

'The uneasy spring of 1988'

A theatrical presentation in five acts with a prologue and an epilogue

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Foreword

As a cultural phenomenon 'the post-modern condition' has been described as the decline of the Meta-Narratives of Science and Art. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard this post-modernity has created a crisis in the legitimacy of all intellectual activities. As the Meta-Narrative of scientific modernity, 'the quest for truth', has lost its value, the basis of all human knowledge (including ethical normativity, how we 'should' act as human beings, as citizens of a state, etc.) is in a state of crisis.¹

But the denouncement of the 'great narratives' of modernity can also be seen as a new Meta-Narrative in itself. Lyotard first eliminates the great narratives and then smuggles them back in, as Fredric Jameson, a post-modernist himself, has said. Post-modernity has also legitimized a number of relapses into the uncritical 'bourgeois liberal' state of the social sciences. By referring to post-modernity, several decades of critical theory and research can legitimately be flushed into the gutter as 'modern' pomposity. This discourse has curious connections with the old 'modern' narrative on science and ideology.

Utopia was one of the Meta-Narratives of modernity. Perhaps post-modernity does not include a loss of utopias as such, but a change in their nature. Our contemporary utopias are as negative as our denounced 'post-modern' modernity. The sappy liberals of criminology still often end their criminal policy statements with a word or two about paradise. Criminology is said to need positive utopias to direct research into areas, where Man is not seen as a part of a system, but as a creative being.

The American author William S. Burroughs has written about another kind of utopia. In his futuristic vision, originally inspired by the youth riots of the 1960s, society has started to battle against its rioting gangs. Burroughs' youth, the 'Wild Boys', have gone into hiding in the deserts and mountains to develop their own strategies. Society is at war.²

By describing the marginality of life through fiction, a writer often says

something about the world she herself lives in. For some reason the eyes and heart of an author have never been enough for a social scientist. Scientific utopias, whether positive or negative, are always secularised, at least on the surface.

But all utopias are dangerous, because one man's heaven usually ends up as the other man's hell. And vice versa.

Welcome!

Prologue

Etymological utopia, ou topos, no place, was the political heritage of a dreamy European culture to Man caged in an economic system. Utopia was an asylum for a weary continent, a refuge with only one law. An unnecessary collective conscience and a political aim were forbidden. Utopia was not meant to be constructed, it already existed in Time. But you had to find your way. During the journey your map was an exotic and colourful postcard of a luminous city built of silver, ivory and white marble. The text on the back read: 'Come home!'

Europe knew two kinds of utopias, social and normative. She tried to realize social utopias, but they usually crumbled either due to their own contradictions or outside interventions. The normative utopias of a bourgeois culture had in common a wide-eyed virtuousness and a temporal dimension in the future. As a positive *Weltanschauung*, a normative utopia was meant to direct the subjective decisions of individual Men, and from the totality of these personal resolutions, the imaginary heaven that we could now only dream of would materialize into the 'City of the Righteous'.

As white presupposes black, the good is born from and thrives on the bad, the Jin and Jang of our heavenly discourse. The counterpart of a positive utopia, its 'bad', was a planet inhabited by cynical doubters. But even these pessimists lived in the shadow of a form of negative utopia. On diverse levels of human devotion and enthusiasm, the pessimists acted against their utopia without knowing how to define their 'good'. And despite it all, the pessimists were accused of everything that the utopians actually were: dreamers, determinists, unwilling to act.

The positive utopians were a long-lived and persistent species, of dinosaurian origin. With an idle grandeur and a deafening pomposity they ennobled their main opposition, the 'politicos', into a civilized and well-mannered theatre group. The mutual despise of the utopians and the politics matured into a popular play. Its stage was a megalomaniac society called 'State', its script the empty phrases of an ancient soap-opera called 'Information'.

But long before the last Act it began to rain outside.

First act*Stage A*

The main boulevard of a metropolis, flooded with light. A mild evening breeze makes the state flags fly. A dome-like building, the Terrarium of the People is full. The annual celebration organized by the Cultural Committee has started.

The hall is packed with people of all sorts: old and young, men and women. Varying dresses: at the back of the hall cheaper looking people, in the centre of the hall on a platform honorary medals glitter on uniforms and suits. Television follows the happening which is projected live for the crowds outside and into every home.

