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Living in (Im) Material Worlds: Modes of Production and Consumption in Utopian Literature

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LIVING IN (IM) MATERIAL WORLDS: MODES OF PRODUCTION
AND CONSUMPTION IN UTOPIAN LITERATURE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

By
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Accepted by:
Dr. LeMahieu, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

My thesis examines and defines “conditions of production” and “conditions of consumption” as they apply to both Marxist economic theory and to the more culturally-oriented production and consumption of literary texts according to Pierre Bourdieu. I will establish the relationship between these conditions as cause and effect, complementary, and, finally, mutually necessary depending upon their context and manifestation. Alterations in the conditions of production and consumption affect our treatment of their corresponding, associative dichotomies in the literary tradition – the transcendent and the material, the spiritual and the corporal, the well-wrought art object and the commodity fetish, and, finally, male and female. I will finally demonstrate how the utopian text in particular, with its paradoxical goals of social change and mass marketability, both alludes to and eludes these categorizations as it projects and capitalizes on new, other worlds.

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INTRODUCTION

UTOPIA'S SELF-CONFLICTED FORM

We often examine utopian literature more for its failures than for its successes. It is a genre consistently labeled by academic and layperson alike as escapist, totalitarian, retrograde, irrelevant, and nonsensical. Utopias do not know their “place.” They attempt to create fantastical, wish-fulfilling visions of different worlds for a mass audience, and broach large questions of ontology. In our current era that avoids the fixation of meaning, utopian writers attempt to manufacture worlds that embody a form of Truth. They do not, however, take up this burden unknowingly: utopian texts give a significant wink to their readers, signaling that their elaborate constructions are both games in themselves and participants in the game of creating meaning. Utopias therefore conjoin philosophical significance with escapist wish-fulfillment, earnestly striving to create a perfect society while at the same time hinting that such efforts will necessarily be imperfect.

An analysis of the material conditions surrounding the creation of utopia may better inform us about its paradoxes and eccentricities in form and content. In this thesis I examine modes of economic and artistic production and consumption in utopian fiction, also sometimes labeled speculative fiction. I view a production-oriented Marxist criticism of socioeconomic alterity in utopian fiction and a consumption-oriented cultural and aesthetic criticism of the utopian imagination's mass form in conversation and cross-pollination with one another. Utopian producers through the history of the genre foresee their worlds becoming appropriated by the dominant, and therefore consciously choose the moments of their textual failures in order to both highlight and criticize the

impossibility of genuine dissent in the world order of state capitalism. However, when we include these utopian works' conditions of consumption, moments of both radical re-appropriation and further subsumption by normative values appear: the unpredictability of public reactions to and use of these utopian texts attests to their potentially transformative nature. Ultimately then, utopia is liberated from the logic of its productive conditions to become common property, the people's literature – albeit that of capitalist consumer's – for better or for worse.

While this thesis focuses on the ways in which modes of production and consumption shape the texts themselves, they also shape the works' individuals authors and authorities. Utopian literature's various self-abrogations may or may not be formulated through authorial “intentionality.” Utopian critics such as Fredric Jameson argue that the process of a “one-dimensional” system or a permanent “state apparatus” through the logic of late global capitalism by definition negates alterity; if this is so, then these internal nullifications may have always already been inscribed into utopian texts that would otherwise seek alternative social forms. However, a perhaps more hopeful critical stance grants our utopianists the ability to choose their instances of textual failures (whether of style, structure, or the imagination), and imply that such foreknown and recursive shortcomings operate as critiques of a system that does not allow for an imaginable overthrow.

Speculative fiction is both complicit with and critical of its dually profit-seeking and activist motivations. Its association with what Pierre Bourdieu labels a “fundamentally heteronomous, middle brow culture” (129) complicates matters further –

the artistic production of utopia depends upon consumption on a mass scale, implicating this form in the vicissitudes of the capitalist marketplace. “Success” for a product of speculative fiction thus means a fetishized aesthetic dissonance with our globalized capitalist system as well as an equally avid participation in the buying and selling of literary goods: no wonder the genre’s manifold tensions. Nevertheless, by this same process utopias manage to avoid the economy of “bad faith” that more highbrow forms may be accused of, in which association with capital is not needed by a previously established social elite. They also avoid a culture of “bad art” that accompanies bourgeois consumption, in which artistic representations are just slightly different iterations of previously successful products. This unique problem and promise as a form of experimental, yet mass-consumed art form establishes the utopian genre as a field which may give scholars a key to understanding the methodologies of aesthetic reification and resistance. Bourdieu’s discussion of the artistically “legitimized form of middle-brow art, the Western” (128) makes for a helpful parallel to our study of utopian literature as it struggles for legitimate influence in the economic and cultural spheres:

Producers of Westerns have to work within the very strict conventions of a heavily stereotyped genre...referring back to previous solutions – assumed to be known – in the solutions they provide to canonical problems, and they are continually bordering on pastiche or parody of previous authors, against whom they measure themselves. (128)

Bourdieu argues that this aesthetic process invites a “second-degree reading” and “authorizes detached and distanced perception, quite as much as first-degree adherence,

and calls for either erudite analysis or the aesthete's wink" (128). The intrinsic limitations and conventional tropes of a particular genre, therefore, can ironically invite a better avenue for a multiplicity of interpretations, free from the binary of high criticism for an academic elite and base entertainment for the masses. Speculative fiction employs a convention of unconventionality that follows recurring patterns of spatial or inner exploration, a "play" with newly imagined sociopolitical forms, and even a Bakhtinian employment of carnivalesque excess.

Perhaps, then, utopias require more than either the exegetical analysis or the aesthetic luxuriation proposed by Bourdeiu, but instead a "both – and" application of a critical eye and a carnival spirit in order to imagine and enact the social change promised by this literary form. Like the Western, speculative fiction attempts to solve the problem of its own canon – the fictive construction of an implementable revolution – with each of its new products. Each utopian work participates in self-parody and self-pastiche, along with a parody of its genre at large.

When constructing an interpretation of utopian literature, we can override a closed, Oedipal system that corresponds with an "anxiety of influence": utopian authors actively borrow and playfully refer to established tropes of their genre rather than seeking to overthrow them, applying their resistance to social rather than literary hegemony due to utopian fiction's generally uncanonized status. Shifts, such as changes in gender constructions from Heinlein to Le Guin, tend towards the dialectical rather than the personal or individual. Instead, we can substitute an outward-seeking, self-reflective (and at times self-destructive) model of an "anxiety of readership," which could also be termed

an “anxiety of consumption” or even anxieties of consummation and re-production. I later apply these terms to a discussion of gender and utopia in Chapter II. As Althusser observes in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” production must reproduce “the productive forces” and “the existing relations of production” (128). Likewise, consumption becomes the means by which the productive and consumptive modes become consummated, allowing a reproduction of these existing modes in a cyclic feedback loop that pre-empts an interruption of capital’s dissemination. Therefore, utopian forms consciously express their participation in reproducing the conditions of their production. In other words, they admittedly reproduce a hegemonic economic structure and its accompanying “superstructure” of state ideology. Readers, or consumers, then internalize and are “interpolated” by the ideologies that these products carry forth (Althusser 170).

However, an analysis of the “force of desire” – which, as Derrida claims, underlies every metaphor – inherent in these Marxist linguistic metaphors of base, superstructure, and consumer re-production allows the utopian narrative opportunities for dissent. Althusser speaks of an economic “base” and its corresponding ideological (as well as cultural or artistic) “superstructure” as a “spatial metaphor” (135) and epistemological technique. This metaphorical structuring device embodies the hope that, in changing conditions of labor and productive/consumptive modes, the subsuming political and cultural ideologies that depend upon socioeconomic stratification will topple. By imagining already realized social transformations, utopian literature seeks to construct new cultural and ideological superstructures – thereby allowing for a re-examination of

the base/superstructure relationship. At times, this remaking seems more like a reproduction of the existing material base: segments of Thomas More's *Utopia* resemble early modern colonization despite the work's attempt to remove itself from European political corruption, and Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* reinscribes preexisting patriarchal norms even it envisions radically new sexual rituals.

If production and consumption, however, are imbued with Bourdieu's aesthetic meaning in combination with Marx's economic one, the production of alterity could alter the "thinking" of its producers and consumers, creating an opposite and parallel productive/consumptive cycle. The intercourse between literary producers and consumers in utopian literature, altering thought, purports to alter economic and cultural relations. The means by which modes of production and consumption in the literary-ideological exchange can simultaneously overcome and incorporate relations of production and consumption in the capitalist exchange become apparent: "men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking" (Marx 47). A Marxist interpretation of utopian production therefore perceives it to be an ongoing systemic process, whether conflated or contending with a state apparatus. While the utopian authors described in this work dramatically differ in goals, outlook, and era, their work focuses on highly similar questions and tensions. In *The German Ideology*, Marx hints at the necessity for a systemic analysis of art that is contingent upon external, historic and material circumstances: "at the present time it has already been found necessary to organize this 'unique' activity"; artistic productions are not "works which

‘only this Unique person is capable of producing’” (108). Utopias are therefore at some level products to be expected from a society that necessitates both internal ideological cohorts and external “opiates.” This situation at the margins and the center of dominant ideology demonstrates utopian texts’ danger and importance to revolutionary thought.

A temporal, historical examination of these texts’ production and consumption reflects a historical Hegelian dialectic, as well as a literary “permanent revolution” that is intrinsic to the genre itself. Bourdieu applies a concept of “ritual sacrilege” (80) to the relations between canonical and avant-garde high art, portraying the act of flouting literary tradition as an entrenched, proscribed artistic custom of canonization in itself. This model can be extended to other, more popular forms of artistic production as well, albeit perhaps at a slower pace. Utopian productions inspire antithetical dystopian parallels; they also tend to comment upon and revolt from previous projections of an ideal social form. Thus, Bacon’s technocratic *New Atlantis* differentiates itself from More’s return to a “natural” monastic and aesthetic lifestyle, and the 1960’s “New Wave’s” focus on changing “inner spaces” consciously revolt from 1950’s “classic” science fiction’s focus on “outer space” exploration. Rather than being an individualistic producer/artist-led rebellion alone, this process reflects changes in the consumer and changes in modes of consumership that are shaped by their historical, material contexts, from the printing press and mass literacy in More and Bacon’s time to the television and mass media in Heinlein and Dick’s.

By combining the terminology of Althusser, Lukács, and Marx, we can develop a conceptualization of the relationship between “Subject”/author and “subject”/reader. The

relation between authorial producer and the consuming subject who both is subjected by, and subjects the object or work, is at once economic, ideological, and aesthetic at its core. In his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács mentions in passing that the author is a “subject” whose “subjectivity creates the work” (40), or the object.¹ Therefore, the product or object of the text establishes the connection between producer and consumer, and reproduces the conditions of their ongoing relations. The author’s work becomes a means by which Subject and subject form their mirror relations; as Marx argues, “a product becomes a product only through consumption, consumption creates [new] production and recreates a need, and production also produces consumption” (132). Critics such as Bakhtin, Bourdieu, and Marcuse inform us of an equally vital cultural methodology in interpreting utopian literature: the object of these texts also becomes the link between the more artistic modes of production and the mass consumption that production entails, explaining the tensions between the two that combine and clash. This process is not, in turn, without its ramifications for utopian sociopolitical messages. Althusser examines “ideology” as a means by which “a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject” submits to predetermined values of a state apparatus. Similarly, through consuming utopian texts, readers are transformed from individuals to “subjects” of their author’s ideological intent, in many ways subjected by their consumption of these ideal forms. Utopia’s complicity with market capitalism, therefore, creates conditions in which its own fictive state apparatuses impel readers in similar ways to real economic domination, albeit with far different productive goals. However, through a critical

¹ I have here preserved Althusser’s distinction between an upper-case, deified “Subject” who interpolates and a lower-case, reified “subject” who is interpolated.

consumption of these texts, we can see that the ideology we are “subjected” to is indeed subjective – a point that utopian textual producers attempt to self-consciously signal throughout their creations. Therefore, speculative literature attempts to avoid and overcome the “double-bind” of creating alterities that carry the danger of becoming equally dominating social structures.

Utopias attempt to surpass their productive and consumptive limitations through their association with what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as popular “folk culture,” a tie that binds them to market exchange in a more liberated manner and frees speculative fiction from making simple, “bare negations” of prosaic life (11). Speculative fiction playfully advertises both its distinctiveness and complicity, in a fashion that evokes Bakhtin’s description of carnival announcements, which “toy with the objects that they announce, and they include in this free game all the ‘sacred’ and ‘exiled’ topics that they can fit into their oratory...popular advertising is always ironic” (160). Ultimately, then, utopias deliberately defer their transcendent promise by blending the sacred and the profane, resisting the confining ideals of the church or the marketplace.

