THE AUTOMATIC EYE:

MECHANIZATION OF THE SELF IN POSTWAR

AMERICAN DYSTOPIAS

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The 'narrative' period of this thesis begins in the last days of World War II, a world coming to terms with genocide, concentration camps, and ruined cities. Nazi Germany, which becomes a touchstone for the depiction of totalitarian states in the the dystopias of Fifties America, was defeated, and with the end of the war imminent, there seems to have been a window of hope or opportunity for the imagination of a better future. The American behavioural psychologist, B. F. Skinner, sat down as the war drew to a close to write a now famous utopia called *Walden Two*, which was published in 1948, in the same time-frame as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is a utopia very much like a frontier community with the benefits of twentieth century sociological and technological advances. *Walden Two* was a centre of controversy when it was published and has remained so since.[1] This has largely centred on its use of behavioural engineering, a social science which attempts to modify human behaviour through the control of environmental factors, and the 'positive reinforcement' (rewarding) of positive communal behaviour. All too often this appears in the guise of manipulation and control. Through his protagonist Frazier, Skinner offers the rationale that as humanity will always be controlled by power elites, it is a matter of who does the controlling, and to reinforce positive behaviour is the best alternative. Power and control are then ideological givens: a Utopia without them is literally unimaginable.

Skinner's 1976 commentary on his own text, called 'Walden Two Revisited' in an unambiguous reference to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited*, illuminates the circumstances of this particular utopia's production. Skinner, dismayed at the organization

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[1] B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (1948) (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

of American life in the mid-1940s, concentrated on production and consumption as

dangers to humanity's future, suggesting that people would accept a lower standard of

living if their own productive lives were materially linked to the processes of

consumption; that is, the small communities would largely consume what they themselves

would produce. He also wrote that '[i]f the world is to save any part of its resources for

the future, it must reduce not only consumption but the number of consumers', a

restatement of many of the 1950s dystopian texts' fears of rapid overpopulation, and its

pressures upon urban living and societal infrastructure.[2] This eco-friendly utopian text is,

however, reliant upon the (untried) methods of 'positive reinforcement' or 'behavioural

engineering' -- a form of social conditioning -- and an ambiguity about individual freedom

at odds with contemporaneous writers of dystopias.

Skinner places the writing of *Walden Two* in 'the early summer of 1945':

> [which] was not a bad time for Western Civilization. Hitler was dead, and one of
> the most barbaric regimes in history was coming to an end. The Depression of the
> thirties had been forgotten. Communism was no longer a threat, for Russia was a
> trusted ally. It would be another month or two before Hiroshima would be the
> testing ground for a horrible new weapon.[3]

There seems to have been, with the end of the war in sight, a window of hope or

opportunity which Skinner hoped to fill with *Walden Two*. Conversely, Skinner sketches

in many of the cultural and political events which shape the coming to prominence of the

dystopian rather than utopian novel in the United States in the postwar years. Nazi

Germany, with its appropriation of classical and monumental architectures, and a

(utopian) myth of societal reconstruction, accompanied by genocide and concentration

camps, provided, along with the Stalinist Soviet Union, a model for totalitarian systems in

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[2] Skinner, 'Walden Two Revisited' in *Walden Two*, pp. v-xvi (p. xi).
[3] Skinner, 'Walden Two Revisited', p. v.

dystopian texts. Hiroshima, and its images of apocalyptic destruction and ruined cities,

signalled the beginning of the nuclear arms race and the Cold War, and many of the

dystopias in this thesis rely on a moment of nuclear apocalypse to provide the narrative

space to imagine the reconstructed, near-future totalized society. That the imagination of

Utopia, a possibility in the early summer of 1945, should so quickly have become the

domination of the dystopian form, can be traced to developments in the historical

movements of the period. The alliance forged to defeat Nazi Germany between

(Communist) Stalinist Soviet Union and the United States of America became ossified

into the mutual suspicions and arms race of the Cold War; and perhaps most importantly,

the atomic bombs which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki also seem to have

undermined the possibility of imagining utopia. David Riesman, whose *The Lonely Crowd*

explored the conformism of the American 1950s, later wrote:

> When governments have power to exterminate the globe, it is not surprising that
> anti-Utopian novels, like *1984*, are popular, while utopian political thought about a
> more hopeful future nearly disappears.[4]

The impossibility of imagining the future is magnified by the imminent possibility of

nuclear conflict and global annihilation. Writing in *Tribune* in 1945, George Orwell noted

'how likely we all are to be blown to pieces by it [the bomb] in the next few years', and

outlined a prescient scenario wherein a 'cold war' (he actually uses the phrase) would be

instituted which would continue societal exploitation, domination, and mass

dispossession.[5]

In an earlier article, published in the Christmas 1943 edition of *Tribune* under the

symbolic byline 'John Freeman', Orwell displayed his ironic and ambiguous attitude

[4] David Riesman, *Abundance for What? and other essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), pp. 95-6.
[5] George Orwell, 'You and the Atom Bomb', *Tribune* (19 October 1945), reprinted in *The Collected Essays, Jounalism and Letters of George Orwell, Volume IV: In Front of Your Nose, 1945 - 1950*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), pp. 6-10 (p. 6; p. 9).

towards utopia some five years before the advent of his classic dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and eighteen months before Hiroshima. In the article, motivated by the Christmas season of its publication, Orwell considered Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to exemplify, through exception, the failure of novelists to convincingly imagine happiness. He wrote:

> All efforts to describe permanent happiness [...] have been failures. Utopias [...]
> have been common in literature of the past three or four hundred years but the
> "favourable" ones are invariably unappetising, and usually lacking in vitality as
> well.[6]

Orwell lauds the principles and intentions behind the Utopian impulse but asks, as do many anti-utopian writers, 'is there anyone who would actually want to live in a Wellsian Utopia?' Though sympathetic to Wells's aims, he writes that 'not to live in a world like that, not to wake up in a hygenic [*sic*] garden suburb infested by naked schoolmarms, has actually become a conscious political motive'.[7] Instead of striving for 'happiness', Orwell argues, a Utopian impulse which inevitably leads to the imposition of order, 'human brotherhood' should be the goal. While the eradication of war, poverty and misery can be counted among Orwell's own left-leaning sympathies, by 1943 Utopia had become, for Orwell, a symbol of the over-regulation of life.

Utopia reacts against the perceived malignities of contemporaneous culture and society by providing images of a 'better' one. One of the paradoxes of the dystopian form (which evinces a suspicion of utopia itself) is that many, in fact most, dystopias are written by those (like Orwell himself) on the political left, or at least left-liberal. Those who one would expect to write utopias, actually write dystopias. As Irving Howe writes, 'antiutopian fiction [...] comes primarily from men of the left'.[8] Aldous Huxley, Evgeny

[6] Orwell, 'Why Socialists don't believe in Fun', *Tribune* (December 1943), reprinted in *Observer* (28 June 1998), p. 3.
[7] Orwell, 'Why Socialists don't believe in Fun', p. 3.
[8] Irving Howe, 'The Fiction of Antiutopia', *The Decline of the New* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), pp. 66 -74 (p. 68).

Zamiatin, and such later writers as Bernard Wolfe or Philip Dick can be counted among

them. Why is this so? Krishan Kumar, in 'The End of Socialism? The End of Utopia? The

End of History?', argues:

> For left-wing thinkers, who might have been expected to be sympathetic, it
> [utopia] was a standing reminder of the origin of their own ideas in a form that
> they were anxious to distance themselves from.[9]

Utopian thought had become tainted by the 'typical' Wellsian utopian world state, and by

Nazi and Stalinist totalized ideologies. The blurring of the textual utopia with real-world

constructions of 'ideal' societies has provided much ammunition for the anti-utopian

temperament, and Kumar has neatly outlined the twentieth century reaction against utopia.

He has written that:

> Fascism is a utopia; so too is Communism in its Soviet form. They are utopian, it
> is argued, precisely in their worst aspects, in their belief that they have discovered
> the secret of history and that, armed with this discovery, they are in a position to
> rule and regulate society totally, in all its aspects.[10]

Where Orwell, in his 1943 article, aligns Fascism with an anti-utopian force of unreason

('one of the sources of the Fascist movement is the desire to avoid a too-rational and too-

comfortable world'), Kumar more properly sees the totalized state as itself utopian in

ideology, in its enforcement of order and uniformity. Utopian ideologies inform the

construction of totalized states, and becomes a recurrent motif within the dystopian

paradigm. The state ideology is ostensibly benign, but provides an alibi for systems of

control.

Several of the writers of dystopia in this thesis come directly out of leftist politics of the

1930s, a politics characterized by the broad anti-fascist umbrella of the Popular Front

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[9] Krishan Kumar, 'The End of Socialism? The End of Utopia? The End of History?' in *Utopias and the Millennium*, ed. by Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), pp. 63-80 (p. 64-5).

[10] Kumar, 'The End of Socialism?', p. 65.

period. Bernard Wolfe's commitment to socialist ideals is revealed by his self-confessed

time spent with Trotsky in his Mexican exile, and Frederik Pohl describes in his

autobiography his time with the Young Communist League. In a chapter called 'Boy

Bolsheviks' (revealingly suggesting that his interest in communism was a youthful

aberration) Pohl writes:

> The word "Communist" has one sound today, had quite another in the 50s, when
> Joe McCarthy shambled across the land, and probably will sound different still in
> the year 2000. In 1936 it sounded adventurous, active, and above all,
> "progressive".
> I'm not sure what the word "Progressive" meant to me, except that it
> seemed generally forward looking.[11]

The 'progressive' ideals of the 1930s, one which could easily be married to a form of

science fiction which imagined the future in terms of the triumph of reason and order, and

scientific discovery and its technical applications, become much more cloudy in the post-

war period. Philip K. Dick, writing in 1955, suggested that '[s]ince science fiction

concerns the furture of human society, the world-wide loss of faith in science and in

scientific progress is bound to cause convulsions in the SF field'.[12] The reaction against

the utopia of technological wonder and World States, a reaction manifested in Zamiatin,

Huxley and Orwell, is partly produced by the drift away from the politics of the

Communist-influenced left towards a centrist and 'liberal' consensus. Christopher

Brookeman, in his *American Culture and Society since the 1930s*, describes 'that

disenchantment with communism and explicit ideological commitment that became a

hallmark of the 1940s and 1950s'.[13] Perhaps under the pressures of the House Un-

American Activities Committee (HUAC), active in this period though only gaining

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[11] Frederik Pohl, *The Way the Future Was: A Memoir* (1978) (London: Granada, 1983), p. 71.
[12] Philip K. Dick, 'Pessimism in Science Fiction', *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Lawrence Sutin (New York: Pantheon, 1995), pp. 54-56 (p. 56).
[13] Christopher Brookeman, *American Culture and Society since the 1930s* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 2.

notoriety in the McCarthyite early 50s, and the burgeoning dictates of a nascent Cold War

and National Security State, socialism itself was identified with Stalinist totalitarianism.