The cupola comes to life. Laser beams form a continuous flow of pictures and visions. Loud speakers roar on all sides of the Terrarium. The stream of visions on the rounded ceiling of the building portray the cultural achievements of the past year, a gallant march of inventions and commodities.

Script A

From the official accounting of the celebration: 'This is the cultural year of all working men and women. There is no elite, no separate elite culture, but only our culture, regardless of our position in society. The diverse elements of our culture are its richness, its strength and its continuity. Our youth and their culture have a special place in our hearts, because especially the young must today assume the responsibility of tomorrow. They are the driving force that we must all support to the fullest. In order for life to prevail, the young must be given the possibility to live'.

'Through our efforts we have founded, built and rebuilt this country and its culture, together. Each individual donation of human toil has lead us to the situation where we now stand. We do not work only for ourselves, but for a common cause. We are a people, and in our democracy the people must reign. And we are in command of this bold progress. Our work is not sacrifice, but an honour. Work is the road to choice and freedom. Let the pride of what we are be reflected in the sky tonight!'

Stage B

A smoky rock club, the air is full of fumes. The noise of the audience is unbearable. People push each other around in the full-house club. Merchandise changes owners on all corners of the room: powders, pills, liquids,

syringes. The first chords of a guitar from the dark stage put the audience on the move towards the front. The bright spotlights at the back of the room illuminate thick layers of smoke. The roar of an engine fills the air. A chromed motor bike with wolf-shaped horns rushes in from a side door to the front of the stage. The biker, clad in black leather, stands in attention and raises his fist. Strobe lights focused on the public reveal that all fists have been raised in answer. The biker begins to sing, and a cheering audience joins in.

Script B

A rock song:

'Our power

Too many words
 too many promises
 T'was only a delusion
 a false perversion
 Anarchy on videos
 demon rum for dipsos
 Heroin, amphetamine
 they take away my medicine

Our power

Copper domination
 to instant abolition
 Paradise is possible
 if we come together
 The power is our
 this is the hour

Our power?.

Vision

The new technology made possible a visual information that was disconnected from time. Events were transferred via satellite to mass media outlets in real time. The comments and attitudes of politicians were offered together at the same time with the events.

Visual signification systems started to replace language systems and written text. Visuals separated entities into particles. Reality was shaped through a flow of events outside their social and material context. A sensation in the receiver was produced effectively, entertainingly and easily. First it offered filling into leisure, but later these visuals changed into a general and comprehensive system of information production. The mind grew dependent on visuals and started to operate by visualizing abstracts. The ability to read was losing its importance, and vocabulary diminished into the banalities of everyday expressions. There was simply no need for books, or interest, for that matter.

Rational political decisions and written ideologies had to make way for dramatized and suggestive statements. How issues and opinions looked on the outside surface was more important than their substance and contents. The legitimation of political choices was based on the quality of sensations and experiences.

Where writing and text were fields of individualistic experience, visual forms of information were areas of collective sight. Visuals gathered people together not only on an objective level in concrete events, but also on a subjective level creating a feeling of common emotion and perception amongst people, a modern form of tribalism. Within the system of visuals, social objects were seen simultaneously and as alike.

Out of these components the diverse groups and subcultures developed their own visual systems of signification that functioned as symbolic identities for the respective communities. Visuals gathered the members of these communities together to rituals that reinforced the cohesion of the groups.

Second Act

Stage

Nightfall in an autonomous ethnic suburb. Broken down houses portrayed as silhouettes against a moonlit sky. Junkies and winos keep warm close to some burning ruins. Community members returning home from a collective meeting. Their own guards see to the safety of the members of the community that live on the outer parts of the suburb.

A series of strong explosions alert the street walkers. Some unbroken windows are shattered by the pressure, a violent fire can be seen at a helicopter port in the distance. The street walkers continue onwards.

At the port three helicopters are on fire. A fourth tries to fly off, but a rocket fired from a black lorry passing by stops it. The lorry disappears into the darkness of the suburb. Emergency sirens wail. On the wall of the burning

building a graffiti resembling an eye.

Script

From a discussion between a suburban official security chief (SC) and a higher police officer (PO):

SC: 'How was this possible? Can't you even defend yourself against a couple of junkies? How do you expect me to believe that you can maintain order even in our own areas?'