While this work can hardly demonstrate a full scope of such permutations, I have selected texts that clearly represent this ongoing dialectical process. In Chapter I, I have chosen Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* in order to interrogate its usual status as a “founding” text: even as it becomes the genre’s label and establishes defining characteristics, More’s text is influenced both by other preceding utopias and used in its process of consumption as a colonial justification. Works of Robert Heinlein and Ursula Le Guin that examine modes of production and consumption as they relate to gender and corporeality present a

further case study of utopian thesis/antithesis in Chapter II, in which subsumption by social norms and a liberating cultural revolution quickly follow one another. Finally, Philip K. Dick's 1960's novels demonstrate how the production of new realities and consumption of mass-distributed economic or textual products can coexist even within the same body of work in Chapter III. These examples additionally display the relations of production and consumption to productive literary authority and a rhetorical persuasion of consumers to an alternative ideology.

Utopian literature thus operates as a highly conflicted, contested form that yet strives to blur the binaries between complicity and dissent. Its promise lies in both the transferability of ideological systems from producer and consumer, and the recursive forces that prevent this end from becoming fully realized. Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais is applicable to its popular speculative descendent: utopia "leaves a gay loophole – a loophole that opens on a distant future and lends an aspect of ridicule" and recognizes the limits of sober "progressiveness" (454). Utopia thrives on its status as a socially renewing fictive elixir that promises transformation yet denies an opiated submission to any dominating ideological system. The utopian text therefore continuously resists both existing systems of the capitalist state and any ideal alternative resolution that would signal the end of the utopian historical and aesthetic dialectic.

CHAPTER I

“A LITTLE MORE THAN KIN, AND LESS THAN KIND”: SIR THOMAS MORE’S
UTOPIA, THE EMERGENCE OF PRINT, AND THE EARLY MODERN TRAVEL
NARRATIVE

Scholars have long characterized the utopian genre’s production in the Early Modern era as an impassioned, nostalgic response to the death of feudalism and the birth of a capital-based modern world system. Imperialist travel narratives that were closely aligned with utopian literature’s popular consumption, on the other hand, have been often construed as the vanguard for modern capitalism’s growth. Thus, the interaction between Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* and travel narratives presents a seeming contradiction in More’s goals and values. However, we can more clearly understand the relationship between the utopian text and colonialism through the dialectic of production and consumption. While the emergence of print production led to the mass consumption of utopias, this consumption in turn produced the economic and ideological modes of the colonial system – a process More anticipates and criticizes, yet also embodies, in his text. A close examination of *Utopia* and its literary descendents reveals that English colonialism and its global capitalist underpinnings were, ironically, supported in part by ideologies that sought to eliminate or prevent certain elements of global capitalism. Thus, utopian literature reluctantly acts as both subject/colonizer and object/colonized in Europe’s emerging colonial system.

Because of its largely unexplored nature in the sixteenth century, the New World existed for humanist thinkers and explorers alike as a *tabula rasa* on which they could

inscribe new social formulations. In More's *Utopia*, the narrative of exploration and empire acts as a means for discarding a "corrupt" European capitalism in favor of the ideal "natural" state that is to be discovered in the fetishized space of the Western hemisphere. Thus, while More proposes a radical withdrawal from Europe's progression towards capitalist economics, his argument and literary tropes are later used by authors such as Richard Eden, Thomas Harriot, Sir Walter Raleigh, and others in order to incite English readers to a conquest of the Americas. As with utopian works in all eras, More's early modern text anticipates and recursively acknowledges its potential complicity with the development of modern global capitalism even as it attempts to construct a vision of alterity.

The interplay between *Utopia* and the early modern travel narrative is informed by the birth of print technology, which fully subsumed literary production into capitalist exchange. Elizabeth Eisenstein explains print technology's exponential use as an effect of the missionary impulse, which was "combined with the demands imposed by an expanding capitalist enterprise...In this sense the use of the early presses by Western Europeans was 'overdetermined'" (274). This transformation of the literary marketplace informs *Utopia*'s tensions between its radical divergence from the early modern era's socioeconomic realities and its capitalization on those same differences, much as the growth of mass media forms, such as television and "pulp" fiction, popularized the twentieth-century utopic form of science fiction. Though More resisted his text's mass publication, he builds *Utopia* upon mass-market literary forms and comments on print's dramatic impact on intellectual life throughout the work. Mirroring his fear that a

vernacular translation of *Utopia*'s text would lead to misunderstanding and "popular rebellion" (Baker 3), More demonstrates the potentially unforeseen consequences of ideological exchange between unfamiliar cultures. Print technology thus became a point of possibility and a point of anxiety for early utopian and humanist authors. Finally, More consciously recognizes and criticizes the limitations inherent within his own utopian vision. The problem of utopia, in More's text, manifests itself as the problem of discovering and conceptualizing "new worlds." More portrays the difficulties implicit in blending his society's concrete beliefs, technologies, and cultural practices with the undisturbed otherness of an ideal realm.

More depicts both dystopian and utopian results from print's growth – just as, perhaps not incidentally, print would allow the utopian and travel genres to burgeon in the early modern era. While Evelyn Tribble asserts that More's desire "to control the Bible by physically containing its circulation" bespeaks "a desire to ensure that Bible reading will be governed by vertical, hierarchical, traditional patterns of authority" (18), More demonstrates how the export of Western classical ideology, and by proxy his own humanist and utopian tenets, can be achieved through printing. Print therefore allows utopia to transcend its limitations through print's development of a literary culture and reading/consuming public. As Marshall McLuhan argues, "writing in 1516, More is aware that the medieval scholastic dialogue, oral and conversational, is quite unsuited to the new problems of large centralist states" (129). Thus, print production correlates to More's aesthetic production by inspiring a new genre of prose fiction that could operate as argument and model. The increasing development of print production encouraged

both the literary production of utopian texts, beginning with More's own seminal work, and their increasing consumption by his early modern contemporaries. At the same time, the utopian text's consumption furthers its development as a capitalist product. As Marx states in *The German Ideology*, "a product becomes a product only through consumption" (132). Utopia becomes, as More fears and anticipates, increasingly incorporated into the modern world system's colonial dialectic.

Another important utopian paradox that arises from the tension between the *ethos* of discovering utopian alterity and the technological capitalist mechanisms that aided Europe's literal discovery of the New World lies in this ideal realm's spatiality. In other words, where does utopia lie and what are its boundaries? Like a forbidden tree or a Petrarchan maiden, the allure of Renaissance utopias is always tied to their removal from one's reach. Yet, as any reader of *Paradise Lost* or a love sonnet knows, this state of existence is never intended to last. Fredric Jameson argues that all utopias, and particularly More's, depend on their "enclave status" (15), their removal from outside influence or what their creators deem their own cultures' corruptive elements. However, these enclaves at the same time beckon to be discovered or consumed. More captures this paradox through Hythloday's statement, "we forgot to ask, and he forgot to say, in what part of the new world Utopia lies" (717). Hythloday's "forgetting" enables Utopia to remain discoverable, as a realm that was encountered before, but as yet undiscovered by any other than its narrative messenger, More's double. Hythloday (and More) ostensibly filter our perceptions of this place through their own memory. The fact that More locates his main character's experience in the past, enabling a forgetting, reveals More's self-

conscious nostalgia for the feudal era and his acknowledgment that such a social structure will soon be “forgotten” by his contemporaries. More situates his utopia as both tangible and undisclosed; Utopia is part of the known world, but remains hidden to the reader. More here enables Utopia to reflect the New World’s liminal and fungible status as an area where early modern Europeans projected their concepts of otherness: as More is writing *Utopia* (1516), both the utopic genre and the Americas are being formulated in the Western imagination.

The development of the publishing business following the creation of print media encouraged the growth of a global humanist literati, led by Erasmus and More himself, at this time; this growing intellectual class envisioned ideal spaces as both consumer commodities and as the means of social change. As Elizabeth Eisenstein notes, the boundaries of this “republic of letters” are “elusive” and “deliberately mysterious”; works from “‘Utopia’ to ‘Cosmopolis’ helped to publicize these novel terms but also added” to their “sense of unreality and impracticality...Moreover, real foundries, workshops, and offices were built to serve the needs of these presumably fictitious realms” (100). Thus, as we see in More’s *Utopia*, a sometimes contradictory, yet inalienable link is forged between the utopian genre, the commodification of ideology, and the development of new modes of authorship and readership.

Utopia’s location in a fungible, liminal space at the boundaries of exploration continues through the history of the genre, from the Arctic setting of Margaret Cavendish’s *Blazing World* (1666) to a fascination with outer space during American science fiction’s “golden age” 1950’s. This aspect captures the popular imagination of a

mass audience hungering for tales of new realms and gives the utopian product a sense of credibility due to its separation from readers' own space and time. More recursively and wryly comments upon this recurring motif in classical and Renaissance utopias: "We were not curious...about stale travelers' wonders... folk-devouring Laestrygones and similar frightful monsters are common enough, but well and wisely trained citizens are not everywhere to be found" (721). More implies that a reasonable society anywhere would be a more unbelievable "marvel" than savage cannibals or other monstrous, marginal creations. However, by mentioning these "stale wonders," he also draws attention to his text's heavy reliance on the travel narrative genre to advertise his ideal state.

Indeed, *Utopia's* depiction of the New World not without precedent in medieval and early modern thought. For instance, Lynn Ramey observes that medieval cartographers' practice of placing "the monstrous races" (i.e., cannibals, Amazons, barbarians) "in the unexplored areas of the known world" translated to early modern mapmakers' location "of these races to the New World" (89). At the same time, "Renaissance explorers also inherited the notion...that God's grace was moving from East to West, which explains why New World explorers saw indigenous Americans as innocents who would eventually be converted, and not as already corrupted Easterners" (Ramey, 90). The dichotomy of More's Utopians, moral examples of a return to a purer, communitarian form of Christianity, and their neighborly counterparts, the uncivilized Zapoletons, thus reflects this binary of noble and ignoble savage present within earlier depictions of the Americas. Additionally, Jameson asserts that More's text embodies a

pre-existing fascination “with the Inca Empire, whose ‘communistic’ social system has not ceased to fascinate the West down to our own time” (433). The accounts of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci (1502-4) had just begun to circulate amongst the literate public by More’s conceptualization of *Utopia*, allowing him to draw upon a burgeoning interest in these new areas and to inscribe an ideal state onto a largely unknown space. Furthermore, while the seminal late medieval travel narratives of Marco Polo, appearing in the early fourteenth century, and John Mandeville, appearing a few decades later, depict the East rather than the West, they establish the travel narrative genre’s tendency to blend the realistic with the fantastic in newly discovered realms.

More’s spatial progression of ideas from the established European civilization of Book One, as Hythloday returns to disperse his discovery to his Old World colleagues, and a more marginal New World setting of Book Two, Hythloday’s detailed depiction of Utopia, mirrors the “Republic of Letter’s” goal of influencing the concrete politics of their States through print media. In this construction, the New World/England binary begins to map onto that of Book Two/Book One, and literary reality/literal reality. Just as Hythloday’s presence at the dinner table of state politicians carries the promise of social change, the printed text’s association with the popular marketplace – the newfound buying and selling of ideas by a mass public – increases its likelihood of widespread transformative powers. Through his doubling of Utopia’s and England’s geographical features, such as including the Utopian city of Amaurotum and its river Andyrus as representations of London and the Thames (744), More further dissolves the binary of Utopian ideality/English reality. In this spatial metaphor, Utopia acts as both colonizing

missionary to England of its social otherness and as an ideal that is continuously colonized, or appropriated by, existing European socioeconomic realities.

More extends this doubling metaphor to his own person, most apparently through the character of Hythloday. The divergence between *Utopia*'s narrator and its author springs from their separate understandings of social change. While the More of *Utopia*'s text encourages Hythloday to influence the political world, Hythloday claims that though "this academic philosophy is not without its charm," "in the councils of kings...there is no room for these notions" (737). Therefore, More uses his own persona and that of his main character to both construct and deconstruct different interpretations of utopia's applicability. For a utopia to be applicable or to construct new social forms, it must be blended with pre-existent norms and, to a certain extent, compromise itself – a process that we have studied in *Utopia*'s own popular publication. Without this compromise with existing realities, utopian literature remains a fanciful, futile aesthetic experiment. Both More's involvement in concrete politics, criticized as ineffectual and corruptive by Hythloday, and Hythloday's detachment from them, criticized as despairing and equally ineffectual, reflexively present this utopian dilemma. The phrase "there is no room for these notions" furthermore refers back to *Utopia*'s translation of "no place," creating a dual interpretation of this passage. Either utopia acts as a space, a "no room" that ideal philosophies can inhabit and effect change through, or as a void in which to cast inoperable and unrealistic academic inventions. Once again, More demonstrates the problem of utopia in connection to its spatiality and its textuality.

