per se* affirms nothingness as rest, utopia affirms fullness of creative labour on the collective level. Antiutopia refuses to think about either, substituting as its supreme rule the Social Darwinist “survival of the fittest” – meaning the rich.

3/ For the emblematic case of Wordsworth, see the richly argued Kantor, who finds “liberal ideology ... a process by which we recover a way of seeing after we have been disabused of its utopian character” (517). The Immortality Ode registers the defeat of visionary revolution and opts for “incremental reform” (519): “Whither is fled the visionary gleam?/ Where is it now, the glory and the dream?/ - - - /... relinquish[ing] delight/ To live beneath your habitual sway.” Even in this early ancestor one finds essential characteristics of liberal abstract utopianism – order stemming out of disillusion and compensatory turn to timelessness (in Wordsworth: nature, childhood, and deism).

Another interesting ancestor to antiutopia, Jameson suggests in *Archaeologies* 144, would be Samuel Delany’s *Trouble on Triton*, where the eponymous planetoid harbours a plethora of changing varieties of physical appearance, [gender](#), and [sexual orientation](#). It is unfortunately a much over-simplified and rather intolerant wish-dream of homosexual and cognate gender counterculture opposed to what he wrongly felt were Le Guin’s totalising sociopolitical tendencies – and her foregrounding of heterosexuality – in the “critical utopia” of *The Dispossessed*. On the one hand *Triton* deals only with life-styles, and one can sympathise with its quest for freedom of experiment; on the other it presents a simple negation of however rainbow-like unity, and therefore of positive utopianism as such, in favour of enclave diversity within a magnified version of the 1960s New York and London yet without economics –

characteristically, even a mega-war is treated as peripheral. The undoubted verve and acuity of Delany is therefore sectarian and eminently cooptable, choosing ephemeral quasi-utopian enclaves – if sex and *jouissance* is your utopia – within the never shown “reigning dystopia of the system” (Jameson *ibidem*).

4/ See to begin with Jameson *Archaeologies*, Sargent “Three” 7-10, and the titles by Baccolini and Moylan, most thoroughly in Moylan *Scraps*.

5/ Autobiography: in 1964-65 I was a “special student” from a poor country at Yale. It was the exciting, ozone-laden age of anti-Vietnam-War and Black protests in the USA, full of great ideas sprouting at every corner; at the second US Conference of Socialist Scholars (yes!) I gave a paper on Brecht and had the speakers’ privilege of breakfast with Herbert Marcuse... Though I was at the School of Drama, I fell in with some people interested in SF & utopia – Jacques Ehrmann in French studies, who died early, and my long-time friend Mike Holquist from Slavic studies, who then in the fatidic year of 1968 published the brilliant little piece on “How To Play Utopia.” Their central view was that utopia was a chronotopic equivalent of the conditional mode in grammar: not indicating but supposing and speculating.

A note on Cold War linguistics: I asked Mike how did a Minnesota Swede get into Slavic studies. He was drafted during the Korean war and told by the CIA he could go to the frontline or learn Russian in order to monitor army messages around that front; he chose the latter. On the other side, at the same time, Arkadiy Strugatsky was told by analogous entities to learn Japanese for the same purpose, and stationed in an anti-aircraft unit near Vladivostok. I myself was in the army for 11 months beginning Sept. 1, 1956, and offered my language knowledge to Belgrade, but the Yugoslav Army wasn’t so sophisticated, so I served in an engineering unit at the Hungarian border, waiting for the Russian tanks to swing South from Budapest and finish off us too...

6/ I came to the concept of constituted absence by being reminded of the role of the Baroque god in Pascal and Racine, whereof Lucien Goldmann speaks in *Le Dieu caché* – with thanks to Michael Löwy– or indeed of the Mbuya tribe’s father god Ñamandu in Pierre Clastres (see Suvin “Power”). This absence was in history positively sublated by the appearance of a revolutionary wave of rich personalities like Denis Diderot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Tom Payne. Alas, the constitutive absence of value signalled by antiutopia is a repressed and anal-retentive obverse of the Baroque tragicalness. It flows out of triumphant counter-revolution and it is carried by impoverished *Übermenschen* like Ayn Rand and the Donalds, Rumsfeld and Trump. The return from *citoyen* democracy to a semi-masked (and often open) bourgeois tyranny adds to cynicism and it is also a confession of weakness: as Marx, cited here, often pointed out, true or plebeian democracy would work against capitalism.

7/ See Wegner, “Jameson’s” 199 and *passim*; I have been much stimulated by Jameson’s chapter “Journey into Fear” and the general horizon of his *Archaeologies*.

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