PO: 'Your suburbs are a totally different issue. They are well protected, but down here we simply do not have enough resources. We are short on man power, our equipment is minimal, and especially our anti-riot armament is out of date.'

SC: 'Explanations and explanations again! You do know how to explain, but you can't even protect your bloody helicopters. We can't afford to let them be broken by the likes of you. How am I going to explain this to the Council of Capital, bloody hell?!'

PO: 'On the whole, the situation is under control. Those muggers can hit targets only incidentally. These attacks have no wider importance. As I said, the situation is under control. We are . . . (laughter) . . . masters of the house, aren't we?'

SC: 'Hmm . . . I guess you are right. I think we have tamed these rioters quite effectively and made the rehabilitation programme work. But still, how the hell did they succeed in this?'

PO: 'They still have arms from the army supply incident. I can think of no other explanation. The effectivity of this attack surprised us, too.'

SC: 'Surprised you, although you have known of the robbery for . . . ?'

PO: 'Yes, but we didn't think they would use the arms against us.'

SC: 'Oh, forget it!'

PO: 'If we could only get more supplies and freer hands . . .'

SC: 'Yes, yes, we have discussed this before, but the rehabilitation programme has had first priority in the budget. Your authorization cannot be widened just like that. There are issues of legality and political responsibility. But I'll take this up again in our next meeting'.

Vision

The economical centres and the cities broke into smaller units. The increase of violence under the depression, the continuous concentration of population in the suburbs and the erosion of the metropolises forced the wealthy to form

their own communities outside the towns and industrial areas. These communities, or 'garden cities' as they called them, were isolated from the rest of society by walls, private patrol forces and sophisticated electronic control systems. Through their own educational, welfare, food production and energy organizations they were able to function without having to rely on the outside world.

The diverse ethnic, religious and ecological pressure movements formed their own suburbs into vacated city areas by squatting buildings and production plants. The formation of these communities took place with official support despite some incidental conflicts between the squatters and the law enforcement authorities. Land and buildings were distributed for a nominal fee, economical support was given for the preservation of self-initiated cultural units, for the commencement of agricultural or industrial production and for the restoration of buildings and houses. The accomplishment of neighbourhood democracy and the respect for individual ways of living was a manifest principle of the state, but behind this policy were the needs created by mass unemployment which the communities could fulfill.

Social problems and the control of unimportant deviance was now in the hands of the communities themselves, which in turn made possible the official control of general restlessness created by the depression. On the one hand, the communities as autonomous 'ghettos' were easier to supervise than spontaneous movements, and on the other, the permission to form these cultural units softened criticism against the state.

Some of the marginal groups were left outside this community formation process. They had no aims the state could accept; they had no aims in general apart from hedonism and self-preservation. These desperados, or 'despos', maintained their group identities by styles and the different elements of amusement. Their relationships with one another were regulated by different forms of turf treaties that also organized the groups in hierarchial structures.

Third Act

Stage

A high twenty-storied tower-like building stands in silent solitude on a field. The bars on the symmetrically arranged windows reflect the rising sun. A rather low rectangular fence surrounds the building. Between the house and the fence a well attended lawn, a green monotony which is only broken by an asphalt path leading from a gate to the main door of the building. On metal poles connected to the fence cameras which circulate 360 degrees at a slow pace. At the gate a marble sign which reads: 'Rehabilitation Centre II'.

A white windowless ambulance drives in through the gate, stops at the main door. Two men dressed in clinical white overalls come to open the rear door of the car. They lead a youngster, also dressed in white, out of the vehicle. The driver hands a file to one of the men. The car moves on out of the premises, the two men and the youngster enter the building. The doors close, then silence again. The morning sun rises higher.

Script

A psychologist's diagnosis:

'Customer:

Register No.	A-003201
Age	14
Sex	Male
Profession	None
Parents	Mother retired bank clerk Father unknown'

'Arrested by police in city district 247G block-area 16 in connection with a drug raid. The interrogations have revealed that the customer was on a getaway from school. During the escape he has injured a school official. He has used drugs and generally behaved violently. Numerous forms of anti-social activities. The juvenile courts have reviewed the case and forwarded the customer to psychologic categorization . . .'

'Has not been able to give rational motives for his actions. Has tried to legitimate his deeds by way of emotion and amusement . . .'