In the travel narratives with which More's *Utopia* is in dialogue, the contradiction of a vague but specified utopian location occupies a space between the actual Americas and a mythic El Dorado that had begun to dominate the Western imagination. The emerging English conception of El Dorado, based on the exchange of people and goods rather than the Spanish, gold-based model, would spark an interest in imperial pursuits.² Humphrey Gilbert, the "first serious English colonialist of the Americas," argued that the colonies could be populated by "criminals and dissidents who would be put to use instead of being a burden upon the state" (Hadfield 237), a precedent founded in *Utopia*.³ In order to escape the difficulties of early capitalism, these narratives argue that these "surplus" English should find or found Utopia in the New World. Not only does Book One's discussion topic of criminality and social disorganization frame the argument of Book Two, but this utilitarian logic is also employed by the Utopians themselves, who retain slaves by reason that their labor supports the state, whereas the death penalty does not contribute to the Utopian economy. Whether More's own intention is one of ironic criticism or of unironic support, the use of criminality for state prosperity became foundational for the colonial system. Through this example of *Utopia*'s perhaps unintended influence, we can perceive how even a radical criticism of the capitalist system may eventually become subsumed by its object of critique. The translation of the utopian text into a product creates a consumption with perhaps unforeseen consequences.

As Hythloday's own travel narrative drifts closer to Utopia, civilizations from the

² Timothy Sweet's "Economy, Ecology, and *Utopia* in Early Colonial Promotional Literature" notes early modern England's portrayal of its population as a kind of surplus "waste" to be "transformed...to productive resources" (401) in newfound colonies.

³ The paradigm of a colonial prison system would be later refined by practice in locales from Australia to the state of Georgia by the British Empire.

"Achorians" (734) to the "Macarians" (736) evolve from less to more authoritarian, lofty, and fantastic social systems. Thus, the further West More travels, the more fantastical his depictions become; once again, geography parallels perspective. Utopia incorporates Western perceptions of the New World's lavishness in its natural resources, as Hythlodæus explains, "all men have abundance" (739). However, these resources, human and natural, must be cultivated by a conquering founder, Utopus, who brings "this rude and rustic people to a perfection of culture and humanity" (742). Utopus's authoritarianism represents the West's projection of more "despotic" political systems onto other cultures (Jameson 433) and exists as More's blueprint for a regulated settler society, a fresh origin with which to literally dispose of human capital.⁴

Later utopian works further cultivate the trope of new socioeconomic forms that make their appearance in New World, colonial contexts. Denise Albanese explores the growing value of scientific empiricism in Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* as a means of colonizing nature and thus the New World's literal geography. She argues that utopias began to operate as "social machines in a way radically different from Renaissance notions of dulce et utile" (505), instead intended by their authors to influence concrete political and/or economic behaviors. For example, real-world methods of colonial exchange in the Americas included the idealized community barter system More advocates. In her examination of transatlantic economics, Eileen Reeves observes that Spanish colonizers and Native Americans exchanged "monedas de la tierra," "wheat,

⁴ Jameson argues that even "if this island has nothing of the empirical exoticism of Cortez's Mexico, or of that China and Japan to which Columbus tried again and again to sail, it is nonetheless situated in the Pacific, between Ceylon and America, and deserves at least some quotient of a properly New World association" (433).

leather, sap..." sometimes "entirely to the exclusion of gold and silver" (136). Thus, the utopian promise of founding a goldless society is realized in the colonial context, even as the European economic system created the imperial surge to the New World.

Certain works following the English translation of More's *Utopia* and in conversation with capitalist travel narratives begin to shape depictions of the Americas through the lens of his text, projecting onto the New World a certain fragile ideality. In his essay, "Of the Cannibales" (1580, trans. John Florio 1603), Montaigne depicts a state of harmonious innocence on the part of New World natives, while lamenting their imperiled status as a colonial frontier.⁵ He describes them as having "no use of service, of riches or of poverty; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle, no respect of kinred, but common" (Hadfield 288), with all property and labor distributed evenly throughout the tribe. Montaigne, like More, uses the Americas as a metaphorical negation and inverted "double" of European society. Montaigne thus demonstrates the problem of intersection and contact between the spaces of the ideal and the real: the natives' precapitalist innocence, as an increasingly conventional trope of utopian and colonial fiction is corrupted by global capital. Once again, capitalism appropriates and consumes the utopian text at their moment of contact, notably through the colonial ideology *Utopia* and its textual contemporaries both promulgate and resist.

More both develops and problematizes these dichotomized elements of capitalist reality and New World, utopian ideality that conflict and coexist within colonial ideology and literary products. Jeffrey Knapp argues that English culture focused on

⁵ Montaigne's observations would in turn influence Shakespeare's depiction of Caliban in *The Tempest*.

"immateriality" and "trifling" (7), which, ironically, would later be presented as a means to "manipulate the pastoral sensibility of America's Indians" (108). More's aspirations towards a smallness in spirit and finance portray a deceptively innocuous urge to return to a Platonic "origin," an antimaterialist, anticapitalist primordial state to be discovered in the Americas. More's love of simplicity and antipathy towards the ostentation of the early English bourgeoisie is not limited to Utopian lifestyles, but seeps as well into his own scholarly persona. In his work's introduction, More claims "to give no thought at all" to its "arrangement" (716), seemingly displaying a preference for substance in the literary binary between style and substance – the former describing Western culture and the latter the New World.

However, More's claim is undermined by his deliberate "framing" of Utopia by the events of Book One, as well as Utopia's elaborately planned nature as a social organism. As Jameson observes, More "constructed the second [and more radical] book of his work before the first" (431), only later choosing to preview his utopian concept with the immediate political problems of his European context. On its own, Book Two could indeed be portrayed as humble, insignificant and immaterial trifling, yet More consciously situates it in a material, concrete context. More also argues that gardens, which as Knapp states were the ultimate symbol of Renaissance England's "inane trifling" (126), should be the focus of human energies instead of material acquisition. While this position may be interpreted as a satiric jab at petty England, this focus on cultivating the natural world, or agriculture, could be More's nostalgia for a premodern feudal economy. However, More's image of the garden is also one of an "enclosed" paradise, bounded

within the limits of human civilization and within the pages of the utopian text: a paradise lost, since unrealizable. More thus again debates Hythloday as to the applicability of Edenesque enclaves to European statecraft, deferring any conclusion as to whether paradise can be regained through the consumption of the utopian text.

More's representation of the Utopians as agricultural stewards would recall an Edenic state to his contemporaries. The belief in a new garden, Eden, as realizable within the "empty wilderness" of the Americas – an Eden that necessitates constant cultivation by settlers – is a problematic worldview. As urged by Derrida in his "Structure, Sign, and Play" (1967), we must undertake a critique of the West's "nature/culture opposition" (201) that accompanies "ethnology's birth as a science" (199). The Western suspicion of culture (as opposed to nature), or of the written (as opposed to the spoken) word, is visible in More's ideal society, where "men are better and more firmly joined together by good will than by pacts, by spirit than by words" (769). The Native Americans' assumed lack of political sophistication and good will towards their European "discoverers" in travel accounts was, as is now known, admired and then exploited (Knapp 108). Such exploitation was not the only goal of Western explorers: another motivation comprised of replicating what they thought of as the natives' simple, communal virtues on their own terms.

The conceptual trade route between Europe and the Americas is not completely one-way in More's *Utopia*. In More's eyes, at least one European export retains its virtue during the encroachment of the West's global capitalist system: Christianity. Europeans' "lust" for the virginal new world, a "subject" More is "greedy" (720) to hear of, is not so

far from his religious goals in light of the Catholic view of Christ as bridegroom to souls. More embraces both the missionary and imperialist goal as a form of ideal cultural exchange – a bartering of values free of what he decries as early modern Europe's dehumanizing, crime-spawning capitalist trade, or "usury." Indeed, rather than solely seeking new markets from which to export raw materials, the missionary purpose became a colonial goal unto itself. More's own Hythloday does not necessarily thirst for adventure, "an idle and curious lust for sight-seeing," but "for the purpose of fostering and promoting our religion" (717-18).⁶ The Utopians, in turn, are eager to hear the Church's message, in contrast to their "savage" counterparts, the Zapoletans. More here appears to delineate a system of "natural" affinity to European civilizing influences, a proto-racial theory that will later be used to justify imperialism full-force. The Zapoletans, the Utopians' paid mercenaries (a practice that will foreshadow British mercenary regiments of colonized peoples), are quite simply inferior, "an abominable and impious people" "the utopians do not care" to "lose" (772). Through his examination of these New World social hierarchies, More also warns what will become of peoples who prefer financial reward over religious/moral values, be it the avaricious Spanish or his own English middle class.

However, More does not whole-heartedly espouse full-scale conversion in an unreflexive fashion. As Hythlodæus attempts conversion of the Utopians, one individual "spoke publicly of Christ's religion with more zeal than discretion...not only did he prefer our worship to any other but he condemned all the rest outright" (775). This

⁶ The Utopian "idyll" allows for freer time and represents such a radical departure from European social practices as to be "curious" indeed.

instance demonstrates how Utopia's Western visitor brought European-style religious conflict to a more pluralistic society, causing social disorder. Therefore, More also metaphorically unites colonialism, print technology, and biblical translation as causes of chaos in his own realm, even as he utilizes and incorporates these same influences in his own work.

A close examination of More's text demonstrates a self-conscious anxiety of these influences through his metaphor of a confining, imperial process that is already matured within Utopia's own enclosed and paradisiacal confines. Slavery and colonialism on the part of the Utopians are the basis for their law and order, dramatically reflecting a social "chain of being" in terms of defined roles, much as More's "men of leisure" who prey upon the work of lower classes in Book One. More's depiction of slavery in Nowhere is particularly sinister: "the slaves of each district are distinguished by a special badge, which it is a capital offense to throw away," "rewards are appointed for "informer[s]" against them, and they are only "granted their liberty" when it is "merited by their submissive behavior" (730). This "submission" and obedience expected of Utopia's serf class is perhaps a medieval ideal, but it is even more crucially a value expected of all natives by Western explorers and scholars, as well as by peasants driven out by means of the enclosure system. More and Hythloday's conversation in Book One depicts this submission as an unrealistic goal: peasants who leave their agricultural setting become thieves and criminals due to a lack of other options. Thus, the class system within Europe and the colonial system without it parallels More's own Utopian Panopticon, a system of social status and "gentle punishment" symbolized by the slaves'

badges in which hard work will set them free. Additionally, More's Utopians continually invade their neighbors and supply them with their own officials out of the goodness of their hearts. The Utopians "found a colony under their own laws...they consider it a just cause for war when a people which does not use its soil but keeps it idle and waste nevertheless forbids" its "use and possession" (749). This passage reflects both Spanish and English arguments for New World conquest and ostensibly conflicts with Hythlodæus's claims of utopian pacifism. As the island of Utopia was founded, its name changed from "Abraxa," or the "highest of the 365 Gnostic heavens" to the Utopian "Nowhere," a conspicuous demotion that contradicts the colonial narrative in which the island's "rude and rustic peoples" (742) obtain civilization from outside settlers. Operating, again, as England's metaphorical "double," Utopia exports surplus goods, and imports gold, a reversal of what will become England's colonial system (753).

Utopia's subsumption by the colonial state apparatus is therefore recursively predicted within More's text: travel and colonial narratives as products of global capital's progression continue to both borrow and negate utopian tropes following the work's dissemination. In 1555, just four years after *Utopia*'s English language publication, Richard Eden in his "Decades of the Newe Worlde, or West India" already offers a satirical reaction to More's work. The narrative depicts the West India's crown prince shaming his European visitors for their love of gold, claiming "we doo no more esteeme rude golde unwrought, then we doo cloddes of earthe" (Hadfield 241), only to later demonstrate a greater lust than the explorers for (wrought) gold and warfare. Thomas Harriot, in his "Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia" (1588, 1590),

embodies the language of Hythloday concerning the Utopians in order to describe a humble Native American lifestyle, stating “they are very sober in their eatinge, and trinkinge, and consequentye verry longe lived because they doe not oppress nature” (276). Similarly appropriative is Sir Walter Raleigh's famous tract, "The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana" (1596), which carries many of More's established devices. Raleigh depicts Guiana as a mythic Utopia, even labeling it at one point as a "commonwealth" (1247). Perhaps because Raleigh found little gold in his paradise, he instead elevates its near-miraculous properties, such as "the powder of" a "horn that cureth deafness" (1247). The utopian text as a genre unto itself experienced a delayed growth in the seventeenth century, with Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) reflecting the era's developing scientific empiricism and perhaps envisioning the first technocratic and futuristic utopia. This departure from More's more naturalistic, nostalgic polity depicts utopian literature's dialectical shifts in goals and aesthetics, which in turn reflect and shape historical movements. Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623), portraying a global monarchical theocracy established by missionary colonialism, represents both an extension and antithesis of *Utopia*. James Harrington's work, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), occurs during Cromwell's reign and demonstrates a more republican state ideology, paralleling historical shifts in thought and policy. An exploration of utopian literature both preceding More's presumably “foundational” text and as a fully existent genre between the early modern and Victorian time periods is incipiently necessary to utopian criticism so that we can perceive the utopian imagination as an intrinsic, continuous force in literary production and as an

antithetical yet conspiring accompaniment to changes in capitalist production.