Brookeman writes that:

> [t]he problems of sustaining ideological positions and loyalties within the
> contradictions of world history led many American writers and intellectuals to
> seek what Arthur M. Schlesinger called the 'vital center', a core of agreed basic
> democratic values that could act as a focus of critical enquiry, not subject to the
> sudden ravages of history, revolution and ideological schisms.[14]

The move away from Skinner's behaviourally-engineered utopia of 1945, to Vonnegut's

mechanical-engineering dystopia of 1952, reflects this disenchantment with a politics of

the left which finds its expression in state socialism. All of the writers in this thesis react

against an oppressive state organization of life, which is opposed by the dystopian

protagonist and the idealized/ utopian space in the text he strives to find. The reliance

upon individual rebellion perhaps betrays a suspicion of all organized political movements

or ideological positions. All of the dystopias in this thesis are in some sense reliant upon a

discovery (through alienation) of an autonomous self and an expression of a universalized

human desire, experience or trait which opposes the pressures towards conformity and

control in a bureaucratized American 1950s. Richard Corber has suggested that this

emphasis on individuation and selfhood was part of a move towards the Cold War liberal

consensus: 'Cold War liberals [...] sought to shift attention from the material world to the

individual's subjective experience of it by defining reality in such a way that it did not

lend itself readily to Marxist analysis'.[15] The emphasis on individual resistance is reflected

in the spaces and forms of opposition to the dystopian state which are imagined in these

texts. In this thesis I will also attempt to analyse how these spaces of opposition are

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[14] Brookeman, p. 3.
[15] Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 53.

ideologically produced within the cultural and societal frames of the American 1950s and 1960s.

Fredric Jameson, in his important essay on the Utopian form 'Of Islands and Trenches', states that 'Utopia is a transparent synonym for socialism itself, and the enemies of Utopia sooner or later turn out to be the enemies of socialism'.[16] While this statement is contentious, to say the least, it does illuminate the overlaying of socialist and utopian thought which characterizes the reaction against utopia, and the dominance of the dystopian form, in the 1950s and 1960s. Daniel Bell, a political and social theorist described by Brookeman as an 'anti-Communist liberal' or 'neo-conservative', argued in his famous text *The End of Ideology* that this shift away from ideological commitment, towards a non-partisan or 'non-ideological' position, was in fact the removal of a distorting and redundant analytical framework. *The End of Ideology* attempted to justify the argument of its title, in suggesting that:

> [i]n the Western world [...] there is today a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism. In that sense, too, the ideological age has ended.[17]

Bell, writing at the end of the 1950s, defined 'ideology' as 'the conversion of ideas into social levers' and a 'road to action'.[18] 'Ideology' for Bell is how Louis Althusser describes ideolog*ies*: contending 'world outlooks' which are largely imaginary conceptions of 'reality'.[19] The exhaustion of ideology is, for Bell, largely the exhaustion of Marxism as

[16] Fredric Jameson, 'Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse', *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-86, Vol. 2: The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 75-101 (p. 77).
[17] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960), p. 373.
[18] Bell, p. 370.
[19] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 123-173 (p. 153).

the motive force behind opposition to, and critique of, the prevailing organization of life in

Fifties America. While characterizing himself as 'anti-ideological, but not conservative',

Bell uses the rhetoric of anti-Utopianism (similar to that of Orwell) to outline his project:

'a repudiation of ideology, to be meaningful, must mean not only a criticism of the utopian

order, but of existing society as well'.[20] This sentence indicates not only the space of

Bell's critique, but also that of the dystopian texts of the 1950s and 1960s. Ideology is then

the utopian impulse itself, a desire for a reconstruction or reordering of society along ideal

(socialist) principles. The reaction against 'ideology' is, in Bell's terms, the reaction

against utopia. In the revised edition of *The End of Ideology*, published in 1965, Bell

comes to suggest the opposite: 'The end of ideology is not -- should not be -- the end of

utopia as well. If anything, one can begin anew the discussion of utopia only by being

aware of the trap of ideology'.[21] Whereas ideology, as a distorting framework, is still to be

eschewed, Bell allows the possibility of access to the imagination of utopia, which perhaps

indicates changing times in the United States.

How does Utopia become dystopia? For Huxley, who quotes Nicolas Berdiaeff in his

epigraph to *Brave New World*, it is the possibility of the *realization* of the Utopian state

which causes anxiety. This formulation has been repeated continually in the theory and

criticism of utopia ever since. The form which is the symbol of utopia's malignity has

been characterized as the 'Wellsian' one, a technological and scientific society in which

human problems are solved by rational and technical means. For the anti-utopian

temperament, this becomes the domination of the 'machine' over the human. This is

echoed by the forms of dystopian writing found in the American 1950s and 1960s,

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[20] Bell, p. 16.
[21] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, 2nd edn (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 405.

mediated through Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. If one

finds fixation, militarization and regimentation in the imagination of a society purportedly

more perfect than our own, then Utopia itself comes to be seen as dangerous, and malign.

The collapse of ideas of 'progress', perhaps brought about by images of death camps and

the destruction at Hiroshima, and the 'exhaustion' of Communist political influence in the

intellectual life of the United States, also informs the turn away from utopia towards

dystopia. Even H. G. Wells, in his last published book, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*,

suggests that 'a harsh queerness is coming over things' and that '[e]vents now follow one

another in an entirely untrustworthy sequence'.[22] Where there was the 'determinism of

history' or even progress, in 1945 Wells saw only accident and chaos. In fact, Wells was

so pessimistic about the future that he suggested that humanity was no longer an adaptive

evolutionary animal and would be soon overtaken. Writing in an alienated third person,

Wells wrote: 'A series of events has forced upon the intelligent observer the realisation

that the human story has come to an end and that *Homo sapiens*, as he has been pleased to

call himself, is in his present form played out'.[23] The writer and person most allied with

the utopian imagination in the twentieth century had come, at the end, to a vision of

humanity on its last legs.

Utopia, Krishan Kumar suggests, is actually dependant on ideas of progress. For Kumar,

the modern utopia is infused with history as process, brought about by evolutionary theory

in the nineteenth century (vulgarised as progress) and the increasing penetration of

'history' into the lives of ordinary people. The undermining of the 'Master Narratives' in

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[22] H. G. Wells, *Mind at the End of Its Tether* (London: Heinemann, 1945), p. 8; p. 6.
[23] *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, p. 18.

the contemporary period, a tendency famously proposed by J.-F. Lyotard, includes those

of 'progress', the 'determinism of history', and utopia itself. Kumar argues:

> Anti-utopia shares in the fate of utopia. As utopia loses its vitality, so too does anti-utopia. The power and imagery of utopia have always been the driving force and indispensable material of anti-utopia.[24]

I argue in this thesis that the type of formal dystopia written in reaction to Wells (see

below), after its great flowering in the 1950s in the United States, becomes less dominant

during the 1960s, with only a few (somewhat anachronistic) examples in the 1970s and

1980s. I shall conclude with a summary of this tendency. The utopian form characterized

as 'Wellsian' -- the self-destruction of the capitalist world, the rise of an elite of

technocrats, a new world order or World State -- was sufficiently undermined by its

dystopian inheritors to make it largely irrelevant to the political and cultural scene of the

1960s.[25] The rise of the counter-cultural movement in the 1960s created a slew of works

of political and social activism rather than formal utopias, and these went on to inform the

rediscovery of the utopian form in the hands of feminist writers in the early 1970s.

Perhaps the anti-Wellsian dystopias did their job too well, for the technological utopia was

overtaken by the 'ecotopia' and what Tom Moylan, in his *Demand the Impossible*, was to

name the 'critical utopia'. Moylan suggested that:

> [a] central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. Furthermore, the novels dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, the novels focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives.[26]

[24] Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (New York and Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 423.
[25] For instance, see H. G Wells, *Anticipations of the reaction of mechanical and scientific progress on human life and thought* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1902).
[26] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), p. 36.

In fact, all of Moylan's points in the above quotation could describe dystopian fiction equally well. The examples of the 'critical utopia' variant he privileges are constructed of utopian, dystopian and 'real' spaces which conflict and compromise each other. I would suggest that the operation of the dystopian text also incorporates utopic spaces and negotiates with the 'real' of the period. Utopia *and* dystopia are produced by, and are reactions to, cultural, social and political forces, and the imagination of utopia and dystopia changes in response to these forces. The type of dystopia dominant in the 1950s and early 1960s, one whose imagination is influenced by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, declines along with the force of the technological utopia and with the breaking up of the centrist, bureaucratized, consumer-oriented consensus of the Eisenhower years. As American society fragmented in the 1960s, under pressure of the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, the counter-cultural movement and feminism, a different form of utopian imagining became relevant again.

The American 1950s: Organization Man and the Mechanization of Life

In the 1950s, several celebrated texts analyzed the rise of the culture of corporations and the construction of Organization Man, of mass culture and television enforcing a conformity of social desires and behaviours. The rise of a bureaucratized, highly organized and regulated life was predicted by James Burnham in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), whose vision that 'the world political system will coalesce into *three* primary super-states' had a large impact upon George Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia.[27] Burnham's prediction of the 'managerial society' was characterized by 'governmental (state) ownership and control of the major instruments of production'.[28] No

[27] James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (1941) (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 176.
[28] Burnham, p. 118.

longer owned by a bourgeoisie, as in Marx's nineteenth century analyses, production becomes controlled by state managers, the bureaucrats becoming the ruling class. Burnham also outlines the ideology of the managers: 'the more effective prosecution of war, and the support of the power and privilege of a new ruling class'.[29] This form of domination is enabled and maintained by technology, particularly communications and transportation, again foreshadowing the ubiquity of the telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and television itself in the American dystopias of the 1950s and 1960s. Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, a dystopia which envisions the domination of managers and engineers and the focus of my first chapter, seems to be in a direct line from both a Bellamy-type technotopia, and Burnham's projections of a bureaucratized future.

Aldous Huxley, in *Brave New World Revisited*, a text of commentaries on how his dystopian novel now related to the world of the 1950s, suggested '[t]hat we are being propelled in the direction of Brave New World is obvious'.[30] In a fairly pessimistic series of analyses, Huxley investigated the ways in which *Brave New World* had anticipated some of the techniques of control and the tendencies towards oppressive organization in American society. He wrote:

> Civilization is, among other things, the process by which primitive packs are transformed into an analogue, crude and mechanical, of the social insects' organic communities. At the present time the pressures of overpopulation and technological change are accelerating this process. [...] However hard they try, men cannot create a social organism, they can only create an organization. In the process of trying to create an organism they will merely create a totalitarian despotism.[31]

In Huxley's analyses as in the dystopias of the 1950s, too much order is the problem. The metaphor of the hive, used here by Huxley, is a common dystopian image of the city, a

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[29] Burnham, p. 137.