'In order to:

- a) reintegrate the customer to the network of social relations as an active subject;
- b) restore the customers linguistic abilities; and
- c) recreate his moral responsibility concerning himself and his socio-material surroundings;

the customer will be placed under Programme PsycSoc-03 at Rehabilitation Centre II until further notice'.

Vision

The discursive world of a homogenous society broke into splinters: the subcultures adopted symbolic structures which were still connected to those of

society. The state tolerated difference as a form of cultural wealth, but the levels of this tolerance were formally regulated. Through the production of information, the educational system and the existence of democratic channels, alternative world views were kept on an acceptable level.

The inner unity of the subcultures reinforced their independent production of meanings and signification. The collective legitimation of the existing political institutions decayed and transformed into the legitimate ideology of these subcultural communities. Morals and norms were shaped with reference to the subcultures' own practices of power, the right to use violence derived from new micro-structural aims.

Educational institutions became desolate. The remaining schools were forced to lock their doors, and they were meant to reeducate and integrate marginal groups that had lost contact with the bulk of society. Teachers became video and audio cassettes that school officials played to the pupils in large auditoriums and theatres. In general the groups at the marginal segments of society were left alone as long as they did not endanger the essential function of the state: the production of capital. The problem of deviance was not regarded as very important, and accordingly there was a wide spread belief in the effectivity of various forms of ideological control. But something evidently went wrong.

Fourth Act

Stage

A large city square at dusk. Street lights, shining in orange in the damp and foggy air, illuminate a noisy crowd that fills the area. The square is bordered by numerous military and para-military units. Numerous different uniforms, all soldiers armed with rifles. The crowd consists of especially youth. Many groups that can be told apart by garments and style, moving about en masse. Occasional manifest conflicts that end as soon as a uniform-clad approaches. On one wall of the square a giant screen, on which economic announcements are reflected. Their messages are drowned in the restless noise of the crowd. After the announcements loud fanfares. A coat of arms is projected on the screen, and then a facial image of a man. The trustworthy looking image addresses the crowd.

Script

The Leader of the Nation speaks: ‘Citizens. I speak to you at the hour of need. The ordeals of the recent years are, despite the bold efforts of our government, beginning to effect our every-day lives. The changes in nature have led to a decrease in the production of foodstuffs. The powerless farmer can only look upon as his field grows into a poisonous harvest. The fisherman finds only inedible seaweed in his nets. Our household animals do not reproduce. And at the same time industrial plants are being closed down. The deep depression has forced the working man to leave his factory . . .’

‘And in these times of hopelessness some greedy parts of our society have started to rob us of the bread we have to share, despite our common interests. They trade outside the official networks. They exchange commodities and services in secret, without informing of their transactions. And they guard their profits and their fortune selfishly not willing to share with anybody but their own kin. They will share nothing with the common man. They do not understand that we all need each other . . .’

Vision

In the long run the decision-making structures of the industrial giants made the independent power of the state needless; the political system became a passive bystander. Eventually the economical resources and the production capacity of the industry grew to the critical point where the ecological decay led to the economical. Or vice versa, no one really bothers to remember in what order the incidents occurred. When, on the macro level, the capital incomes of the state and organized industry started to decline, the forces of production spread wide into the segments of society had to be reunited. But the firm and homogenous society with whose economical support industry could be lifted on its feet again, did not exist anymore. An economical structure based on an artificial monetary economy coming down in a tail spin did not have a lot to offer to the individual, and the factories and production plants emptied quickly as the remaining working people withdrew to smaller communities and into the shelter of more natural economies.

Before the final collapse the macro level organizations tried desperately to revitalize the idea of society. The countless small and diverse groups and subcultures were once again pulled together with an abstract dream of unity and the future, but these independent groups had long ago learned how to survive outside the official economy. The colonies these groups formed were in control of the few remaining cultivable areas of land and guarded them from outsiders. Trade between the individual groups was based on barter. Their

norm and signification structures had developed to be so strong and independent that the outdated languages and ideologies of the macro level could not puncture through them.

When the failure of a unification of society from little pieces was evident, there were rapid changes in the organizations and functions of the state. Large-scale industry and the state were once again united into one. The organizational structures of society were centralized. Control was tightened on all sectors of social life, and the supervision agencies were militarized. The huge amount of offences against rationing regulations soon clogged the judiciary that had once withered away with the trust put into informal control. Speedy and temporary courts were founded. Eventually the police and the other para-military control units were authorized with enough independent decision-making power to make all court proceedings unnecessary. Abolished former institutions started functioning again.