Changes in the mode of literary production – from the medieval script to the printing press – radically transformed literary forms and functions, creating an exponential growth in the publication and popularity of prose fiction and democratizing the modes of literary consumption. The text of *Utopia* reflects the author's own anxieties and hopes concerning this new literary and economic era, in which the growth of mass literacy would combine with the growth of a more globalized economic system to both foster and contradict the utopian genre. We cannot explain away the onset of imperialism as merely a systemic response to the linear progress of economic and technological events. Rather, the colonial system envisaged by the utopian text itself and utopias' influence upon the travel narrative demonstrates that political systems and their ideological apparatuses can sometimes emerge from the mass-consumed products of idealistic literary thought. Therein lies the utopian text's problem, promise, and power.

CHAPTER II

SEXUAL CELLS: GENDER, CORPOREALITY, AND THE MASS MARKET IN
“NEW WAVE” UTOPIAS

As we have explored in early examples of the utopian genre, new textual forms, or modes of cultural production, reflect, perpetuate, and resist a progression towards global consumer capitalism. Visual mass communication, through the format of television and advertisement, permeated all cultural structures and practices in the American 1960's. This new media actively constructed identities of race, class, and gender in its depictions of postwar daily life, a process then either re- or de-constructed in 1960's science fiction. Betty Friedan's "Sexual Sell" chapter of *The Feminist Mystique* analyzes the fraught relationship between gender and commodity fetishism in popular advertisement at length: a social production of sexual roles creates an increased consumption of household goods; these acts of consumption then reinscribe cultural definitions of "maleness" and "femaleness."⁷ Thus, the subsumption of the subordinated half of the producer/consumer, male/female binary becomes capitalized upon by a mechanized patriarchal dominant. What, then, occurs when this consumptive/subsumptive methodology is transcribed upon the mass-marketed, yet activist form of 1960's utopian texts?

A comparative study of Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974),

⁷ "The really crucial function, the really important role that women serve as housewives is to *buy more things for the house*" (Friedan, 206).

three novels that have become more or less “canonical” to science fiction criticism, reveals a transformative dialectic – from consumption/subsumption to feminist liberation – that is both intrinsic to utopian narrative’s problem of social assent/dissent and extrinsic, portraying the revolution in sexual roles and mores that occurs in the decade of the works’ publication. Therefore, I have selected these texts for their historical situation at the onset, pinnacle, and reverberation of the sexual revolution and the “New Wave” literary form. Certain recursive attributes continue to characterize literary utopias in similar ways: production-oriented models of a masculine “anxiety of influence” or a feminine “anxiety of authorship” should perhaps give way to a more consumer-driven model, an anxiety of readership, when interpreting this genre. Though postwar gender roles projected a binary of male producer and female consumer, science fiction was overwhelmingly marketed to male readers before the “New Wave” movement, with its reexamination of the sci-fi genre and activist nature, and its feminist offshoots took hold. While Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land* imagines a radical, communitarian overthrow of the bourgeois monogamous family structure and portrays women in a few professional roles (nurse, secretary – the only professional roles universally accepted in the early 1960’s), Heinlein also indulges in a voyeuristic and in many ways commodified depiction of female bodies. Not only does the female body become consumed, and thus subsumed, by its male audience in the novel, corporeality itself, typically gendered feminine, is consumed as well. Furthermore, Heinlein demonstrates a disembodied, transcendently “spiritual” understanding as arising from the consumption of female bodies and the body of his text through his motif of cannibalism. The “idea” of a Martian

utopia survives from a disintegration of the physical. Therefore, the process of textual consumption by the male science fiction fan reading *Stranger in a Strange Land* is also a form of sexual consumption, a subsumption of the female body to a masculine ideal.

Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* in many ways mirrors Heinlein's subsumptive process, yet the novel presents the masculine gaze recursively through the observation of its protagonist Genly Ai. While critics have argued that the novel's gendered depictions, such as the use of he/his to describe its androgynous characters, are problematic, these biases become more comprehensible if we align Genly's observations with those of a male science fiction reader in the 1960's.⁸ Le Guin's own recognition of the problem in our language's use of "he" – the particularization of the feminine, to be subsumed into the universalized masculine – demonstrates her awareness of the gender binary's inextricability from narrative and linguistic structures. However, Le Guin allows some hope for liberation in *Left Hand of Darkness*, as Genly's changing perceptions of androgynous "others" reflect the transformative beginnings of feminist and sexual revolutions in the late 1960's.

In the *Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, Le Guin extends her idea of a liberated gender structure free from the ideologies of consumption and subsumption, yet this breakthrough is itself subsumed into the structure of Le Guin's full universe: on no other planet are there political or sexual forms free of control and domination. Indeed, Le

⁸ Le Guin defends this choice in an introduction to her novel, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (1975), arguing, "Many feminists have been grieved or aggrieved by *Left Hand of Darkness* because the androgynes in it are called 'he' throughout. In the third person singular, the English generic pronoun is the same as the masculine pronoun. A fact worth reflecting upon. And it's a trap, there's no way out, because the exclusion of the feminine (she) and the neuter (it) from the generic/masculine (he) makes the use of either of them *more* specific, *more* unjust, as it were, than the use of 'he'" (93).

Guin's portrayal of an anarcho-feminist movement's implementation, is, as the novel's subtitle suggests, ambivalent and "ambiguous" – a liberation that is unrealized and deferred, ultimately fused in many ways with the very hegemony it defines itself against.⁹ This paradox is emblematic of the utopian genre's ongoing dilemma at being a mass-consumed product (one that begins even with More's first *Utopia*). In addition, the relationship of *The Dispossessed*'s radicals to the universal status quo exemplifies the status of the women's movement and a more experimental "New Wave" form of science fiction beyond their 1960's inception as they became integrated into "mainstream" literary and social constructs. The interrelation of consumption, subsumption, and liberation thus comes full circle in Le Guin's 1970's text. Like a "Virginia Slims" ad proclaiming "you've come a long way baby," or the mystique of the slender, shoulder-padded "superwoman" that approaches the confining label of a "happy housewife heroine," feminist liberation becomes subsumed into literary and economic modes of production and consumption. Nevertheless, Le Guin argues in *The Dispossessed* that liberation can only by necessity be realized in exchange and in encounter with dominant social structures. Only in the reflexive and conscious interpenetration of the ideal and the normative can mutual stagnation be prevented: a goal and aspect of the utopian genre at large. The three novels discussed here are thus representative for their thematic concerns with the subsumption of corporeality and femaleness, textual consumption, and social liberation.

⁹ "In fact, the Free World of Anarres was a mining colony of Urras" (92) and they were "buying them off with a world" (94).

Heinlein's examination of property and propriety in his novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, was published during what its protagonist Valentine Michael Smith might have called a "cusp" in history. While Heinlein claims to have written the novel over the course of a decade, it was released in 1961, one year after "the pill" was approved for use in the U.S. Yet, this work anticipated the "hippie" counterculture and its experiments with sexual freedom and communitarian lifestyles. Whether Heinlein would have approved the "free love" generation's use of his work as a concrete paradigm for social change is highly debatable. His personal political ideals swing wildly from the far left to the hard right and back through the years, appearing to depend more on his love life and love of shock value than on any enduring philosophical coherence. However, if we look to *Stranger in a Strange Land*, particularly its characters of Jubal Harshaw and the Martian Man, we can begin to understand Heinlein's idiosyncratic stance on marriage, money, and the utopian genre at large.

The bulk of *Stranger in a Strange Land* depicts Martian Valentine Smith's assimilation into American consumer society, and, conversely, his foundation of a taboo-breaking, Martian-based "Church of all Worlds" that espouses "sharing" in an economic, sexual, and corporal sense. Valentine's (and Heinlein's) utopia, however, falls short of full-fledged equality amongst genders or individuals. The church is highly regimented between levels and dependent upon its leadership; its depictions of group sex indicate a primarily male wish-fulfillment. The novel's main character, nurse Jill, experiences a sexual reawakening and fulfillment that would have been shocking to early 1960's readers, yet her role throughout the novel is one of partnership and caretaking instead of

leadership or social rebellion. Gender structures are also replicated by Jubal Harshaw, a retired “popular writer,” and his three “secretaries” who alternately dominate and serve him, occupying dual roles of infantilization and expertise that reveal the sexual anxieties of Heinlein and his era. These contradictions occur at a time that is post-contraception and pre-women’s movement, when a utopia of a more patriarchal sexual freedom appears possible. At the end of the work, Valentine and his Church disintegrate, or disincorporate, shedding such material concerns with the female role.

Though *Stranger in a Strange Land* largely operates as a polemic against the nuclear family’s apotheosis in mid-century bourgeois America, the novel does not portray its alternative of communal “brotherly” love palatable, or even successful – at least in terms of its material conditions. If we are to follow the circumscriptions of social or literary realism, Valentine’s experiment has failed: its leader dead, its followers scattered, the inconclusive dash in the final two chapters signifying a cyclic feedback loop of endlessly deferred artistic and spiritual transcendence. If Smith and his followers manage to fabricate a utopia, it is the proverbial “kingdom not of this earth.” Thus, Heinlein simultaneously criticizes the world that is, but also perceives the inevitable complications that arise from implementing utopian ideals: as the text itself draws to a close, its main character Mike Valentine simultaneously “disincorporates” or self-destructs. Nevertheless, both Mike’s body and Heinlein’s body of work are also “consumed” by their disciples and readers. The utopian possibilities they promise survive in a special “underground” of cultish aficionados that have learned to speak and even think in a “language” alien to the normative values and paradigmatic experiences of their society. Just as the premise of

cannibalism from New Guinea to the Vatican rests on a transference of special virtues or abilities from consumed to consumer, Mike's body and Heinlein's novel seek to disseminate their utopian qualities through the counterculture's avid consumption of science fiction.

The tensions between utopia's goal of material implementation and its fictive immateriality are present in *Stranger in a Strange Land* from its initial words, "Once upon a time there was a Martian named Valentine Michael Smith" (3). Heinlein here associates his novel with the genre of fantasy and the "fairy tale," seemingly referring to a point in the distant past rather than the distant future and enhancing the ending's cyclic, unresolved effect. This choice of beginning borrows from an ingrained cultural narrative. Its use of the "folk-tale" trope successfully establishes science fiction as a populist literary form created for and by its consumers while disguising its radical aims as harmless, fanciful, and staid. Like the fairy tale, science fiction's goals are not, as Jubal Harshaw claims, the goals of elite "high art" – at least according to Heinlein. Harshaw, whose voice is arguably closest to that of Heinlein and a far more realistic character than the messianic Mike, defends his popular work fiercely by asserting, "what I write is intended to reach the customer...I never hide from him in a *private language*...a government-supported artist in an incompetent whore" (326). This dichotomy recalls Bourdieu's distinction between "bourgeois, middle-brow" art that is marketed to the general public ("customers"), and "high art" that claims an "autonomous principle" (40), existing as a means unto itself. In this excerpt, Heinlein also attaches a gender binary to the artistic one, dividing the "manly" occupation of writing popular fiction (with the help

of three beautiful secretaries) from the effeminate pursuit of “pure” art. Heinlein inverts the concept of purity in high art by labeling it a form of “prostitution,” dependent upon patronage or national sponsorship for survival. Therefore, Heinlein entrenches rather than liberates the sci-fi genre from its domination by male producers and consumers, even attempting subsumption of the (feminine) aesthetic ideal to the “purity” of market economics.

This perspective, however, is seemingly complicated by the external example of the Martian political and aesthetic system. On Valentine’s home planet of Mars, deceased Martians dubbed “Old Ones” fully control the modes of artistic production, churning out “great works” over the course of centuries and tutoring young “nymphs.”¹⁰ Even in the Martian’s far more “autonomous” collective and utopian productive structure, however, the feminine is both subsumed and consumed: “Martian nymphs were female, all the adults were male” (119). Those neophytes who fail to please their aged, male masters are predictably cannibalized. One point of similarity between Le Guin and Heinlein’s radically different constructions of “alien” gender lies in their re-imagining of the male/female binary and its implications for social and sexual behaviors. Where Le Guin’s Gethenian androgyny in *Left Hand of Darkness* leaves the species free of a public/private split and implies an equal sharing of domestic duties, Heinlein’s youth/age, female/male paradigm allows the male gender to be free for its “serious” pursuits.