[30] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) (London: Flamingo, 1994), p. 34.

[31] Huxley, p. 33.

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spatial image of a society which prizes communitarian ideals over individual freedom.

This is an anxiety common to many texts of social theory in the 1950s. The destruction, or

perhaps supersession of the individual (and necessary erasure of the mythos, peculiarly

American, of individualism and struggle) was the theme of David Riesman's *The Lonely

Crowd* (1950), and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), which attempt to

describe a transformation in the motivation and behaviour of the (male) individual in

immediately postwar America.[32] Riesman analysed a change in the way conformity is

constructed. He described the typical person of the American 1950s as 'other-directed',

whose conformity is less to the values of parents but to the desires and preferences of the

social or peer group, and who experienced fear of transgression as a constant anxiety. *The

Lonely Crowd* suggested that this indicated a change from a myth of individual freedom

and entrepreneurship, which legitimated the forms of earlier American capitalism, to a

myth of belongingness which was required in a more bureaucratic, corporate postwar

society.

William H. Whyte perceived that the Protestant Ethic of individualism and work was

disappearing under pressure from the needs of big business; he saw it being replaced by a

'Social Ethic': 'that contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the

pressures of society against the individual'.[33] Huxley, in *Brave New World Revisited*, cites

Whyte's analysis approvingly. Both Whyte and Riesman analysed the pressures towards

conformity and 'belongingness' in order for people to succeed in society, what amounts to

the suppression of individuality in exchange for material wealth. Whyte wrote that 'the

dominant ideological drift in organization life is toward (1) idolatry of the system and (2)

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[32] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1950); William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955).
[33] Whyte, p. 7.

the misuse of science to achieve this'.[34] He advocated a 'fight' against the organization,

for the individual. Ironically or not, the dystopian protagonist is also positioned within the

system (if not in a condition of idolatry, as others may be), who then comes to the

realization that he must fight against the state.

Daniel Bell attempted to critique the idea of the mass society in *The End of Ideology*

(1960), but his contemporary, the sociologist C. Wright Mills, suggested that a mass

society had, in fact, been deliberately created in the United States in order to circumvent

democratic scrutiny and perpetuate the power and control systems of the military,

corporate giants, and 'political directorate' (which are not elected representatives). *The*

Power Elite, published in 1956, analyzed the 'military definition of world reality' since

World War II, the way in which the economic and political life of the postwar United

States became militarized:

> The terms in which [the American elite] have defined international reality are
> predominantly military. As a result, in the higher circles there has been a
> replacement of diplomacy in any historically recognized sense by calculations of
> war potential and the military seriousness of war threats.[35]

He also states: 'war or a high state of war preparedness is felt to be the normal and

seemingly permanent condition of the United States'.[36] The American postwar prosperity

was inextricably linked to military spending. As he left office in 1960, even President

Eisenhower -- a former Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Army -- was forced to sound a

warning against this trend, in which he made famous the phrase 'the military-industrial

complex' (Mills defines this as 'the coincidence of interest between those who control the

major means of production and those who control the newly enlarged means of

[34] Whyte, p. 171.
[35] C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 202; p. 184.
[36] Mills, p. 184.

violence').[37] According to Mills' analysis, the Cold War becomes an alibi for enlarged

military budgets and powers, rather than simply the structure of superpower conflict:

economic, political and cultural discourse is shaped by the needs and designs of the

military. Dystopias such as Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, and particularly Mordecai

Roshwald's *Level 7*, which I investigate in chapters 3 and 4, reflect these anxieties in

imagining societies where the ideology of the military-industrial complex is dominant, to

ultimately catastrophic effect.

These texts of social theory then attempted to investigate the ways in which the

naturalized organization of the American 1950s was in fact constructed, an Ideology. The

dystopias of the 1950s and 1960s attempt to expose this Ideology by offering estranged

representations of everyday life of the time. Darko Suvin describes utopia as an *estranged*

genre. By this he means that it offers an alternative society and world to that of the 'real',

and thereby exposes the ways in which the 'real' is not natural but constructed. His

definition runs:

> Utopia is, then, a literary genre or verbal construction whose necessary and
> sufficient conditions are *the presence of a particular quasi-human community
> where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are
> organized on a more perfect principle than the author's community, this
> construction being based on estrangement rising out of an alternative historical
> hypothesis.*[38]

By the double movement of estrangement, in which we recognise the familiar in the

unfamiliar, which casts the familiar in a new and revealing light, utopia challenges the

forms of the 'real', of everyday life. Similarly, Tom Moylan, in *Demand the Impossible*,

uses Louis Althusser's definition of Ideology to inform his argument about utopian

practice. Althusser's conception famously runs: 'Ideology represents the imaginary

[37] Mills, p. 276.
[38] Darko Suvin, 'Science Fiction and Utopian Fiction: Degrees of Kinship', *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 33-43 (p. 35), Suvin's italics.

relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.[39] It is a false

understanding of 'reality' itself, one that effaces its own presence by insisting that the

dominant ideology and organization of life is in fact the 'natural' one. Moylan argues that

the utopian text is a negation of 'the enclosing of the present by transnational capital', an

oppositional textual space to the formations of ideology.[40] It exposes Ideology by positing

an alternative to it: 'Utopia is that unconquered power of the imagination which resists the

closure of ideology'.[41]

Moylan is indebted to the work of Fredric Jameson, who conceives of Utopia as an

imaginary or textual space removed from and opposed to Ideological formations and the

extant socio-economic structure. The *textuality* of the utopian or dystopian world is its

essence, and it should be stressed that in this thesis I intend to focus upon the dystopian

texts and their relationship to the 'real' world of the American 1950s, rather than any kind

of blueprint or program for 'real' utopian places. Jameson's key article 'Of Islands and

Trenches' is, in part, a review of Louis Marin's *Utopiques: Jeux d'Espace*, translated as

Utopics: Spatial Play, and Jameson's conception of the Utopian form is influenced by his

reading of Marin. Marin calls utopia 'an ideological critique of the dominant ideology';[42]

and it is 'a critique of dominant ideology insofar as it is a reconstruction of contemporary

society by means of a displacement and a projection of its structures into a fictional

discourse'.[43] For Marin, utopia is a 'neutral' term, which is to say non-dialectical. Utopia

opposes the synthesis of thesis and antithesis, which he believes partakes in a myth of

closure. The 'neutral' holds these terms in suspension, posits an alternative to 'either/ or'.

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[39] Althusser, 'Ideology and State Ideological Apparatuses', p. 153.
[40] Moylan, p. 36.
[41] Moylan, p. 18.
[42] Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. by Robert A. Vollrath (1973) (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press; London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 19.
[43] Marin, p. 195.

Neutralization also occurs in the relation between the utopian text and its cultural origin.

Jameson explains it thus:

> The central proposition of *Utopiques* [...] [is] that the basic relationship of the
> Utopian text to what we have been calling the referential subtext is one of
> neutralization; or, in terms of More's *Utopia,* that the island of that name functions
> as a point-by-point negation or cancelling of the historical England itself.[44]

Here, then, the conception of utopia is of a simulation, the map of which conforms in all

points to that of its referent but is paradoxically entirely different: its reverse, or inverse,

image. It confronts the 'real' of history by providing a negating space, one which exists

(through utopic imagining) as a product of that history and an alternate to it.

Through the play of the word 'utopia' on ideas of place, the utopian imagining is *utopic*,

inherently bound up (through its derivations from the traditions of the Ideal City and

voyage imaginaire) in the figuration of textual space. Utopia is, in Marin's conception, the

spatialization of Ideology itself: 'the city map is a "utopic" insofar as it reveals a plurality

of places whose incongruity lets us examine the critical space of ideology'.[45] The creation

of Utopic space negates that of real space, and reveals the Ideological construction of

reality in its spatialization. Thus, the concentric circles and grids of the Ideal City tradition

reveal the discourses of power and exclusion that lay behind their conception.

Similarly, the dystopias of the 1950s and 1960s expose the ideological structures of the

United States of the time. The unmapped spaces of the postwar dystopias represent the

desire for freedom from the seemingly enclosing forms of corporate, commodity-capitalist

life. The ideology of the state in the dystopian text of the 1950s and 1960s is ostensibly

Utopian, and inverts the ideal which informs the construction of Utopia. Dystopia

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[44] Jameson, 'Of Islands and Trenches', p. 85.
[45] Marin, p. 201.

transforms a utopian desire for order into the ideological alibi for state institutions of

repression, and this utopian or idealized state ideology masks the operation of the

machinery of control. The estrangement of the dystopian protagonist is an estrangement

from that idealized ideology, and the fracturing of this image is repeated in a

fragmentation of the state's control. The rebellion of the dystopian protagonist exposes

the 'natural' organization of life to be an artificial and imposed ideological construct.

The spatialization of this revelation is the protagonist's impulse towards the interstitial

space in the system of control, the chinks in the world machine. The protagonist's

alienation takes the form of a search for the authentic which lies behind the ideological

'real' of official discourse, and this search is often represented as spatial exclusion. The

prevalence of metaphors of the body and body politic in the dystopian texts I analyze in

this thesis expose discourses of power, oppression and exclusion in the United States in

the immediate postwar period, and the naturalized ideology of the corporate, bureaucratic

1950s.

My theoretical emphasis in this thesis relies on the conception of utopia outlined by

Marin, Jameson and Moylan. I argue that the American dystopia of the 1950s and 1960s is

a marginal textual space, one in which the forms of socio-political, cultural and economic

life in the United States could be critiqued through imagining them in an estranged

manner. In utopia's (and science fiction's) double movement of estrangement, the real is

depicted in other (coded) terms, which the reader still recognises and reads through to the

'real' itself. The ideological constructions of the American 1950s and 1960s are exposed

by their estranged representations in dystopian texts. In this thesis I hope also to unpack

the various imaginations of an American dystopian future, and argue for their consistent

derivation from forms of control and oppression uncovered by many writers in the period.

I will also argue that utopia and dystopia, as 'ideological critiques of ideology',

themselves produce and reproduce ideologies (world outlooks) in their constructions.