Fifth Act

Stage

A rainy night scenery. In the midst of a dying forest a white run-down manor house illuminated from four lighttowers. The towers are connected by a dense barbed wire fence. On the grounds between the barbed wire and the house there is no movement, two human figures in sight lying motionless on their stomachs. A flickering light from torches and candles can be seen in the windows of the house, a squalling and frightened sound of voices can be heard. Outside on the other side of the barbed wire fence a military unit in stabilized combat positions, two-man machine gun units in the lighttowers. A dark figure runs out of the house towards the barbed wire fence. One shot. The figure falls and remains motionless. Shouting and crying from the house. Then again no motion.

Script

Report number 33254/9/96 of the Mental Health Officer in duty: 'City district 311W, house 548/17, the so called "White fortress", a community found by public informant. Inhabitants: despos, category: ethnic. House surrounded under Paragraph 18 of the Psycho Sanity Act. Immediate danger of psychoepidemic evident, the house and the surrounding area are put in quarantine. The siege was conducted unnoticed during the night while the despos were sleeping. When all measures were completed and the lights switched on, there was a

short encounter. Stones and other particles and later incendiary bombs were thrown from the house. No casualties. During the siege three despos have been eliminated trying to enter the house and eight trying to leave the house with aim of surrender’.

‘Inhabitant estimate: 150 despos. No signs of agriculture or other forms of industry in the surrounding grounds, inhabitants must accordingly be hunters and collectors. Proposal for procedures: unrecycleable forces of production, area must be isolated and declared State Sanitarium’.

Vision

The state and its supporters went into counter-attack. A sharp rise in activities against the new society-dogma was evident. All social enterprises were now concentrated on saving the large scale economic macro structures, and accordingly control was militarized to the extreme. The supervision of deviant behaviour was in fact warfare between the state and the numerous small and diverse groups and subcultures within society, but because the central leadership was still trying to maintain the picture of a normatively homogenous society, these conflicts were never regarded even as crime. The dialogue was about the big mental disease epidemic.

The state regarded the small groups as either necessary or unnecessary according to the possibility of integrating the group back into society as an economically productive power. Specific mental health units specialized in stabilized combat were founded under the leadership of the police organization. Their mission was to search and to locate groups living outside the main structures of society and to bring these groups into high security production units. Useless or unnecessary forces of production were placed in prisons, hospitals and other institutions.

The existing and reopened institutions became overcrowded with unnecessary groups quickly, and in the institutional control units working under capacity and resource pressures order was very hard to maintain. The patients took over power in the institutions quite often, and the personell, mainly soldiers and therapists, moved outside to guard the institution. The soldiers were to physically isolate the institution effectively from the outside world, and the therapists were specialized in forced information that would stimulate the inner conflicts of the institution and thus hasten its natural death.

Because the inmate capacity of the existing and reopened old institutions could never sufficiently cope with the endless flow of unnecessaries, the mental health units were soon given the authority to isolate the dwellings of the deviant communities: buildings, farms, sewer networks and subway tunnels. The construction of new and expensive institutions was not required.

Epilogue

RIPPED OFF FROM:
 ALEX COX, DAVID LYNCH,
 NICHOLAS ROEG, RIDLEY SCOTT,
 JOHN CARPENTER,
 DAVID CRONENBERG,
 WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS,
 URSULA LEGUIN,
 RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER,
 JEAN-LUC GODARD, STEPHEN KING,
 JEAN-JACQUES BIENIEX,
 THE BIRTHDAY PARTY,
 THE SEX PISTOLS, L'AMOURDER,
 COLIN WILSON, TOBE HOOPER,
 GEORGE MILLER, GEORGE OGILVY,
 EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN,
 THE NEWS, THE END?

Notes

1. Lyotard, Jean-Francois: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis 1984); as to the themes of this paper, see also Morrison, Wayne: *Reflective Considerations for a Post-Modern Penology: Science and the Narratives*. Papers on Crime Policy 2, Contributions from HEUNI scholars. HEUNI Publication Series No. 10, p. 111-148, Helsinki 1986.
2. Burroughs, William S.: *Wild Boys. The Book of the Dead*. (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972).