Heinlein’s ambivalence towards a transformation of gender roles – *Stranger in a Strange Land* advocates both a transcendence of his era’s marital and family structures

¹⁰ A more hierarchical – and academic – artistic structure.

and a preservation of male hierarchy – continues in his treatment of the female body. As a medical student reflects on the implications of the mind-body control given to members of Mike Valentine’s cult, he exclaims: “What happens...when a female conceives only as an act of volition...any man who tried to rape her would die so quickly, if she so grokked, that he wouldn’t know what hit him? When women are free of guilt and fear – but invulnerable?” (401). This passage evokes a utopian transformation of sexuality and, in a Malthusian sense, economics, reflecting the revolutionary possibilities of female oral contraception surrounding the time of the novel’s creation. However, this new vision of female bodily autonomy inevitably serves male goals and desires, as the student proclaims that women will want “intercourse with a whole-heartedness Cleopatra never dreamed of” (401). This example could be additionally used as a meta-commentary on the novel itself, as its clamor for sociocultural change mask its appeal to male readers’ sexual appetites. Ironically, Heinlein portrays the women of *Stranger in a Strange Land* as serving male characters’ sexual and domestic needs out of their own free will, as they conveniently become autonomous agents of their bodies’ reification. Though he shows women as having power over their rapists in the example above, the novel’s leading female Jill tells her Martian lover not to “protect her too much” if such an event occurs, because she would have willed it herself (379). Women, in Heinlein’s model, actively produce the modes of their consumption and subsumption.¹¹

¹¹ Such a philosophy in many ways resembles our own era’s preference for “choice” feminism, in which a woman may “choose” a more traditional role as an individual agent, over a more systematic feminism that analyzes the socioeconomic conditions that help shape such a choice.

Thus, while Heinlein replaces the Cold War cultural narrative of monogamous marriage as emblem of suburban privacy with a communitarian, public structure that seeks to revolutionize sexual practice, *Stranger in a Strange Land* demonstrates the difficulty of erasing existing gender structures from our literary and linguistic consciousness: a difficulty that, unlike in Le Guin's novels, is not yet reflexively acknowledged. Yet there are a few moments in which Heinlein's subsumption of the feminine approaches self-awareness. Like Le Guin, Mike Valentine struggles with our linguistic treatment of "he" and "she." Mike cites Webster's dictionary as a justification for naming Dorcas "he," since "the masculine gender includes the feminine" (107-8), and continually calls female characters his "water brothers." This move towards a communitarian, gender-neutral universality, however, also allows for a cognitive process that absorbs and marginalizes concrete reality (the female gender) in favor of abstract unity ("man"kind), reflecting a totalitarianism that later appears in other Heinlein novels such as *Starship Troopers*. Feminine sexual difference or sexual resistance, which is not portrayed in Valentine's utopia, would prohibit a society of universal "brotherly" love from becoming realized.

The stark divergence between Heinlein's and Le Guin's utopian revisions of gender and sexual practice can be understood both through differences in the external events surrounding the works' production and through differences in the novels' internal aesthetic orientations. Cultural revolutions of the 1960's that questioned racial theory and public authority had just sparked the process of interrogating gender roles by *The Left Hand of Darkness*'s 1969 release. Also, Le Guin's conscious focus on "soft" or socially-

oriented science fiction anticipates a slightly different readership.¹² Pierre Bourdieu characterizes literary “position-takings” (34) as a “struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g., ‘bourgeois art’) and the autonomous principle (e.g. ‘art for art’s sake’)” (40). Other, inter-generic “position-takings” and hierarchies develop from these same principles. As most avid fans of a particular, mass-marketed fictive form such as science fiction well know, the struggles between these different literary positions – canonical vs. non-canonical, “hard” vs. “soft,” niche vs. widely-distributed – can become equally fraught, reflecting class, race, and gender differentiations in their turn. Ironically, we can extend and apply Bourdieu’s concept of the “high,” prestige-seeking literary field’s “inverse principle” to this heteronomous genre. Because more academically-acclaimed sci-fi works tend also to reach a broader, more diverse audience, performing better in the actual economy and in the economy of ideas, they can lose their niche status as “speculation for speculation’s sake,” overwhelmingly geared towards a younger white male consumer. Thus, Le Guin’s works portray a far more tempered, problematic view of utopian production itself. Nevertheless, it is probable, as critic Ellen Peel notes, that her works still “imply a white male reader” (109), most ostensibly through the male gender of Genly Ai, who by and large shapes the representations of the Gethenian utopian realm he encounters (which is, in turn, gendered female). This main character’s gaze, as well as that of the reader, is turned towards a feminine “other” world. However, the reversal in this case of the usual masculine producer/feminine consumer

¹² In *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, LeGuin has characterized her novels as “thought experiments” rather than “blueprints” or futurist speculations (9).

binary enables Le Guin to enact a change of social paradigms. Normative consumers who identify with Genly thus may experience shifts in gendered perceptions along with him: the narrative voice of Genly Ai becomes the means by which Le Guin interpolates her readers, in an attempt to persuade them to think beyond sexual persuasion.

The Left Hand of Darkness centers upon Genly's visit to the planet of Gethen as an Ekumen, or a member of a loosely organized interplanetary league: his goal is to convince the isolated planet to join this group. Gethen is "split" into two nations – Karhide and Orgoreyn – which represent tradition/anarchism/darkness/femininity and "enlightenment"/the State/masculinity, respectively. The work has little "plot" or "action" to speak of, focusing instead on Genly's reactions to Gethenian sexuality, which is androgynous, cyclical, and permeable. The novel's outset depicts Genly's frustrated and rather bigoted reactions to a Karhidish ceremony, in which he remarks of Estraven, Karhide's prime minister, "Wiping sweat from his dark forehead the man – *man* I must say, having said *he* and *his* – the man answers" (5). This passage signals a similar textual, linguistic conundrum that Mike Valentine gleans from his Webster's dictionary. The problem of textual authority's tendency to enforce normative values and the problem that Saussure first observes in the production of words themselves – that the production of meaning depends upon the production of difference – implies that textual and linguistic production produces sociocultural divisions as well. There is no "origin" of the gender binary in Gethen, Le Guin here demonstrates, yet Genly's first gender-based perceptions of Gethenians necessitate linguistic labels and preferences, and therefore the reproduction of his own biases. However, this excerpt also demonstrates a possibility of

social progress, as an encounter with the “other” enables Genly to begin his interrogation of gender. Genly’s italicization of “*he/him*,” as well as the term “must,” demonstrates his burgeoning self-awareness of the predetermined aspects difference’s definition through outside “authorities” such as himself. Le Guin therefore shows the possibilities for gender’s transformation within utopian and sci-fi literature, as its depiction of difference and “otherness” may begin a self-examination of gendered perceptions by male readers.

Reader consumption of the utopian product then becomes the starting point for social liberation. Le Guin extends the motif of reader/outsider reflexivity as Genly reflects that he is “self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own” (12). The ultimate outcome of these category shifts is unclear, but Le Guin appears to espouse the famed 1960’s method of “consciousness-raising” in order to enact transformation; the process of gender-blending in Genly’s (and the reader’s) mind becomes the means (syntactically and figuratively) by which our “essentialisms” become perceived as “irrelevant.” Genly’s personalized, internal voice also contrasts with a parody of masculinized scientific objectivity that appears in the work. This disembodied and disjunctive voice narrates, “the sexual cycle averages 26 to 28 days (they tend to speak of it as 26 days, approximating it to the lunar cycle)” (90). The neutral tone of this sentence contradicts the fraught, emotional nature of human sexuality. The scientist’s use of “they” makes a linguistic differentiation between the observer and the “othered” observed. By including this contrast to the voice of Genly, Le Guin demonstrates the ways in which the act of observation transforms social conditions by changing the

observer and observed, a process unacknowledged by a classical “scientific method” but supported by quantum theory. This implication could also extend to Le Guin’s metatextual message: that the act of consuming utopian literature will change the modes of the genre’s production, and of the production of gender, a process that perhaps includes consumer’s awareness that they are reading a product of female authorship.

Ultimately, therefore, Le Guin also imagines an inverse consumption and absorption of the reader by the radicalized text, much as Genly becomes enmeshed in Gethenian social values and alien sexuality. At the novel’s close, as both Genly and the reader prepare to leave Gethen, Genly remarks of his fellow species, “they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them...it was strange to hear a woman’s voice, after so long” (296). After the disorienting encounter with Gethen, known sexual binaries are then seen in a different light, as “strange” and too extreme. The repetition of “strange” mirrors Heinlein’s title, as both novels attempt to implant a productive cognitive dissonance with a one-dimensional society in their readers. The process of reading *Left Hand of Darkness* is indeed a strange one, one that is disjointed from social values and linear time. Some of this alterity can be attributed to the novel’s productive mode – after so long, science fiction readers newly experience a female author’s voice.

In contrast to *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *Left Hand of Darkness*’s emerging models for alternative lifestyles, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* portrays social and sexual utopias that have already come to fruition. Mike Valentine and Genly Ai face doubt and persecution from without, yet carry a promise of continuity via countercultural consumption; the *Dispossessed*’s utopia already faces destructive/deconstructive

fragmentation from within.¹³ The novel is set on the planet Urras and Anarres, its moon; Le Guin constructs Urras as a de-facto replica of the one-dimensional Cold War world, with a capitalist nation-state A-Io locked in permanent rivalry with a military commonwealth, Thu. Anarres then becomes situated as an alternative “third way,” a stateless and non-hierarchical society that allows equal opportunities (or, in fact, necessities) for socioeconomic contributions from men and women. In a development that in many ways parallels Le Guin’s portrayal of binaries in *Left Hand of Darkness*, Urras is associated with “maleness,” with its linear social structure and technological prowess, and Anarres with “femaleness,” with its woman founder Odo and its more stable, egalitarian system. However, stability and equality do not lead to utopian fulfillment in the novel. The plot primarily charts talented physicist Shevek’s dual struggle: to create and publish his life’s work and to establish an acceptable family life, free from the tyrannies of unofficial public approbation in Anarres and from the tyrannies of domination on Urras. Neither goal becomes achieved without contact between Urras and Anarres, male and female, and the public and private worlds.

At first glance, Le Guin’s Winter and Anarres ascribe to the utopian tradition, founded in More’s text, of both enclosure and spatial distance as a means of visualizing and preserving alterity. *The Dispossessed* begins: “There was a wall. It did not look important...instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real” (1). Ostensibly, Le Guin refers in this passage to the

¹³ A similar development and contrast can be seen within Frank Herbert’s *Dune* universe, his first novel, published 1966, positing a violent overthrow of existing power structures and his immediate sequel, *Dune Messiah* (1969), demonstrating the tensions inherent in implementing the Atreides revolutionary government.

concrete, spatial division between her two planets, the plentiful, yet inequitable Urras (a world resembling our own) and the communal “economy of scarcity” in Anarres. The phrase, “idea of a boundary,” informs us that the primary division between the two worlds is one of ideology and establishes the mutual precariousness of the planets’ ideological structures. Without this boundary, social upheaval may occur in Urras, reactionary regression to “propertarianism” in Anarres. Additionally, Anarres is from the outset of the novel a realm in which the ideal transformed to the real has become its governing social principle. This planet’s very lack of real laws, central authority, or power structures enables the world to be organized by internalized ideals of utilitarian cooperation that are eventually portrayed as equally confining. Le Guin thus reflects on both the sociocultural transformations of her era and on the problematically “fixed” nature of imagined utopias. She demonstrates in *The Dispossessed* that utopian movements and utopian literary texts must avoid becoming one-dimensional by self-interrogation and ongoing transformation. Le Guin therefore portrays cultural revolutions in political structures and gender roles as dependent upon dialectical shifts. This preoccupation resembles the feminist movement’s precariously stagnated state in the mid-1970’s, as cultural voices proclaimed its goals already “achieved” and feminist voices became exhausted from shouting for change. Le Guin thus signals from the novel’s outset that the destruction of the binaries of Anarres/Urras, female/male, producer/consumer, and ideal/real is the work’s ultimate goal.

This goal cannot be achieved without the direct encounter of these entities with their other, sparking mutual transformation. Le Guin depicts this process as occurring

between and within the organic, corporal bodies of her fictive societies, lending her imagined social structures and texts in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* a (gendered) physicality. Subverting the capitalist, patriarchal paradigm Friedan criticizes in the *Feminist Mystique*, Le Guin's sexualized cells intermingle in her social organisms, breaking down boundaries. Anarrestian protagonist Shevek is the first to penetrate Urrastian society since the Anarrestian founder Odo revolted from Urras, founding a feminist-anarchist state on Urras's moon. During Shevek's initial encounter with Urrastians, he "spreads" his gendered and political ideologies as he states, "I cannot bring, I cannot buy. If I am to be kept alive, you must give it to me. I am an Anarresti, I make the Urrasti behave like Anarresti: to give, not to sell" (13). Thus, Shevek "infects" the Urrastian body with Anarrestian cultural behavior (gendered female) of cooperative survival.

Accordingly, Le Guin here recursively comments on her own goal of infecting and influencing the reader/consumer's own social and gendered perceptions, transforming our more "Urrastian" postmodern capitalism. However, Le Guin also problematizes elements of feminism's and utopianism's radical break with the dominant culture, as Shevek queries, " 'Why haven't their propertarian societies collapsed? What are we so afraid of?'" to which the subversive Bedap replies, " 'Infection'" (43). The paranoia of infection by both the Urrastian and Anarrestian worlds is extended by their role as "hosts" to Shevek. Through her model of physical inclusion and infection, Le Guin criticizes an increasingly polarized American culture following the 1960's, but also offers the metaphor of mutual infestation as a means of resolving the split between the

feminist literary production and male readerly consumption in her bodies of text. Like Heinlein's cannibalized bodies that preserve the radical qualities of his text within his countercultural audience, Le Guin's viral text can become integrated into the masculine bodies of her readers in order to carry forth her message. Marketing a utopian feminist text to the male consumer prevents the text's own stagnated remove from normative culture. Le Guin portrays the tension between utopia as a fixed, ideal Platonic form and that of a flexible, Odonian "permanent revolution" (176) further by the paradoxical description of Anarres's "ideal" being "that of an organism" (61) and Shevek's own depiction of his mother planet as dead, lifeless, and barren. The utopian text, as well as Anarres, is enlivened through contact with its plentiful (though corrupt) opposite: Urras, the dominant culture, and the male reader. This paradigm connects human sexuality, the fertilization of a barren womb through an interpenetration of binaries, to the process of reading, consuming, and realizing a textual utopia.