The dystopian texts of the 1950s and 1960s that I will analyze in this thesis follow Orwell

rather than B. F. Skinner in their reaction to the formations and organization of life in the

United States in the period. Orwell's imagination of systems of control, of surveillance

and bureaucratic oppression, casts a long shadow over the dystopian worlds of the 1950s

and 1960s. This thesis is organized through a focus on what I consider to be key dystopian

texts of the period, each of which imagine variations on the narrative paradigm. In chapter

one, I analyze Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, and its imagination of a mechanical system

of industrial production which symbolizes the regulation of everyday life. In opposition to

the state, it offers the principles of working with one's hands (artisanal production) and

particularly *play* as human needs that cannot be repressed. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit

451*, the focus of chapter 2, imagines a state-controlled system of book-burning and

thought-control, the books embodying a liberal humanist 'civilization' antithetical to the

state's power-imperatives. It also represents a nostalgia-imbued pastoral space to allow

their expression. Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, in chapter 3, has a recourse to Freudian

psychoanalytic theory to privilege human laughter as that which challenges a dystopian

state which is signified by voluntary amputeeism, cyborgs and a desire for death. In

Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7*, the focus of chapter 4, the protagonist, an officer of a secret

command bunker for nuclear missiles, works his way from being a metaphorical 'robot'

towards individuation and love of life as the text narrates the end of the world. The

dystopias of Philip K. Dick, the production of which I have split into two chapters on his

1950s and 1960s texts respectively, represent the search for *authenticity* in life and in the

experience of the 'real' itself, a 'real' mediated through propaganda, television or

fabricated environments. My final chapter concentrates on the worlds of Frederik Pohl, whose protagonists resist the invasive pressures of conformism and consumerism to find freedom, often by escaping the physical space of the dystopian system altogether. Pohl's visions of a repressive superabundance and narcotizing consumerism are perhaps more indebted to Huxley, and *Brave New World*'s apparently benign forms of control, the feelies, sex and *soma*. In all these texts, there is a sense that the authentic in life has disappeared, that the mechanization of life has debased humanity, and that the very forms of life are a deception or even a fabrication perpetrated on the mass of population. Technology in these texts is a form of control; in the dystopias of the 1950s and 1960s, the anxieties about an increasingly controlled, bureaucratic and uniform society in the United States find expression as the imagination of totalized states in a repressive future. In texts such as Vonnegut's *Player Piano* and Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, the mechanization of the body, and metaphorically as the body politic, represent the conformity, over-organization and automation of life. The pressures and processes of production and consumption, the ubiquity of television and the penetration of mass communications into the everyday lives of the citizens commodify and reify their bodies and environments, transforming them into metaphorical or literal 'robots'. They consume a narcotizing spectacle on their giant television screens, and are watched in turn. In the dystopias of Frederik Pohl, this becomes a literal and oppressive race to consume in a system of over-abundance. It is against these pressures and operations that the dystopian protagonists rebel.

The Dystopian Narrative

The Bellamy/ Wells type of utopia, one in which the Utopian world is brought to order and happiness by the application of science, reason, and technology, dominates the dystopian novels of Zamiatin, Huxley and Orwell, which in turn regulate the imagination

of dystopian worlds in the American 1950s and 1960s. The power and cultural longevity of both *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* attests to the way in which they informed the twentieth century's conception of utopia, at least until the 1960s, reinforcing the 'Wellsian' conception of utopia in their critique. Even a 'utopia' such as Skinner's *Walden Two* is a utopia of systems. Mark Hillegas describes the typical dystopia of the mid-century in these terms:

> the cataclysmic war which precedes the new state, the rule of an omniscient director, the guardian elite, the standardization of men and women, including artificial faces and numbers for names, the substitution of the manufactured (plastic flowers and trees) for the natural, and the familiar revolt against the machine.[46]

The typical dystopian narrative for the 1950s texts is that a middle-ranking member of the state apparatus, who becomes increasingly alienated from the structures of power (either through a manipulated fall, an understanding of the oppressive nature of the state or through the intervention of a personal -- female -- catalyst). All of the protagonists in this thesis are male; his trajectory of alienation is discursively figured as a fracturing of his own image of the state's (Utopian) ideology, which then results, through his rebellion, in a fragmentation of the state's control systems. The texts usually end in a moment of suspension. The ending of the system, through a moment of apocalyptic destruction and creation of a new order; a continued struggle; or the reimposition of the state's control are all possible narrative endings.

In the dystopian text, the protagonist is usually an *apparatchik*, someone who has a position within the lower levels of the official power structures. In relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Vita Fortunati describes the role of the dystopian protagonist:

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[46] Mark Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 150.

In *1984*, we have lost the clear-cut distinction between the two character-types of literary utopia, the *traveller*, who carries the values of the society of departure, and the *guide*, who is the character within the utopia who expounds the principles on which the utopia [*sic*] world in question is based. Winston Smith, a citizen of Oceania, is ambiguously both inside and outside the system.[47]

The dystopian protagonist then embodies *both* roles; the malign dystopian society is discovered through the process of his or her alienation. The protagonist has an ambivalent relation to the dystopian state, a part of its ideological structures yet resisting them -- though often this rebellion itself replicates the forms of oppression of the state (as in *Player Piano*). The role of the Guide is also taken by the 'expositor' figure, someone in power who enlightens the protagonist before his/ her exile or destruction. This is patterned on Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*; we can find it in dystopias in the figures of Mond in *Brave New World*, O'Brien in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Beatty in *Fahrenheit 451*, or Frazier in Skinner's utopia, *Walden Two*. This figure is also strangely at once both inside and outside the system, possessing knowledge prohibited by the reigning ideology, yet furthering that ideology by his or her actions. This emphasises the lack of closure in the dystopian text, the chinks in its systems of control, without which there would be no space for the resistance and rebellion of the dystopian protagonist. The Grand Inquisitor figure is, like the dystopian rebel, male, in all the texts of this thesis. Paradoxically, the authority of this figure rests upon knowledge prohibited by the regime he controls or embodies. Where the knowledge discovered by the protagonist precipitates alienation, the prohibition itself coming to signify domination and control, the Grand Inquisitor figure is in a position of official sanction. For him, the prohibited knowledge leads directly to the furtherance of state control. The system of information, which is mapped onto a hierarchy of power, maintains this hierarchy and the regime of status, and

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[47] Vita Fortunati, "'It Makes No Difference": A Utopia of Simulation and Transparency' in *Modern Critical Views: George Orwell*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York, New Haven & Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 139-150 (p. 142).

exclusion from knowledge equals exclusion from power. The dystopian protagonist moves from alignment with the power imperatives of the system to an alienated state through either (a) information about that state or (b) a desire for knowledge. In both it becomes apparent that what the protagonist took for 'reality' is in fact a fabrication. Layers of information, disinformation, lies and reality are then constructed for the protagonist to move through.

All of the dystopian texts in this thesis place the totalized world in a near future. The break in space which signifies the constitution of the classical utopian world (as in More's *Utopia*) becomes the break in time. Few of the dystopias in this thesis assume the generic status of a 'future history', with an unbroken historical narrative from the 1950s or 60s to the putative time of the novel. Often the temporal 'gap' or blank space signifies the place of an undescribed and undescribable apocalyptic moment, usually in the form of a cataclysmic nuclear war. This has a clear provenance in the context of Hiroshima and the growing nuclear arms race of the 1950s. The gap between the 'real' present of the reader and/or the Visitor to utopia, and the utopian/ dystopian future, is often revealed, however, by the presence of recognizable technological artefacts, such as the ubiquitous television. Such artefacts emphasise that an aspect of the writer's present is often magnified in order for it to be scrutinized in an estranged, imagined future. As Krishan Kumar argues, utopia and apocalyptic beliefs have a long and similar development. He writes:

> millennial hopes, or the utopian imagination, were commonly coupled with a belief that a great disaster - what H.G. Wells called "a cleansing disillusionment" - must precede the emergence of the millennial kingdom or the good society.[48]

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[48] Krishan Kumar, 'Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia Today', in *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, ed. by Malcolm Bull (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 200-224 (p. 205).

In fact, he cites Hans Magnus Enzenberger, who suggests that "'the end of the world is simply a negative utopia'".[49] I suggest that the apocalyptic moment is in fact built in to the dystopian text as the textual motive for the changed, dystopian, world. It provides the temporal and textual hiatus, and the space for imagination, which generates the estranging operation of the text. The dystopian text partakes of history, is produced by it, and the reader recognises the 'real' in it; yet the estranged space and time allow for critique.

The reliance on archetypal or Biblical narrative patterns suggests that these dystopias themselves exhibit a failure of imagination; as Jameson argues, a failure to 'project the Other of what is'.[50] Their reliance on the apocalyptic would suggest that they reproduce the ideological and mythical constructions of the world they attempt to critique. However, the dystopias in this thesis, I argue, are *estranged* representations of the 'real', and it is in this estrangement that the 'real' of the American 1950s and 1960s is exposed. Only at the endings of these texts is the possibility of utopia opened once again. The protagonists attempt to find a free (textual) space outside of the control-systems of the dystopian state. They seek, and sometimes find, a physical space to match their own intellectual alienation. Similarly, it is only at the end of the 1960s, with the exhaustion of the Wellsian utopian paradigm and its dystopian inheritors, that utopia is itself opened and refreshed, and becomes once again the way in which writers 'can conduct "thought experiments" about alternative futures', and become an agency of change.[51]

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[49] Kumar, 'Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia Today', p. 205.
[50] Fredric Jameson, 'Of Islands and Trenches'. p. 77.
[51] Kumar, 'Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia Today', p. 216.

CHAPTER 1:

GHOST HANDS PLAYING: THE MECHANIZATION OF SOCIETY AND

REPLACEMENT OF THE HUMAN IN VONNEGUT'S *PLAYER PIANO*

Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* was published in 1952, imagining a United States after a

war in which a system of automated production was set up and which, as in some of the

stories of Frederik Pohl I will discuss in my last chapter, continues in peacetime to itself

regulate economic and social development. It offers a satirical representation of the trends

towards mechanization and uniformity in postwar America, and inverts the kind of

'technotopia' of machines and efficiency of Wells and Edward Bellamy. The tendencies

towards conformity and over-organization that the social theorists analyzed in the 1950s is

figured in the dystopian text of the 1950s as a mechanization of life. In *Player Piano*, this

is concentrated in the world of work.

Vonnegut explicitly placed *Player Piano* in the tradition of dystopian writing, and indeed,

Player Piano first achieved widespread success in a paperback SF reprint under the title

Utopia-14. In a 1973 interview he stated that:

> I was raised to be bughouse about the Constitution, and to be very excited about
> the United States of America as Utopia. It seems utterly workable to me and I keep
> thinking of ways to fix it, to see what the hell went wrong, to see if we can get the
> thing to really run right.[1]

Ironically, Vonnegut's engineering metaphors in this statement make him sound like one

of the gadgeteering protagonists of *Player Piano* itself. The United States becomes the

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[1] Frank McLaughlin, 'An Interview with Kurt Vonnegut', in *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. by
William Rodney Allen (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), pp. 66-75 (p. 72).

subject of a textual experiment, as Vonnegut foregrounds the sense of the text as an

interventionary statement. I would surmise that Vonnegut would recoil from any

suggestion of didacticism in his texts, but he is explicitly engaging in a political and

cultural debate about the formations of postwar American life. The dystopian form

provides Vonnegut with a vehicle for imagining the postwar United States in estranged

form, and thereby a textual space in which to criticise movements towards conformity and

mechanization in work and life. In another interview he confesses that 'George Orwell

interests me more than anyone else [....] I like his concern for the poor, I like his socialism,

I like his simplicity', and perhaps we can see the dystopian form and writing *as* activism

making a common thread here.[2] Like Frederik Pohl, Vonnegut was employed to write

publicity material: Vonnegut worked as a publicist for General Electric as a young man in

Schenectady, New York, where Pohl was involved in a minor capacity with Madison

Avenue and the world of advertising.[3] While Vonnegut does not fall into the trap of

criticising advertising while using the techniques of advertising (as I will argue Pohl does

in chapter 7), perhaps we can see in this background an intention towards persuasion of

the reader.

Where *Nineteen Eighty-Four* casts a long shadow over the dystopian texts of the 1950s

and (perhaps to a lesser extent) the 1960s, Vonnegut suggests that he 'cheerfully ripped off

the plot of *Brave New World*, whose plot had been cheerfully ripped off from Eugene

Zamiatin's *We*'.[4] *Player Piano* is without the bleakness of Orwell's dystopia, and themes

of mechanization, conformity and the disruption of language clearly situate *Brave New*

[2] Laurie Clancy, 'Running Experiments Off: An Interview', in *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. by William Rodney Allen (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), pp. 46-56 (pp. 52-3).
[3] Jerome Klinkowitz, *Kurt Vonnegut* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 31.
[4] Kurt Vonnegut, 'Playboy Interview', *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons (Opinions)* ([n.p.]: Delacourte/ Seymour Lawrence, 1974), pp. 237-285 (p. 261).

World as an intertext. Where *Brave New World*, with its images of genetic engineering

and the 'bottling plant', focuses on the automation of *re*production, *Player Piano* imagines

the automation of *pro*duction.

1. The Hands of Rudy Hertz: ghosts in the machines

Paul Proteus is, at the beginning of the text, the Works Manager of the Ilium plant in New

York state, an almost entirely automated factory site. The novel narrates his growing

alienation from the mechanized state, the subsequent collapse of his marriage and exile

from his position in society, and his involvement in a doomed revolution against the

dominant order. The town of Ilium is divided along tripartite lines, a typical division for

the dystopian text (such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Inner Party, Outer Party and Proles).

The factory Works, Homestead (an ironically-named working class area) and the middle-

class suburbs are demarcated zones, with passage between them limited. Stanley Schatt

suggests that the opening of the novel is a clear parody of Julius Caesar's *Commentary on*

the Gallic Wars, suggesting that 'the managers and engineers are the modern-day Romans,

while the people who have been automated into early retirement and into reliance on

public doles serve as counterparts of the non-Romans, or savages'.[5] This reflects the three-

tier class structure of the United States in this particular dystopian future: at the bottom is

the Army, a large unarmed standing force into which the unskilled are conscripted; in the

middle, the 'Reeks and Wrecks', the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps are an

industrial army of sorts made up of the otherwise-unemployed skilled manual labour; and

at the top are the managers and engineers, all possessing some kind of academic

qualification (largely doctoral), who manage and maintain the large mechanized factory

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[5] Stanley Schatt, *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), p. 17.

sites. The layout of the town of Ilium marks it as a microcosmic version of the United States itself: the space of Ilium is a metaphorical representation of society.

The ideology of the corporate state in *Player Piano* is ostensibly Utopian: the end of want, a job for everyone, peace, and social order. The dystopian text inverts the ideal which informs the construction of the utopian space; for instance, *Brave New World* is the 'Utopia of Happiness'. The controllers of the Brave New World (such as Mond) promote a state ideology which rationalises genetic engineering, stratification and the narcotizing of the populace for ostensibly benign ends. *Player Piano* is, comparably, the 'Utopia of Efficiency': 'As Kroner often said, eternal vigilance was the price of efficiency'.[6] This statement inverts the Cold War phrase to replace 'freedom' with 'efficiency', a neat exposing of the workings of the corporate state. This utopian or idealized state ideology in all the dystopian texts of this thesis, as I argued in my Introduction, masks the operation of the machinery of control. The anti-utopian intent transforms a utopian desire for order into the ideological alibi for state institutions of repression.

The economic system in *Player Piano* is entirely controlled by a central computer, EPICAC XIV, whose mechanical efficiency provides the inspiration for, and means of applying, a ruthlessly imposed structure of social engineering, wherein all are provided for at the expense of individual autonomy. The social system parodies the excesses of an overly regulated and bureaucratic welfare state (perhaps patterned on Franklin Roosevelt's interventionist policies) whereby an apparent ideology of equality and freedom from

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[6] Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (1952) (London: Flamingo. 1992), p. 75. All further page references will be given in the body of the text.

material want masks brutal social competitiveness and a rigid class structure. Howard

Segal notes that:

> such early federal government experiments as the Works Progress Administration
> and the Civilian Conservation Corps [...] [are] both possible models for the novel's
> Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps. [7]

If Segal is correct, then the political drift of the dystopian writer towards anti-statist,

liberal and individualistic ideals, which I argue in this thesis characterizes the American

1950s, is exposed in the utilitarian and mechanized ethos of *Player Piano's* corporate

state. Society is ostensibly based on meritocratic principles and the elevation of the most

able; however, the process of 'aptitude testing' is shown to be rigidly applied and resulting

in the promotion of only those with engineering or managerial skills. All other skills are

marginalised or unrecognised. This emphasis on aptitude testing, for the assessing and

fitting of each individual into their most socially useful space, places the Utopias of

Edward Bellamy as a clear influence on *Player Piano*'s imagination. The traveller to

Utopia in Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is told that '"when the nation became the sole

employer, all the citizens, by virtue of their citizenship, became employees, to be

distributed according to the needs of industry"'. [8] The efficient running of the nation-state

requires the optimum use of resources, both human and otherwise, and this in itself rests

upon the effective assessment and distribution of human aptitudes. Human needs are

subsumed into the needs of the industrial state: citizenship of Utopia must bring its own

rewards. In *Player Piano*, Bud Calhoun's gadgeteering instincts result in his own

replacement:

> Now, personnel machines all over the country would be reset so as no longer to
> recognize the job as one suited for men. The combination of nicks and holes that

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[7] Howard P. Segal, 'Vonnegut's *Player Piano*: An Ambiguous Technological Dystopia', in *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, ed. by Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 162-181 (p. 178).

[8] Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000 - 1887*, ed. by John L. Thomas (1888) (Cambridge MA and London: Belknap, 1967), p. 131.

Bud had been to personnel machines would no longer be acceptable (*Player Piano* 74).

Bud, whose name -- slang for 'friend' -- has ironic overtones in the competitive world of *Player Piano*, has an employment class of P-128, an echo of other dystopian text's motif of signifying imposed uniformity by replacing names with numbers. The specialization produced by mechanical aptitude testing results in the mechanization of employment and the ultimate replacement of the human.

The revolutionary preacher in *Player Piano*, the Reverend Lasher, states, 'People have no choice but to become second-rate machines themselves, or wards of the machines' (*Player Piano* 271). The anti-sabotage laws (enforced with both military might and social mores) in *Player Piano* indicate the extent to which the machine has become more valued than the human. Even the political process has been mechanized. Part of the near-deification of the machine is the complete abdication of judgement and therefore responsibility of the human 'power elite': the machine is endowed with the idealized trait of infallibility, which in turn in the binary system of the text means that the humans are endowed with complete fallibility. This makes the logic of turning all decisions over to the computer EPICAC XIV not only desirable but necessary, even irrefutable; 'EPICAC XIV was dead right about everything' (*Player Piano* 113). The humans, in making this bargain, in fact reduce themselves to nothing but '*takaru*', the visiting Shah of Bratpuhr's term for 'slaves'. The mechanization of the site of power symbolizes the state which becomes dislocated from human concerns, and whose rule privileges the continued efficient running of the 'machine' of government at the expense of the lives of its citizens.

Stanley Schatt's argument, that 'Paul and his wife Anita have already become two automatons', is suggested by their ritualised role-playing and the emptiness of their discourse: "'I love you, Paul'" is invariably followed by "'And I love *you*, Anita'", divorced entirely from emotion.[9] Schatt's point can be applied to many of the characters in the dystopias in this thesis. The rituals, like those Paul encounters in his visit to a corporate weekend, signify that the entirety of life has been mechanized, even as far as language and thought. Conformity is figured as the mechanization of thought, of the transformation of humans into metaphorical robots. Unthinking devotion to the dictates of the factory system and the mechanized government characterizes those who, like Paul's rival Shepherd and his cohort Berringer, look to ascend the class hierarchy. The factory bosses are themselves subject to the principle of replacement. Bud Calhoun, who invents a gadget which not only replaces himself but his whole grade, is the most obvious example; however, Proteus is also under threat from Shepherd and is in fact replaced by him both at the factory and in the arms of his wife. The football players at Cornell, depicted in a comic interlude from the main narrative, provide an inversion of the principle. They replace the old, losing players but are meant, like machines, to last forever. Their coach, Doctor Roseberry is angry:

> 'But what the hell they think they bought?' he asked himself. 'Sumpin' made outa steel and *see*-ment?
> Supposed to last a lifetime, is it?' (*Player Piano* 255).

It is the failure of the human to be a machine which is troublesome, both physically and economically. Human beings conspicuously wear out. Rudi Hertz, Luke Lubbock, the fake Indian at the Meadows, and even Proteus at the end of the text all display the signs of ageing, and of emotional and physical stress.

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[9] Schatt, p. 20.