Anarres's language – "pravic," or "truth"¹⁴ – aptly summarizes the problem of producing a centralized, communicable ideal: an arrival at justice but a constant revision of its terms. The alternative to being a populist genre at violent conflict with the dominant ideology is one of silence once revolution becomes hegemonized. Le Guin attempts to surpass this dilemma through producing a text that can infect the worldview of its normative consumers, while at the same time looking to broaden and complicate the revolutions that have come before. Le Guin thus denies her novel, or that of any literary product, an ultimate truth, as she claims, "Nothing said in words ever came out quite

¹⁴ Perhaps also signaling the Soviet publication, Pravda.

even” (31). However, she looks to a possibility that will transcend the limitations of constructed language and the elusive nature of true justice as she posits, “underneath the words, at the center, like the center of the Square, it all came out even. Everything could change, yet nothing would be lost” (31). Heinlein and Le Guin’s texts, therefore, attempt to embody a dialectical “permanent revolution” in aesthetics and social forms by constructing our imagined futures through both preserving and transforming elements of our material present.

CHAPTER III
IS GOD IN THE MACHINE? : TRANSCENDENCE AND COMMODITY CULTURE
IN PHILIP K. DICK

Speculative fiction continually emerges during periods of historical transition and turmoil. Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *Ubik* (1969) portray the economic and aesthetic anxieties of American society as post-WWII stability gave way to countercultural rebellion, yet attempt a resolution in their apotheosis of the market commodity. Since these novels' publication, critical attempts to classify Dick's ideological message as either Marxist or anti-Marxist have largely ignored the possibility that the oscillations and contradictions that consistently thwart such efforts comprise Dick's larger textual strategy. While Dick hints at a spiritual awakening through commodities, whether cultural artifacts, hallucinogens, or spray-cans, he simultaneously defers this transcendence through the base materiality of commercial jingles, rude machinery, and unreliable products in order to recast the utopian urge as, perhaps, an illusory "opiate." One of the primary conflicts within Dick's novels exists between genuine moments of otherworldly reification/deification via these objects, and the material limitations of such moments. In *Ubik* and *Androids*, the reification of transcendence into commodities becomes the same method by which these object fetishes concurrently become deified, or imbued with otherworldly meaning: a process that can be applied to their own texts.

Ubik can thus be read as either an earnest salvation narrative or a sardonic self-parody of the utopian genre's goals and conceits. The novel follows protagonist Joe

Chip's¹⁵ efforts to free himself from a state of "half-life," or cryogenic freezing, after his murder. The ability to do so is shown to be dependent upon the use of *Ubik*, a transubstantiated consumer product that alternately emerges in the form of spray cans, household cleaning products, salad dressing, and old-fashioned apothecary elixir. Whether this product is a figment of Joe's imagination, a cruel trick of the half-life world's controller, Jory, or a desperate form of help from Joe's living boss, Runciter, remains uncertain, reflecting Dick's own uncertainties over whether a mass-consumed product can become a form of spiritual liberation from one-dimensionality. This ambivalence becomes clear as Dick simultaneously spiritualizes class struggle and demystifies the afterlife in *Ubik* by blending the two paradigms. Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang, the business owner of the moratorium that preserves the deceased in a state of frozen "half-life" muses, "I think I'll will my heirs to revive me one day a century...I can observe the fate of all mankind. But that meant a rather high maintenance cost to the heirs...they would rebel" (613). Dick thus translates the bourgeois/proletariat, employer/employee binary to a dichotomy between the dead and the living, the latter performing the productive work in order to maintain the lifestyle (or deathstyle) of their masters. This passage exemplifies the ways in which Dick continually represents spirituality as inextricable from materiality and socioeconomic circumstance, recalling and refuting a "great chain of being" worldview that Western religion inherits as it promises an equal reward to each social class in the hereafter.

¹⁵ The initials "JC" have been consistently noted to stand for Jesus Christ, yet this trope had already been (over) used by the novel's publication, perhaps implying pastiche.

In more contemporary terms, this construction likewise reflects the influence of Herbert Marcuse upon 1960s cultural discourse, given his claim in *One-Dimensional Man* that a truly “transcendent mode of thought” necessitates a transcendence of “the web of Reason itself” (169). “Reason” here refers to the “objective” scientific process used in contemporary Western thought and to the materialist technological culture this objectivity creates. While such a philosophy appears to parallel the Romantics’ resistance to Enlightenment thought, Marcuse situates his own transcendence as an impossibility within both capitalist and communist political systems: the economy, the state, and the technologies they employ rule out any means of subverting the existing order. By including the language of capitalism in “maintenance costs” and of communism in a predictable “rebellion” that occurs in the eschatological “one day,” Dick demonstrates the ways in which one-dimensional socioeconomics foreclose all considerations, mystical or otherwise, that lie outside their concerns.

Mirroring established communism’s awkward status as purported revolutionary alternative and participant in a one-dimensional hegemony, Ubik’s half-lifers radically alter their interior vision while remaining limited by their exterior circumstances in the moratorium. Vogelsang’s own aspiration to transcend materiality and establish an objective historiography is itself an embodiment of the Marxist meta-narrative. The drive to maintain historical consistency and the tendency to view past, present, and future through the lens of class struggle here becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dick bridled at purely Marxist or deconstructionist interpretations of his work – at one point reporting science fiction critics such as Frederic Jameson, Peter Fitting, and Franz Rottensteiner to

the FBI out of paranoia of a “worldwide communist conspiracy” (Philmus 92-3). It is the Marxist *perception* of reality as well as our capitalist economic structure, Dick suggests, that leads to social unrest – perhaps a key to understanding his paranoid fear of interpretations that would foster this ideology. Nevertheless, he couches *Ubik* in Marxist terms even as he maligns Marxist philosophy in a self-referential failure to imagine a transcendence of existing political philosophies. By parodying Marxist theory, *Ubik* parodies itself.

Dick likewise uses the trope of advertisement as a vehicle of both social oppression and individual liberation, extending the notion of complicity with the one-dimensional world as he satirizes the mass media, its mouthpiece. Because his own genre is mass-marketed as well, he must leave some hope of discovery or transcendence through more “lowbrow” formats. While this contradiction certainly fits Marcuse’s condemnation of a confining, ersatz freedom to choose between fetishized commodities, Dick recognizes that such a conceptualization would diminish the potential of his own commodity – the pop-culture-oriented genre of science fiction.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968) interrogates similar issues of a complicit mass media, an increasingly mechanized socioeconomic system, and a potential loss of our “humanity” as well, in its title and in its text. Its main character, Rick Deckard, is employed to assassinate rebellious androids who fulfill more of a human than a mechanical function, using a device called the “Voigt-Kamffp” empathy test to make such distinctions. The novel is set in a postapocalyptic earth that has faced environmental catastrophe, in which only a few proletarian workers and their machines

remain: the title refers to technological “replacements” or “doubles” for real animals, which have perished. Thus, the novel implies that such differentiations between nature and technology are moot in a stratified, unnatural, and mass-produced society. Dick chooses to connect the android market to the loaded metaphor of the slave market: “the TV set shouted, ‘duplicates the halcyon days of the pre-Civil War southern states! Either as body servants or tireless field hands, the custom-tailored humanoid robot’” (445). In his novel *The Simulacra*, advertisements are configured as sentient, pestering insects that interrupt daily lives as well as the narrative. These images recall the initial scene of Thomas Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49* (1966), in which its heroine is “stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube, spoke the name of God, and tried to feel as drunk as possible” (10-11). In these examples, a malignant human-automaton relationship is established, in which the TV and its industry technicians watch and coerce their watchers. Dick’s depiction of mass media here resembles the sort of authorial domination represented by Runciter and Vogelsang in *Ubik*, as the producer in the literary market attempts to transmit a subliminal message to the reader and persuade readers to consume more text. Alternately, Oedipa, Rick Deckard, and the reader seek in mass media an artificially mystical, nostalgic spectacle of comfort and escape (recalling many critics’ view of science fiction’s particular dangers). Dick personifies the media as an overbearing auctioneer here, literally attempting to persuade its viewers into participating in social inequities. This depiction of mass communication as fraudulent pastiche, preserving injustice through distractions, has its roots in its identity as a propaganda machine for the U.S. government during Vietnam, at least in the mind of Philip K. Dick.

Emmanuel Carrere neatly summarizes Dick's conspiratorial suspicions: "what proof was there that the images of Vietnam that appeared on the television screen weren't cooked up in a studio with blank bullets, scale models, and ketchup?" (159).¹⁶ Such personal suspicions and textual recriminations of the media can be contextualized by the media's historic use by the government in the 1960s and its contestorial relationship with the counterculture instead of being attributed to Dick's personal psychoses and drug use alone – though his novels' portrayal of hallucinogens once again underscores the conceptual problem of simultaneous religious transcendence and market-driven escape.

Another example of Dick's pastiche of advertisement, which begins every chapter in *Ubik*, displays the ways in which the media both sustains and subverts consumer capitalism. Chapter Four begins with "wild new Ubik salad dressing...an entirely new and different taste treat that's waking up the world. Wake up to Ubik and be wild! Safe when taken as directed" (639). The double repetitions of "wild," "new," and "waking" satirize the common advertising gimmick of restatement, yet the terminology itself paradoxically highlights Ubik's revolutionary, disrupting qualities. The exclamatory injunction (as well as the "w" alliteration) also seems to echo the infamous Marxist phrase, "workers of the world, unite!" Joe Chip's own status as a half-lifer invites a focus on Ubik's resurrective, restorative qualities to a stultified, regressive world. The final phrase of this snippet, "safe when taken as directed," stylistically jars with the bulk of the ad: one can imagine the rapid, low, deferring, and disclaiming voice that often occurs in the ending marginalia of many commercials. Dick's inclusion of safety and

¹⁶ As Marcuse similarly inquires, "Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?" (8).

command seemingly serves to contradict Ubik's claims of creating a new world; nonetheless, such an interpretation ignores the disclaimer's conventional role in ads. Its goal is not to negate entirely the preceding message's import, but rather to avoid responsibility for the dangerous product's, or text's, effect on consumers, or readers. At the same time, the quiet disclaimer highlights the louder message of revolution by its contrast to it. Dick must, through his authorial role, give a certain amount of legitimacy to the idea of the liberating product. Ubik salad dressing thus acts as a meta-commentary on *Ubik* the novel, as well as science fiction's problems and potential. *Ubik* and its genre must advertise their distinction from the normative social order in order to attain commercial success, to be all the more avidly consumed.¹⁷ Perhaps this reality is another source of Dick's irritation towards Marxist criticism: constructing his novels as deconstructions alone ignores his own implication in the game of exchange.

Dick therefore levels his criticism of mass media upon science fiction's dual role as agent of social transcendence and as instrument of hegemonic cultural forces. The androids of *Electric Sheep* act as contemporary science fiction's most attentive fans, remarking "Nothing is as exciting. To read about cities and huge industrial enterprises, and really successful colonization," and labeling it "pre-colonial fiction" (542). This connection recalls the relations between the production of the utopian text and the production of the colony in More's *Utopia*. Such a classification also has obvious political implications in a post-colonial era – in the novel, science fiction has paved the

¹⁷ In their role as epigram at the start of each chapter, the ads generally sell the Ubik as a disposable, rapidly used product such as a food or a cleaning solution: one that generally atrophies or dissipates by consumption. Dick again portrays his own authorial anxiety, while also playing upon his own theme of spirituality through consumption in the "salad dressing example"; salad dressing is not usually consumed in the morning, pointing out the cultural narrative of life, death, and resurrection.

way for mass migration to Mars as well as the android fans' own oppression in this colonial system, a less "successful" structure that its promotional literature foreshadowed. In his *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, escape from the realities of a capitalist and colonial system, while ostensibly achieved through imbibing the drugs Can-D and Chew-Z, also takes a narrative form in the puerile adventures of Perky Pat – a science-fictionalization and commodification of bourgeois society on Earth.¹⁸ In the *Silent Spring*-like worlds of both novels, terraforming on Mars has given humanity an easy "out" from environmental crises. These post-colonial and ecological approaches to his own literary niche allow us to revise our understanding of Dick as a proponent of escape in itself.

Dick likewise highlights humanity's oppressive control over what we deem "nonhuman," be it machinery, nature, another race, another gender, or another species. In this Orwellian paradigm, man's mastery over "object" leads to our own servility. For instance, one of *Ubik*'s many amusing recurrent motifs consists of Joe Chip's struggles with sentient coin-operated machinery, from doorways to payphones. A heated debate with his door occurs as follows: "'what I pay you...is in the nature of gratuity; I don't have to pay you.' 'I think otherwise,' the door said. 'Look in the purchase contract'" (630). While talking doorknobs may parody a certain psychedelic '60s aesthetic, Dick is also attempting a broader, Marcusean examination of the "domination" of man by man, and of man by object. Sherryl Vint observes of Dick's portrayal of this human/inhuman binary: "like the test for empathy that divides androids from humans, the line drawn

¹⁸ The narrative of Perky Pat's adventures additionally offers a pastiche of both "Leave it to Beaver"-style family sitcoms of the 1960's and of Barbie advertisements.

between human and inhuman justifies the use of violence without ethical consequence.” Our valuation of empathy is thus revealed to be an outcropping of humanist thought (an exclusionary term in itself) – a means by which the “soul” has historically divided man and nature, man and machine, and man and woman. Vint labels these segregations as “Cartesian” in origin; to extend her argument, the novel’s “Voigt-Kampff empathy test” that aims to assess mechanically an ethical value’s presence in a machine in many ways resembles Descartes’ attempt to find a physical “soul” through anatomical study. Dick’s rejection of both humanism and positivism is borne out by an argument between Deckard, the androids’ bounty hunter, and his wife at the novel’s outset. Deckard argues for his ethical purity by claiming, “I’ve never killed a human being in my life,” to which his wife retorts, “just those poor andys” (435). Thus, a moral claim that rests upon one’s own privileged condition or group identity in the context of violence – or perhaps even genocide – must be perceived as an irrelevance. This juxtaposition of differing ethical systems also connotes America’s “culture war” in the 1960s, between a moralized conformity that often excluded non-privileged groups and a more inclusionist but sometimes socially disruptive agenda.

Dick’s imagined society creates divisions and exclusions through the (pseudo-) scientific language of sociology and psychology, as with the Voigt-Kampff empathy scale, evoking the Cold War era’s proclivity to explain or medicate away cultural inequalities through Freudian psychoanalysis and the proclamations of social “experts.” Dick also emulates his contemporaries’ discourse of biological certitude in Deckard’s description of empathy, which “evidently, existed only within the human community,

whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order” (455). Finally, Deckard’s own practice of non-empathy towards “nonbeings” catches up to him as he proclaims, “what I’ve done, he thought; that’s become alien to me. In fact everything about me has become unnatural; I’ve become an unnatural self” (598). The repetition of “unnatural” juxtaposed with the “self” creates a paradox in which “alien” otherness is found within rather than without, mirroring the Cold War cultural mythology of aliens disguising as humans in science fiction shows, or of communists disguised as everyday suburbanites in the era’s politics.¹⁹ Dick extends this common trope to a “detective” character who must judge human normalcy, effectively accusing the accusers and subverting the binary between hegemony and rebellion. Thus, even the bourgeois or “privileged” segments of an oppressive, one-dimensional society ultimately become subsumed by the same structure that bequeaths to them preferential treatment over workers, be they doorknobs, androids, or men.

The power structure depicted between Joe and his doorknob thus operates as a metaphor for capitalist class (and cultural) struggle. Dick plays upon the etymology of “robot” from the Czech *robotá*, or forced labor (OED), the theme to which Dick more critically returns in *Androids*. The question of who (or what) is mastering whom is continued in a later polemic by Joe against a coffee maker. He warns, “people like me will rise up and overthrow you, and the end of tyranny by the homeostatic machine will have arrived...furthermore, your cream or milk or whatever it is, is sour” (681). Joe

¹⁹ The narrative of “hidden subversives” within the hegemony also, again, mirrors science fiction’s role in Cold War culture.

Chip's diction, as in so many of the novel's detailed and prosaic "blips," both appropriates and parodies Marxist discourse. Dick disrupts the proletariat/bourgeois binary by presenting Joe as revolutionary legend (at least in the character's own mind) and as an abusive, complaining customer and consumer of the machine who/that acts as producer and automaton of his goods.²⁰ Here we can see another example of Dick's critical attitude towards Marxist thought even as he borrows heavily from its linguistic and symbolic repertoire. The phrase "whatever it is" signals another moment of utopian deferment on Dick's part; here, the land of milk and honey promised by technological advances and the exchange of goods and services has "soured" to Joe due to its incessant material frustrations, if such promises have ever been genuine artifacts. At the same time, Joe's use of Marxist eschatological terms such as "rise up" and "end of tyranny" self-deconstruct, particularly in lieu of *Ubik's* carnivalesque "Resurrection Day" and the cold pac's constant delay of the most "natural" or "inevitable" end, that of death. Yet another semantic complication lies in Joe's reference to a "homeostatic machine," which could depict his own stultified state of being as he is unknowingly preserved by ice at this very moment in the text. Thus, any overturning of the "world that is the case" or its "objective order" would work against his own self-preservation.

The only entities that promise victory over his stagnated existence, before or after his "death," are other fetishized objects, replicas or doubles of the social and technological machinery that otherwise thwart him. Attempting to pit commodity against commodity, Joe pleads to his door, "I'll charge my overdue bill against my Triangular

²⁰ This scenario also perpetuates and portrays the ever-present division between literary producer/author and his/her most finicky consumer, the literary critic.

Magic Key” (629). Credit, in modern capitalism, is the “magic wand” that eases socioeconomic relations, though of course its mystical attributes eventually reach a predetermined “limit.” “Credit,” like the terms “trust,” “security,” and “fidelity,” carries both ethical and economic associations. Perhaps Dick here includes the idea of “magic” in order to demonstrate how the credit system is able to transcend the entropic decline of value exchanged for goods, at least in the short term. However, like all other forms of transcendence, credit is finally limited by and integrated into the material facts of expenditures.

The concept of entropic time in *Ubik*'s half-life realm reflects sociopolitical regression. Dick condemns 1960s American culture for acquiescing to what their contemporary Pynchon unveils as social decline in *Crying of Lot 49*. Joe's first truly despairing assessment of his backwards-cycling phenomenon occurs as he encounters what would be reactionary, racist politics from his “future's” standpoint. Joe's experience of half-life includes a regression both of the products (including *Ubik*) of his environment, but of temporality itself. In an inversion of *The Time Machine*'s motif of exponentially-increasing time, time in half-life speedily goes backwards. As Joe hitchhikes in 1939, he reflects, “I never actually heard the term ‘nigger’ used...and found himself appraising this era a little differently, all at once. I forgot about this, he realized” (740). This passage therefore contains a prescient criticism of the present's continual whitewashing of a nostalgic past that never took place. Joe is called a “political agitator” (741) by the pre-WWII world's inhabitants. This depiction potentially parallels Dick's own experiences as a conflicted member of the '60s psychedelic counterculture.

Furthermore, Dick integrates the discordances between 1960s political nostalgia and progressivism into a schema that examines each worldview's respective theoretical implications, presenting postmodernity's ensuing culture wars as a clash of ideas. Scott Bukatman argues that *Ubik* undermines the idealism of Platonic forms: "a character's ability to alter the past implies the existence of myriad presents, one more real, finally, than the other" (235). Yet, Dick does seem to uphold the existence of a final "origin" or narrative "center" of Jory's and Joe's "play" – the onset of WWII. This pause in the entropic process reflects upon the totalitarianizing aspects of modernist literature that have sought Platonic, mythic origins of speech, behavior, and meaning. One of Marcuse's more sophisticated strategies was to deconstruct the cultural, or at least intuitive, "origins" of modernist science as well, from objective theory to subjective, constructed forms of measurement. Thus, Dick's choice of gravitational fulcrum for *Ubik* becomes more comprehensible in this context. In addition, WWII is often cited by literary scholars as the "origin" of "postmodern" fiction, a label which can be applied to the novel and an era in which, as Brian McHale asserts, ontological questions began to dominate literary discourse.

Dick further delineates the parallels between textual recursivity and entropy theory in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. The ecology of this novel's postapocalyptic world represents itself as a space overrun with "kipple...useless objects, like junk mail or match folders...when nobody's around, kipple reproduces itself...it always gets more and more...there's the First Law of Kipple" (480). The interpretive possibilities of this passage do not lie in its syntactical similarity with Thermodynamic

Law – they lie instead in Dick’s undermining of ironclad scientific principle through “kipple’s” active nature and neologism. The image of “kipple” reproducing itself out of human sight calls to mind the common childhood fantasy of toys becoming animate once their “owner” has left. In other words, Dick’s depiction of Kipple’s Law recalls what Freud speculates in his essay “The Uncanny” (1919) as the “primitive, animistic” root of our “uncanny” fear of living automata: elements that are “homely” for children are alien, unnatural to adults (147-53). Kipple’s Law may attest to the endless replication of textual meanings after its production by the author, but Dick’s characterization of endless interpretive possibilities is pessimistic, portraying them as “junk” sifted and necessarily placed into a hierarchy by the consumer. Kipple’s “uncanny” activity may also portray the avidity with which science fiction’s younger audience and skepticism with which its older audience approaches its more far-out, speculative elements. Dick demonstrates entropy/kipple, therefore, to be a label in the mind’s eye of the beholder, or, more importantly, to be a social and linguistic construction. Indeed, this excerpt’s messenger has his own label, “chickenhead,” and operates as living kipple in the spatial and socioeconomic margins of the universe. It follows that a “colonial” culture with a vested interest in enjoining earth’s “desirable” inhabitants to migrate may develop, consciously or subconsciously, such a worldview. A perception of the universe as inevitable, preordained waste, Dick implies, may follow its own logic into self-destruction.

Dick thus extends a Marcusean critique of scientific “objectivity” with a warning concerning apathy. Dick Palmer recognizes that Philip K. Dick has often “been content to demonstrate that there is no ‘objective’ reality irrespective of consciousness” (92).

However, Palmer claims that in *Ubik* he begins to add “the concept of ultimate reality...what religion calls God, science calls the unified field, and Dick calls Ubik” (92). Palmer’s own diction of “content” and unification of theories under one big tent perhaps uncovers more about his own preferences than Dick’s: *Ubik*’s narrative does not necessarily offer a reality outside its characters’ minds after the turning-point of the accident that sent Joe and his colleagues to the morgue. *Ubik* the product is instead revealed to be a willed manifestation of the Runciter couple. While its redemptive effects on Joe’s closed-off reality are certainly not negligible, there is no proof that it represents a unified theory of reality in the “real” world. Indeed, *Ubik*’s status is that of an exchange, both figuratively and literally in the form of currency, between Joe’s internal/mystical and Runciter’s external/material worlds. Even this set-up will be reimagined at the novel’s last words. In the “law of kipple” and *Ubik*’s fluid movement between worlds, Dick emphasizes the dually creative and destructive power of human consciousness to formulate both material and mystical realities. The mind’s destructive potential is signified by the hegemonic power of “Jory’s” one-dimensional domination: through his characterization, Dick demonstrates how a society characterized by entropic conformity has actually been purposefully developed through subliminal messages by cultural authorities.

In a one-dimensional world that controls all methods of communication, including sci-fi literature, literary tropes carry the terminology of economic exchange. Nevertheless, by naming both his novel and his redemptive product “*Ubik*,” Dick reaches beyond his rebellion against universal, “ubiquitous” infiltration of language in Marcusean

schematics. Dick demonstrates the potential of revolution and redemption even in the hegemonic methods that would seemingly destroy this possibility, such as advertising gimmicks and household products. Indeed, it is in such fluid symbolism that *Ubik* as text and as product comes to life. Dick further expresses the relationship between language and materiality through Joe Chip's own misguided notions of his physical state. Joe speculates of *Ubik*'s appearance on the scene: "Runciter can't be doing it...this originates from within our environment. It has to, because nothing can come in from outside except words" (781). In his half-life world as will and idea, however, word and metaphor are enabled to metamorphosize into "physical" fact, whether their origin is developed from inside or ordained from outside this closed system. Words, even in their low cultural "form" as *Ubik*, are vital to survival and revolt in Jory's one-dimensional construct. Dick conceptualizes the means by which a writer in mid-century America can, using his/her reified "message," "corrupted" by market realities or not, actively operate as an agent of social transformation.

Thus, Dick's attempted subversion of the one-dimensional system must be continuously "deferred" by its complicity with, and inextricability from, the hegemony's influence upon commodity culture, mass media, and literature. However, this very complicity allows science fiction's utopian speculation through Dick's liminal subversions that may change our interpretation and perception of social realities. One might argue that this inside participation, rather than a critique from the margins, freezes the authors' message of social change as carnivalesque "play" alone. Yet, as Dick demonstrates through his works, hope remains for a conceptual change transubstantiated

through the commodified machine that may not only result in, but become a concrete metamorphosis in itself. *Ubik* therefore acts as a metaphor for literary exchange in the capitalist system. Furthermore, by anticipating the inevitable moments of collusion with dominant society, Dick allows himself the free agency to establish when and where this complicity will take place in his work. Such a meta-critical methodology is a new feature of the science fiction narrative in the 1960s. Dick therefore blurs the boundaries between mysticism and machinery, producer and consumer, author and reader, and the one-dimensional and polyvocal world.