However, machines are not infallible. As Stanley Schatt suggests, '*Player Piano* is filled with descriptions of machines that do not work properly'.[10] The lathes in Building 58 are beginning to wear; the microwave in the Hagstrohms' house is broken; and Checker Charley singularly fails in his attempt to wrest the checker championship from Paul. The game between Checker Charley and Proteus indicates the divide between machine and human: the machine is used by Berringer with the intent to defeat and to humiliate Paul, to replace him (once again). It also signifies the areas of machine and human competence, where one ends and another begins. This is encapsulated in Finnerty's speech: "'If Checker Charley was out to make chumps out of man, he could damn well fix his own connections. Paul looks after his own circuits; let Charley do the same. Those who live by electronics, die by electronics'" (*Player Piano* 63). Checker Charley is not a self-regulating machine; like all machines in the text, there still needs to be some kind of human overseer. Even EPICAC XIV needs human agency to obtain information. As Paul plays Charley, the friends of Berringer flick switches to make him move. The text is possibly referring to Poe's essay 'Maelzel's Chess-Player', a piece of deductive reasoning which exposed a fraudulent chess-playing machine. Poe describes the scene thus:

> At the hour appointed for exhibition, a curtain is withdrawn, or folding doors are thrown open, and the machine is rolled to within about twelve feet of the spectators, between whom and it (the machine) a rope is stretched.[11]

It is a spectacle; the *coup-de-théatre* is reminiscent of the unveiling of Checker Charley. This places the whole performance (for such it is in both texts) in the zone of trickery, of deception. Things are not what they seem. Checker Charley is a fraudulent machine, and so is EPICAC XIV. The Shah of Bratpuhr calls EPICAC XIV a 'false god' when it cannot

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[10] Schatt, p. 30.

[11] Edgar Allan Poe, "Maelzel's Chess Player", *The Southern Literary Messenger* (April 1836), reprinted in *The Viking Portable Library Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Philip Van Doren Stern (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 508-537 (p. 514).

answer his riddle, a God that ill deserves its deification. Like the computer of Bernard

Wolfe's *Limbo* or the factory production system of Pohl's 'The Waging of the Peace',

EPICAC XIV is a machine built for the exigencies of war whose dictates rule (falsely) in

peacetime: mechanical production, efficiency, and the militarization and uniformity of

civilian life, necessary for the winning of a world conflict, come to regulate the postwar

period. The idealization of machine efficiency is an ideological alibi for continued

domination of the 'military-industrial complex', or warfare state. The world of *Player*

Piano is clearly derived from the United States of the late 1940s and early 1950s, where

the factory system which provided the munitions for World War II were geared for the

production of commodities in the booming postwar economy. This super-abundance of

production and consumption later becomes, in the dystopian texts of Frederik Pohl,

another means of control and automation of life.

In the economic area, the machine also replaces the human. The key image which signifies

this replacement are 'the hands of Rudy Hertz'. On arriving at the Ilium works as young

men, Paul and Finnerty record the workings of one man upon the lathe. The actions of this

man, Hertz, recorded and played back on tape, co-ordinate the workings of twenty lathes

in the automated present of the text. The hands of Rudy Hertz become like the ghost hands

of the piano player which seem to operate the pianola: a semiotic ghost, a highly symbolic

absence. Human hands are displaced, *re*placed, at work. The hands have a dual

signification. One is the fact of replacement; the other is the transformation of the human

individual into a machinelike unit, a tiny piece in the machine economy, voided of

freedom, choice, and desire. This second signification is satirical: the text is, to a large

extent, extrapolating from and satirising the economic structure and social processes of the

contemporaneous United States. The factory becomes the microcosmic image of societal

regimentation, mechanization, and alienation. In another 1952 dystopia, Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, the mechanization of human hands becomes not a figural replacement in the operations of the factory, but a literal and physical replacement of human limbs by artificial, cyborg ones. The conflation of the body and the body politic is a recurrent one in the dystopias of the 1950s, and has particular significance in Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*.

The central image of the replacement of the human is the Player Piano itself. Like the hands of Rudy Hertz, the hands of the piano player exist as an electronic or mechanical spectre in the operation of the machine. The irony of the scene where Proteus squirms as Hertz marvels over the Player is obvious: it was he who caused Hertz's redundancy at the Ilium works. However, in this key image one finds that the direction of replacement can be, and is, reversed. It is by Finnerty, who in Proteus's game with Checker Charley, says: "'my sympathy's with any man up against a machine'" (*Player Piano* 63). He is (ironically) the loose cog of the text, who voluntarily withdraws from his position of power, who satirises the hierarchical and malign social system, who is at home in Ilium and in Homestead, and who goes over to the dissident 'underground' Ghost Shirt Society first and then manages to take Paul with him. Finnerty, then, represents humanism, humour, liberty, freedom of thought and deed. It is he who sits at the Player Piano and plays it himself. It is in this scene that Finnerty leaves Paul and moves in with the Reverend Lasher, another dystopian malcontent, and where Paul calls for the meeting on the bridge, the utopic space or place of compromise. The playing on the piano is a symbolic act of reversal, of turning the technology back on itself, of replacing the mechanical 'hands' with his own. It is not an act of destruction, as at the end of the text, but one of appropriation.

Paul Proteus (clearly linked by the alliterative nature of his name) is himself a human

player piano. He is played upon by ghost hands, unseen forces which direct him.

Lawrence Broer suggests that Paul, like the other citizens, has 'become so regulated and

standardized by the ruling technocracy that they themselves have become mindless pieces

of machinery', though perhaps this should be corrected by emphasising the ideological

nature of this mechanization: the citizens behave as 'robots' because they have been

conditioned to believe themselves to be so.[12] It is an act of self-deception brought about by

the ideological formations of the state -- formations Paul and others have internalized.

Paul is acquiescent, determined by the will of others. As his name implies, Paul Proteus is

the shape-changer, a chameleonlike figure who is often the observer, overhearer, and

sometimes speaker of other people's discourses. Lasher's, Gelhorne's and Kroner's

speeches attempt to determine his behaviour; Anita attempts to inculcate certain set speech

responses into Paul; and he has a marginal and observational role in the meeting of the

Ghost Shirt Society (in which he is a figurehead and 'a glib mouthpiece for a powerful,

clever organization' (*Player Piano* 295)). Proteus in fact operates as a screen upon which

the desires and discourses of others play. His manipulation by nearly all of his friends,

relations and colleagues cast him as an agent of their will to power, status, or success. He

is the focus of the text and the locus of the economy of need, from Anita's thirst for social

status to the unemployed men of Homestead's bar. As befits his role as a successful

company man, Paul is sustained by the wills and the ideologies of others; as Stanley

Schatt suggests, even Paul's rebellious joining of the Ghost Shirt Society is a 'transfer

from one organization to another'.[13] It is one of the ironies and paradoxes of *Player Piano*,

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[12] Lawrence Broer, 'Pilgrim's Progress: Is Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Winning his War with Machines?' in
Clockwork Worlds: Mechanized Environments in Science Fiction, ed. by Richard D. Erlich and Thomas P.
Dunn (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 137-161 (p. 138).
[13] Schatt, p. 23.

and the dystopian form itself, that the protagonist, whose trajectory of estrangement leads

him to alienation from dystopian society, must be in enough of a position of power to be

exposed to the holes and contradictions in the system, that which propels his

estrangement.

Playing the player piano, as Finnerty does, is resistance rather than outright rebellion, and

is an instance of what Situationist theorists would later call '*detournement*'; that is, the

turning of an artefact of the control-system against itself, and therefore against the system.

Finnerty's piano-playing symbolises his attempt to estrange Paul from his place in the

power elite, but like the pianola itself, many hands may play where Finnerty plays. The

hands of Kroner, (the name perhaps referring to 'Kronos', the father of the primal gods in

Greek mythology), signify power and authority and invert the demateriality of the hands

of Rudy Hertz, and those of the player piano. They are far from being 'ghost' hands: 'The

hands on the knees tightened. Paul struggled resentfully against the urge to pour his heart

out to this merciful, wise, gentle father' (*Player Piano* 125). They signify power, and here,

coercion: their existence casts the person whose knees are gripped into the position of

weakness or supplication. Prior to Paul's rejection of the offer to betray the Ghost Shirt

Society, he 'stepped back out of reach of the big, sapping, paternal hands' (286). Power in

the text becomes conflated with the idea of Father; the site of power and authority in

human form is in the Old Man and in Kroner. Kroner is the 'direct industrial security

officer' (125) for the area, in addition to his role in the bureaucracy: the factory system,

economics, then becomes mapped onto the national security system. In what reads as a

rewriting of O'Brien's interrogation of Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Kroner

interviews Paul, and dangles advancement as the bait for the betrayal of his friends, Lasher

and Finnerty. Paul ultimately refuses this bargain, but the dialogue is patterned upon that

of the father talking to the son. Paul's estrangement from state ideology is typed as filial

revolt at his sham trial, a re-inscription of dissident behaviour into familial structures.

Paul's trial, at the end of the novel, reveals that his rebellion is psychologically motivated

by resentment for his father, a figure for whom Kroner stands in.

2. Production and Consumption: the Automation of the Home

The domestic space of the text is also invaded by machines. As Jerome Klinkowitz notes,

the '*urdle-urdle-urdle*' and '*urdle-urdle-ur dull! Znick. Bazz-wapp!*' (*Player Piano* 244)

sounds of the Proteus's kitchen 'play counterpoint to the harsher sounds from the

machines in Building 58';[14] they also replay the words of Baer when told of Paul's

'loyalty' problems: "'Um, oh, I see, uh-huh; a hurdle, a hurdle. I see. Um'" (*Player Piano*

126) -- equating language with the sounds of machinery. The noises of machines provide

the rhythm of life for both work and domestic environments. The Hagstrohm's house also

has a plenitude of appliances: the radar range, the ultrasonic dishwasher and

clotheswasher, and so on. Klinkowitz suggests that the humans of the text are 'drowned in

a sense of plenty',[15] and this superabundance is repeated in the scenarios of Pohl's short

stories which I will analyse in chapter 7. The domestic space is also characterized by the

presence of television. Both Proteus and the Hagstrohms watch it while the chores are

automated; in fact, the mechanized chores provide the time to watch. The introduction of

machines does not actually provide more leisure time, because that is itself regimented and

mechanized through the medium of television. In fact, for Wanda, television replaces both

the chores *and* leisure time.

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[14] Jerome Klinkowitz, *Structuring the Void: The Struggle for Subject in Contemporary American Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 40.
[15] Klinkowitz, *Kurt Vonnegut*, p. 36.

As in other dystopias of the period, television signifies the invasive pressures of

consumerism and the penetration of mass media into the lives of the ordinary citizens.

Further still, it represents at an attempt by those in control of the system of production

(nearly always also in control of the processes of mass communications) to deceive the

populace. Television is a machine which falsifies reality and dehumanises its viewers

(Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*); is used to further consumption (Pohl's early texts); or even

to fabricate an entirely false reality for the viewers to believe in (the dystopias of Philip K.

Dick). As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, television, the medium of spectacle, is the means of

surveillance. Those who watch television are unaware that it also watches them.