Conclusion

Unreal Cities and Synthetic Bodies in Gibson's *Neuromancer*

Utopian literature's dialectical process of responding to the tension between liberation and appropriation both within and between its individual works continues into our own era. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* in many ways operates as a case study of a product both antithetical and endemic to utopian yearnings: its aesthetic properties celebrated as a form of cultural resistance, or "cyberpunk," yet its thematic message nullifies such hopes. If we accept the precept that New Wave texts such as Dick's *Ubik* and Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* mirror cultural revolutions of the Cold War era, then William Gibson's cyberpunk *Neuromancer* (1984) in many ways operates as their dialectic rebuttal. Like many works of the 1980s that refer back to the sociopolitical upheavals of the 1960s, this novel looks upon its influences with both nostalgia and criticism. Gibson's novel represents an American culture jaded by transcendent revolutionary ideals, a world economy faced with increasing globalization, inequality, and the death of Soviet power as an alternative to modern capitalism, the political birth of neoconservatism, and the increasing use of interactive technology and body modification as commodity fetishes. While Gibson deals with similar issues of social and material constraint as Dick and Heinlein, he also deconstructs the idea of a "freedom" "beyond" these confines – creating a bleakly anarchic world in which individual freedom is characterized by technofetishism, corporate corruption, and hedonism. In particular, Gibson portrays technology not as a transcendence or enhancement of our humanity, but its loss.

Like many science fiction works that depict the posthuman cyborg, *Neuromancer* complicates the binaries of natural and artificial, human and automaton; however, Gibson's combination of the two is primarily negative, a critique of technology as capitalism's servant in fostering social and moral disintegration. Gibson depicts *Neuromancer*'s urban landscape as a dystopian waste land, perhaps experiencing environmental devastation similar to that of Dick's *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, as its first sentence states, "the sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (1). This opening also recalls Pynchon's "greenish dead eye of the TV set" that stares down Oedipa Maas, as he pioneers the conceptualization of sentient and active technology in a Marcusean realm. However, here it is the natural or the organic that is deadened and/or mechanized rather than the inorganic that is enlivened, foreshadowing the prosthetic modifications and human co-dependence on cyberspace that occur throughout the novel. In other words, the biological has been mechanized, even alienated, from the novel's characters as it becomes integrated into the capitalist system. However, this same cyberspace is a place in which destiny can be controlled and life extended, a possibility symbolized by its "Dixie Flatline" character who lives through this technological form, anticipating the internet's role in popular debates as either a tool for greater equality or a tool of social regress. As utopian works anticipate and respond to burgeoning technical forms, from print technology to mass media to the digital age, literary consumers' response to them may construct social perceptions of the possibilities inherent in these innovations. Thus,

consumer and cultural ambivalence to new modes of literacy are often shaped by utopian literary producers.

Reflecting both his proximity to the millennium and the specter of a capitalist historical dialectic with no end in sight, Gibson sparks a trend of an eschatological focus in postmodern utopian literature. Gibson extends his theme of death-in-life with the Terrier-Ashpool family, who exist at the top of *Neuromancer*'s social hierarchy and set the narrative's events in motion. Like the Runciters of Dick's *Ubik*, the Tessier-Ashpools have "their own cryogenic setup" and are nevertheless able to project certain realities from that state, as "they trade off" authority and inheritance amongst each other (76). In *Neuromancer*, the frozen plutocracy does not merely represent social stagnation or permanent economic inequities, but a hypothetical depiction of capitalism's final stages: "there hasn't been a share of Tessier-Ashpool traded on the open market in over a hundred years. On any market, far as I know" (75), declares Finn. The modern world system's active bourgeoisie (76) – inventors, venture capitalists, factory overseers – will no longer be needed or even present during its future stages, Gibson theorizes. Instead, the system will exist via its own preinvented machinery, symbolized by the Wintermute/Neuromancer AI, with no "human resources" necessary. Therefore, *Neuromancer*'s sentient machines and mechanical men offer a warning to its 1980's readers, many of whom perhaps reaped the rewards of global capitalism: that they will eventually become replaced by more efficient workers. This fear is supplemented by the novel's initial setting of Japan, as its technologically-based economic success during this decade inspired paranoia in the West.

Though Gibson therefore revolts against what he portrays as his New Wave forbears' embrace of cultural revolution to no material, economic effect, he also wrestles with the same problematic – that is, whether or not dissent can exist without becoming subsumed by the hegemony and consumed by its participants. For example, Gibson imagines lawless regions and anarchist organizations as an inextricable segment of his dystopia. In one scenario, the “Panther Moderns” (64), antigovernment terrorists, are hired as mercenaries by the plutarchic Tessier-Ashpools, perhaps a recursive critique of the utopian form's use by capitalist power structures: a motif that echoes Genly's status as global Ekumen spokesman and the utopian planet Anarres's existence as a capitalist mining colony. Additionally, their name and inchoate, violent activities recalls 1960's revolutionary groups such as the Black Panthers and the Symbionese Liberation Army, and their leader Lupus Yonderboy's pink hair and body piercings lend the Moderns a “punk” persona, offering a pastiche of youth rebellion in the latter-20th century. While Gibson's *Neuromancer* is often labeled the first “cyberpunk” novel, it therefore deconstructs the punk or counterculture sensibility. Thus, the genre of “cyberpunk” already criticizes itself even at its supposed foundation, a process that mirrors More's metacritical foundation of the utopian genre. Punk's anarchic sensibility, Gibson therefore argues, is only a microcosm of the state's atrophy as a result of deregulation and globalization, a process mirrored in 1980's politics and culture as well as within the novel. As Case states, “burgeoning technologies require outlaw zones. Night City wasn't there for its inhabitants, but as a deliberately unsupervised playground for technology itself” (11). Night city therefore emulates utopian literature's role of subversion and

containment. Gibson's placement of "technology" as this sentence's subject lends it an active, sentient stance, establishing the alternative "zones'" inhabitants as objects rather than subjects of a technological state system.

The correlation between Gibson's artificially modified characters and Gibson's artifice in his radical depictions of them further problematizes the aesthetics of a "punk" work, much as Heinlein and Dick submit their respective works to self-criticism. Nevertheless, Gibson acknowledges this lack of humanity and complicity with a dehumanizing system on the part of counterculture punk movements as in part a necessary answer to postmodern culture and certain historical events that precede it. Through the character of Armitage/Corto in particular, Gibson shows our nation's trauma coming out of the Cold War and its losing battles. The convoluted, conspiratorial nature of the novel's "Operation Screaming Thunder" and "Three Weeks War" with the Soviets mirrors the beginning of the Vietnam War and an ensuing atmosphere of government secrecy. As the last surviving American participant in this conflict, Armitage forgets his true identity and enters a criminal underworld, reflecting some of the post-traumatic stress and social maladjustment that comprise our usual cultural representations of Vietnam vets. His personality shows similarities with the Panther Moderns, that of emptiness. Case observes, "Operators above a certain level tended to submerge their personalities, he knew. But Wage had had vices, lovers...the blankness he found in Armitage was something else" (96-7). This alienated alterity unites Gibson's portrayals of Armitage, the Panthers, the Tessier-Ashpools, and, finally, his own novelistic form. Because Gibson shows this "blankness" to be a symbolic result of Cold War trauma, it

can be assumed that his depictions of “punk” are conceptualized as the final outcome of a failed political and cultural struggle, or a failed attempt at utopian transcendence.

If we can view *Neuromancer* through this lens, then we can better understand Gibson’s continual pseudo-religious references as, in the words of Yeats, a “terrible beauty is born” through technology and AI. Any transcendence concurring with production and consumption in the novel exists not for its main characters or the human race, but for the system’s own perpetuation and survival. Gibson’s representation of cyberspace as a “shared illusion” casts the utopian drive into doubt. His conceit of body as prison leads to the supplanting of man by machine, as utopian escape from the body on the part of the Tessier-Ashpools incites the creation of Wintermute/*Neuromancer*.

Therefore, Gibson does present certain elements of transcendence via machinery seen in Dick’s 1960’s work, but depicts these elements as terrible, grotesque, and inhuman as machinery attains the corporality that humanity attempts to leave behind (or disincorporate). The horror of machinated resurrection appears full-force during Molly and Case’s travels in Istanbul. After an AI is damaged, “the thing seemed to pull itself up out of the pavement, through the inert, bloody ruin” (92). Once again, Gibson uses stillness and stone to show the horror of technological sentience. The active movement through something “bloody” and passive also resembles a birth, such as that described by Derrida in “Structure, Sign, and Play,” of a thing that is “as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of

monstrosity.” Thus, Gibson portrays a utopian transcendence by means of the *machina* of postmodern capitalism that is not sublime, but monstrous.

Reflecting and in some ways dissenting from Bourdieu’s postulations of class roles and aesthetic forms, Gibson demonstrates that a great amount of concentrated wealth and power must be amassed in order to mobilize a modern utopia, whether social or personal. The utopian aesthetic arises out of a turning inward, a denial of reality or social responsibility, on the part of the powerful. The reference to the Tessier-Ashpool’s AI as “demon” also unites its ancient classical meaning of guiding, creative genius with its usual definition as malefactor and evil henchman: technology is both a means of utopian creation and dominating social control. Gibson’s argument is therefore an exception that proves the rule: social liberation through the utopian form must be achieved through its innate populism and consumerism.

Perhaps the most visceral imagery Gibson employs in the work is his use of the “wasp’s nest” flashback during Case’s drug experimentation, in which he confuses and ties the mechanical to the natural. The stakes of such a connection are high. As portrayed by Dick’s *Androids*, if the mechanical is indistinguishable from the organic, no privileged ethical or mental divisions can be made between our own species and the tools of domination that we employ. In his memory, Case re-encounters the nest and views it as a “Horror. The spiral birth factory, stepped terraces of hatching cells, the staged progress from egg to larva, near-wasp, wasp...Alien” (126). Later, this visual image transforms itself into a machine gun in Case’s mind. The words “horror” at an encounter with alterity interestingly evokes both a communal and an industrial social structure:

wasp births occur in a “factory,” and their development as a “staged progress” imitates the wording of a Hegelian and Marxist dialectic. This vision of another social order centers around the “hive paradigm” in science fiction’s presentation of the cooperative system, yet this hive image also could be viewed as all-too-familiar to the capitalist reader in its sense of droned, stratified labor. This combination of the familiar and the “alien” continues though Gibson’s use of the word itself; there are no “otherworldly” creatures in the novel, in a strict definition, as the sense of the unfamiliar or “other” is encountered in the bodies of modern humanity and its altered commodities. Gibson thus offers a metacritique at his own attempts to lend a sense of “alien horror” to the reader. Instead, the horror occurs through a different perspective on our own system: after Case “drenched the nest with fuel,” he encounters “the T-A logo of Tessier-Ashpool neatly embossed into its side, as though the wasps themselves had worked it there” (127). Therefore, escape or transcendence – either literary or hallucinogenic – from this system is once again interrupted by the author’s interjection of consumer-driven advertisements and commodities. In this case, the hive is at once communal, consumerist, and a symbol of utopian alterity: once again, the utopian text interrupts and defers itself in order to offer an image of its necessary corruption by state capitalism so that it may critique an oppressive social order.

The active inscription by the aesthetically productive wasps of the corporate logo draws comparisons with Dick’s self-criticism of his genre; indeed, Gibson here extends this evaluation to include literature itself as necessarily historicized and limited by its material circumstance. Gibson additionally subverts our usual defense of literature as a

“humanity,” a genre of thought that centers upon man and depends upon the elevated nature of our species. Wasps do the same work as literature and the arts of abetting aristocratic solipsism. Lady 3Jane’s essay on her Villa’s machinations speaks for, and of, itself, as it drones, “The semiotics of the Villa bespeak a turning in, denial of the bright void beyond the hall...We have sealed ourselves away behind our money, growing inward, generating a seamless universe of self” (173). Here, Gibson uses the adolescent heiress’s pontifications to comment upon bourgeois culture as well as cultural criticism, since her pretentious diction and obfuscating philosophical terms such as “universe of self” and “bright void” offer a pastiche of its worst elements. Given that other species and the hegemonic class are the examples of literary works and culture in *Neuromancer*, we can see Gibson removing literature from the category of what gives us our humanity, or ability to transcend social realities. Dixie Flatline, for instance, tells Case that he “ ‘ain’t likely to write you no poem,”” but that “ ‘Your AI, it just might. But it ain’t no way *human*.”” If utopian literature cannot give us our humanity, our comfort, or our revolution, Gibson perhaps demonstrates its use in the wasp paradigm – displaying the ways in which we can view historicized subjects creatively enacting and interpreting socioeconomic realities.

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