In Vonnegut's later short story 'Harrison Bergeron' (1961), television again becomes the

mode of consumption of the spectacle. A domestic couple, George and Hazel, watch a

programme of dancing ballerinas:

> They weren't very good -- no better than anyone else would have been, anyway.
> They were burdened with sashweights and bags of birdshot, and their faces were
> masked, so that no one, seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty face, would
> feel like something the cat dragged in.[16]

In this dystopia, as in many others, the principle of equality (the title of Bellamy's own

sequel to *Looking Backward*) becomes inverted as a principle of repression: 'everybody

was finally equal', but everyone has been made equal by force. This enforced equality

finds an absurd manifestation in a system of physical handicapping, so that George and

Hazel's son, the eponymous Harrison, is weighed down by what 'looked like a walking

junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three hundred pounds'.[17] The language of

Darwinian (and laissez-faire capitalist) competition is mapped onto that of the racetrack,

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[16] Kurt Vonnegut, 'Harrison Bergeron' (1961), reprinted in *Welcome to the Monkey House* (1968) (St. Albans: Panther, 1972), pp. 19-25 (pp. 19-20).
[17] Vonnegut, 'Harrison Bergeron', p. 22.

the comic incongruity exposing both the absurdity of the metaphor and of the system of enforced equality. Harrison, however, throws off his shackles on primetime, a buffoonishly inflated figure, and with the most beautiful of the ballerinas, ascends to the ceiling, a parodic transcendence. 'It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, came into the studio with a double-barrelled shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor'.[18] The forces of repression remain in control, and George and Hazel, their minds narcotized, retreat back into the routine of the spectacle.

In this short story, Vonnegut seems to both privilege and mock a sense of difference as an important social and cultural motor. As in other dystopias of the period, particularly those of Orwell and Pohl, equality is an equality of ugliness and domination. Implicitly satirised is the role of mass communications in enforcing this equality: George, and other intelligent people, have a small radio (similar to the one which helps narcotize Millie Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*) tucked into their ear, which explodes with noise every twenty seconds to distract them. In another Vonnegut short story, 'Welcome to the Monkey House' (1968), the dystopian repression is focused on sexuality, motivated by overpopulation. One of the Hostesses of the 'Suicide Parlors', where (semi-) voluntary euthanasia takes place, is called 'Nancy McLuhan', a clear reference to 'global village' guru and mass communications analyst Marshall McLuhan. In this story, television 'was the government', but then '[p]ractically everything was the government'.[19] As in *Player Piano* and Pohl's dystopias of consumption, the world has become automated, this automation repeated metaphorically in the drugs which anaesthetize the sexual drive in the

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[18] 'Harrison Bergeron', p. 24.

[19] Kurt Vonnegut, 'Welcome to the Monkey House', (1968), *Welcome to the Monkey House* (1968) (St. Albans: Panther, 1972), pp. 38-55 (p. 41).

majority of citizens. Nancy McLuhan, like Orwell's Julia, belongs to an all-female corps which is dedicated to the suppression of sexuality for ostensibly benign ends: here, the reduction of population. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the mores of the late 1960s, Vonnegut connects this aversion from sex to prudishness, and particularly as female frigidity. It becomes an emblem of societal emasculation (male impotence figured as societal suicide), cured, rather abhorrently, by an act of rape. Vonnegut offers contraception as an alternative to repression, self-control rather than governmental control, and ironizes the dystopian rebel Billy the Poet as a rather unremarkable man (lover), but this particular escape from dystopian control -- the utopian space in the text being the Monkey House itself, free from sexual repression -- has a problematic reliance on the sexual and gender givens of the time, a charge that can also be brought against *Player Piano*.

As in many other dystopias of the period, the role of women is -- at best -- the catalyst for the male protagonist's alienation. The central female figure in *Player Piano* is the nakedly ambitious social climber Anita, who abandons Proteus when it appears that he is not going to get to the top. The wife of Edgar Hagstrohm is still a domestic slave (*'takaru'*) despite her labour-saving devices, and is betrayed, but remains stoical about her husband's infidelity. The wife of patrician boss Kroner is known as 'Mom' to all, and is a stereotypical manipulating matriarchal figure, perhaps the emblem of what Philip Wylie was to call 'Momism' in the 1940s. The importance of women in the text is marginal: they are secretaries and wives, as they were meant to be in the world of 40's and 50's America. The text offers no escape or real role for the women. Even Katherine Finch's role in the Ghost Shirt society is that of supporter to Calhoun.

In many of the dystopian worlds in this thesis, the space of the domestic is chararacterized

by the signs of consumption, and particularly the automated appliances of the 1950s

consumer boom. In *Player Piano*, materially the citizens are free from want, and have

their needs satisfied, but there is nothing 'above and beyond the goddamned package'

(*Player Piano* 158). In *Player Piano*, as in Frederik Pohl's short story 'The Midas Plague',

even the processes of consumption have become regulated and mechanized: the home of

the '*takaru*' Hagstrohm is supplied and paid for automatically from his wages. The scale

of consumption is utterly determined and matched to the amount of goods that the factory

of Ilium, and those like it, can produce. There is no fluctuation, no 'play' in the market

(yet another meaning of that central word): it has achieved stasis through, once again, the

replacement of the human. The complete control of the processes of production and

consumption have left no room for individuality of taste, or of choice.

The removal of the individual from the world of production is repeated in the removal of

individual *choice* from world of consumption. In both, Vonnegut's imagination of the

oppression of humanity is reliant on the very conception of the human being as producing

or consuming unit, that which the text attempts to critique and satirize. To be free to

choose to spend one's money on 'an electric organ. Expensive, impractical, strictly

personal' (158) is a form of freedom, but itself a very circumscribed one. The freedom of

choice to buy one product or another is a capitalist, consumerist one, as bound up with the

material (in the form of commodities) as is the mechanized, regulated state. Just as *Player

Piano*'s imagination of the automation of work signifies the dystopian structures of its

society, the removal of consumer choice reveals the text's own (ideological) assumptions

about human individuality.

The text sets up an economy of unspecified need in nearly all the human individuals, which is itself created by the societal and cultural economies of automation and factory production. It is the computer EPICAC XIV who assesses and provides for the material and physical needs of the population, but ignores their spiritual or emotional needs, figured as a kind of emptiness or absence. Proteus, Finnerty, Hagstrohm, PFC Hacketts, Lasher, even Baer realise that there is something missing from their lives. In the case of Hagstrohm and the men of the Reeks and Wrecks, a sense of self and self-worth is based on notions of production and value. The meaning of the lives of the 'working classes' (who in the inverted world of the text are precisely the ones whose work has no value) is centred on their productive value, or lack thereof. The scene in the Homestead bar, where Proteus is confronted by the men who have been replaced by the processes of mechanization that he himself had furthered, signifies that their lives are voided of meaning because they are voided of valuable work: their sense of worth and self-worth is still linked to the structures of industrial production that the automated factory has replaced. Ironically, the word 'hands', whose demateriality on the pianola and the lathe signifies the replacement of the human, has also been a synecdochic term for the human worker, and in Dickens's *Hard Times*, employees are metaphorically reduced to their instruments. The narrator describes them as:

> the multitude of Coketown, generically called "the Hands" -- a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs--[20]

The reduction of the human being to its productive member, the hand, has then a long history in the satirical representation of industrial life. It is difficult to escape the conclusion, however, that Vonnegut is prey to a kind of industrial nostalgia, that

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[20] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854), ed. by George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York and London: Norton, 1990), book 1, chapter 10, p. 52.

humankind was spiritually better off when it was poorer and had to work in factories, through 'valuable' work. The society of the text creates this economy of spiritual need through the failure to replace one kind of work with another of equal value, but it is clear that Vonnegut privileges work (physical labour) throughout the text. Work still takes its position as the way in which the human individual measures his or her own worth: an industrial ethos.[21] Homestead, with its ironically pastoral name, is a place where the absence of work is the problem. Where, in Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, work has been eliminated to maximise time for leisure and for learning, in *Player Piano* the absence of work produces, ironically, a concomitant automation of all other time and activity.

The 'utopian' space of the Gottwald farm, Proteus's vision of an escape from the corporate and mechanical state, entails a large amount of physical labour. It is no Cockaygne, but still symbolizes, through its associations with the past and its non-consumerist, non-commodified life, a space opposed to the Ilium works. Proteus cannot embrace its own imperatives of hard manual labour (for self-sufficient ends) because, ideologically, he is still part of the mechanized state. The direct connection between human work (with the hands) and a kind of life which avoids the pressures, oppressions and redundancies of the world of EPICAC XIV reveals Vonnegut's own individualistic and work-oriented ideology. Work or labour also *occupies* the mass of population. The elimination of work, *Player Piano* suggests, results not only in discontent but in societal fragmentation (the tripartite

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[21] Work, or productive labour, is also at the heart of Karl Marx's conception of human life. Peter Singer has written that, for Marx, 'labour in the sense of free productive activity is the essence of human life. Whatever is produced in this way [--] a statue, a house, or a piece of cloth -- is therefore the essence of human life made into a physical object. Marx calls this "the objectification of man's species-life". Ideally the objects workers have freely created would be theirs to keep or dispose of as they wish. When, under conditions of alienated labour, workers must produce objects over which they have no control (because the objects belong to the employers) and which are used against those who produced them (by increasing the wealth of the employers) the workers are alienated from their essential humanity'. Peter Singer, 'Marx' in *Great Political Thinkers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 361-459 (p. 394).

social and spatial order of the text). Work becomes, then, a generator of social cohesion. Work also is a guarantor of order and stability. The stability embodied in the machine is an order of depression and dispossession for the majority, one that creates the conditions of resistance and ultimately rebellion. What happens at the end of the text, when the citizens of Homestead are given a chaotic state of liberty, suggests (rather ironically for a dystopian text) that perhaps human beings need order, and it is the structure and extent of the text's forms of control which are deforming. Liberty is sacrificed for order in the dystopian state, but there can be no liberty without law even in the idealised liberal state (America as Utopia) Vonnegut values.

Working with one's hands is a central feature of the main body of human society in *Player Piano*. It is assigned value in the text where it has none in the society of Ilium; the managers and even the engineers of the factory no longer partake in physical work. For them, too, it has been replaced. Thus, Proteus spends his time in his office, watching dials; Bud Calhoun designs gadgets which will eventually replace not only himself, but a whole class of job. The Reeks and Wrecks continue to work with their hands but long to be able to do something of value, of meaning, something the worth of which is immediately apparent and of satisfaction. They all gather around to mend Proteus's broken-down car when it expires on the highway, and at the end of the novel it is the innate desire to fix and repair which signifies the defeat of the rebellion. The factory system has eliminated (or replaced) the need for the human to be the 'maker', the artisan who creates goods with his or her hands, or even the artist whose productions are of aesthetic rather than of economic value.

The processes of cultural (re)production in the corporate-state reflect this mechanization:

"'It's the Golden Age of Art, with millions of dollars a year poured into reproductions of

Rembrandts, Whistlers, Goyas, Renoirs, El Grecos, Degas, da Vincis, Michaelangelos...'",

says Halyard (*Player Piano* 228). There is no new art. There is one novelist mentioned in

the text, though he is himself absent: his classification number is withdrawn for writing an

anti-machine work; without this he cannot be a novelist, by definition.

> 'Then how can you call him a writer?' said Halyard.
> 'Because he writes,' she said.
> 'My dear girl' said Halyard paternally, 'on that basis, we're all writers' (*Player Piano* 226).

Unlike *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, the physical body of the writer has

not been replaced by a machine: however, the writer must become as a machine for his or

her work to be published. Only books which fit the structures of marketing, and more

importantly reproduce the ideology of the state, can be allowed. The novels which are

published, about clipper ships or "'the old days on the Erie Canal'" (*Player Piano* 228)

again commodify the historical past and turn it into its own simulacra.

3. History and Significant Space in *Player Piano*

The beginning of *Player Piano* finds Paul Proteus inspecting the vast factory site.

Building 58 is a secure and militarized space -- 'An armoured car, its turret nervously

jerking its brace of machine guns this way and that, grumbled to a stop' (*Player Piano* 22),

a conflation of the industrial and the military that is found in other dystopian texts of the

1950s (particularly those of Frederik Pohl) and which anticipates the revelation that

Kroner is 'security officer' for Ilium as well as overseeing its production. Building 58 is a

zone of exclusion of the human: Proteus 'discouraged and disliked visitors' (16). As the

original site of one of Edison's workshops, Building 58 signifies the beginning of the

human as an economic unit in a system of mass production. The opposition of human and machine in the text, as I have shown, is focused upon the word 'replacement'. In contrast to the uses of this central dystopian motif in such intertexts as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, the machine is not a tool of the processes of control which physically destroy the human individual, nor is it the shaper of the very nature of humanity. The human and the machine are terms which are mutually exclusive: the existence of one in a physical space creates a zone inimical to the existence of the other. This echoes Zamiatin's *We*, in which the Green World beyond the rigidly controlled and artificial urban space of the dystopia provides an alternative to, and perhaps even a threat to, its existence.

The factory space is antithetical to life. Proteus finds a cat in the Works which he wants to train as a 'mouser'; however, it takes fright at a mechanical cleaning device, attempts to scale an electrified fence and is electrocuted. Similar in theme is his short story 'Deer in the Works' (1955), where Vonnegut again returns to the Ilium works.[22] In it, a local newspaper editor called Potter (a name again with artisanal overtones opposed to the significations of the Works) seeks to give up his independence and join the company in the name of 'security' for his newborn children. He is taken on, and on his first day a deer breaks into the secure space of the factory and he attempts to track it down. The space of the factory site becomes kaleidoscopic, disorienting: he gets lost, then stumbles upon the deer being trapped by his new boss and a posse of men and 'company policemen'. Here, though, the animal does not die. Potter opens the gate and allows the deer to escape into the 'green world' beyond. The irruption of the deer violates the purity of the mechanical zone and must be killed (and symbolically devoured at a meal later), but the natural here

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[22] Kurt Vonnegut, 'Deer in the Works' (1955), reprinted in *Welcome to the Monkey House* (1968) (St Albans: Panther, 1972), pp. 196-208.

threatens the technological, rather than the other way around. It is threat by opposition, by the existence of the other. The deer is the alien, the intruder, the other. By implication, so is the protagonist Potter, who acts to save the animal, and aligns himself with nature (and therefore freedom in the rhetoric of this text) by stepping outside the gates at the end of the story, repeating the rejection of the factory already performed by the deer. Here, then, the space of the natural can oppose and physically impinge upon the space of the mechanical, an inversion of the processes of *Player Piano*.

The opposition between the mechanical/ artificial and natural/ authentic spatializes the operations of ideology. As in the other dystopian texts in this thesis, in *Player Piano* ideology attempts to efface its own existence and to represent the corporate state's domination of machines as the seemingly 'natural' human state. This ideology finds its apotheosis in the scenes at the Meadows, where Proteus attends a corporate morale-boosting weekend. There, he has to endure a theatrical production which is meant to indoctrinate the employees still further into the valorization of the mechanized state, and another ritual uses an oak tree as a symbol of timelessness to emphasise the naturalization of ideology which obscures the operations of the state.

> "It is our custom," said Kroner; "it is the custom here at the Meadows - our custom, our Meadows - to meet here under our tree, our symbol of strong roots, trunk and branches, our symbol of courage, integrity, perseverance, beauty." (*Player Piano* 187).

Of course, this performance only exposes to Proteus and to the reader the ideologically constructed nature of Proteus's world and the crudity of this literal naturalization of ideology. The rationalization of the super-computer EPICAC XIV's rule is its ideal of the 'Utopia of Efficiency', the benevolence of which demands the human deferral of responsibility in favour of the 'infallible' machine. The rebellion of the dystopian

protagonist exposes the 'natural' organization of life to be an artificial and imposed ideological construct. The spatialization of this revelation is the protagonist's desire for, and search for, the interstitial space in the global system of control. This space can be found in imagination, as in *Fahrenheit 451*; on another planet, such as the Venus of Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*; or, as in Winston Smith's ideal of the 'Golden Country', and in Paul Proteus's (self-deceiving) wish for the pastoral idyll of the Gottwald farm, in Nature, the 'Green World' of Zamiatin's *We*.

Building 58 of the Ilium Works contains the oldest of the automated lathes, and thus functions as a zone of nostalgia for Proteus and also contains the historical signs of the history of automation. Ilium forms a spatial junction for several time-paths: the town is sited on the Iroquois river, a signification of pre-colonization place names (and a history excluded, suppressed or assimilated by official discourse); Ilium itself refers to Homeric narrative; it had been an old battlefield:

> Here, in the basin of the river bend, the Mohawks had overpowered the Algonquins, the Dutch the Mohawks, the British the Dutch, the Americans the British (*Player Piano* 13).

It is a site of battle, of contestation, signifying struggles for possession and particularly for an implied domination. History is a sequence of successive power elites, suggesting, at the very beginning of the text, that this particular United States and its formations may only be in temporary control.

Most importantly, as I noted above, part of the factory site is the site of Edison's workshop, which is a mythic space signifying processes of (idealized) genius and invention opposed to the organization of science and technology in the Ilium works. Vonnegut relies upon the ideology of individuality and entrepreneurship, which David

Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* suggested was being superseded by one of belongingness, to provide an oppositional figure to the engineers and bureaucrats of Ilium. Edison becomes a symbol for an authenticity of life erased by the machine-state of *Player Piano*. Paul Proteus creates the museum-space of the factory, 'a vote of confidence in the past' (*Player Piano* 16), but excludes others, and desires to keep the historical zone to himself. 'He'd been told to have the north end of the building torn down and replaced, and he'd talked Headquarters out of it' (*Player Piano* 15). Perhaps he has to keep it to himself in order for it not to be erased -- the idea of visitors (perhaps another history, another 'record') acts as an alibi for his actions.

The spaces of history are sites of contention in the text: the very status of 'history', as progress, as the ideological grounding of the corporate-state, or as, perhaps, an oppositional continuum to that of the present (Lasher's toast '"To the record"' at the end of the novel) are all in a state of unresolved ordering. The company attempts to erase the historical 'past', as the space of the factory colonizes and replaces the human space of the community. The word 'ghost', one of the key terms of the text, comes into play here. Just as Rudy Hertz marvels at the player piano, '"You can almost see a ghost there playing his heart out"' (38), the signs of history return as mere semiotic 'ghosts', as in the scene where Paul and Anita visit the Kroner's residence:

> The mansion was one more affirmation of Kroner's belief that nothing of value changed; that what is once true is always true; that truths were few and simple; and that a man needed no knowledge beyond these truths to deal wisely and justly with any problem whatsoever (*Player Piano* 119).

Here, the relationship with the past is dual. In one sense, the past becomes the alibi of the present, becomes filtered through the ideological structures of the present to reflect and legitimate the societal and cultural conditions, and structures of power, of the corporate

state. History (as official discourse) buttresses the dominant ideology by reinforcing the naturalization of ideology, providing a narrative rationalization for the current societal organization. The other sense of the past is created through the idea of the *simulacra*, which I derive from Jean Baudrillard. By this I mean that the signs of the past cease to have reference to any kind of historical reality, and become free-floating, create their own order of discourse, their own sign system.[23] The idea of history is then not only masked by these signs of the past but replaces them, erases them, records over them.

History then becomes another commodity to be fabricated or consumed. In a scene finding its echo in Pohl's 'The Midas Plague', Paul and Anita visit the Kroner house to find it 'was a Victorian mansion, perfectly restored and maintained down to the filigree along the eaves, and the iron spikes along the roof peak' (*Player Piano* 119). This consumption is entirely conspicuous, history reproduced as a sign of the power elite's wealth and status. Similarly, Paul and Anita's kitchen displays

> Rough-hewn rafters, taken from an antique barn [...] held against the ceiling by concealed bolts fixed in the steel framing of the house. The walls were wainscoted in pine, aged by sandblasting, and given a soft, yellow patina of linseed oil (*Player Piano* 107).

When Paul reveals his purchase of the faux-pastoral Gottwald farm, Anita turns history into commodities: she desires to strip the place of its artefacts and transport them to the Proteus home, where they will be technologically updated and displayed. This represents another invasion, another colonization. Previously the farm had been 'a completely isolated backwater, cut off from the boiling rapids of history, society, and the economy' (*Player Piano* 143). This space, a utopian one in Paul's imagination, is itself penetrated by consumerism, though it is later saved by Paul's own inaction.

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[23] See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11.

David Seed has suggested that Vonnegut, like Pohl, 'sees commercial expansion as an imperialistic process'. [24] I would take this further to suggest that the importance of space, as territory and as spatial metaphor within the utopian/ dystopian paradigm, lends itself to imagining the dystopian formations of consumption as imperialistic or colonizing. The equating of consumption with colonization, and commodities with simulacra, suggests that the dystopian 'real' is in fact irreal, fabricated, an ideological screen for deceiving its citizens. This motif becomes, in the dystopias of Philip K. Dick, a disruption of the 'real' so strong that the characters in his texts struggle with a radical instability of both world and identity.

As in other dystopian texts of the period, the importance of history, as official discourse or as that which opposes it, permeates the text. The Reverend Lasher, at the end of the novel, responds to the defeat of the rebellion by saying: "'It doesn't matter if we win or lose, Doctor. The important thing is that we tried. For the record, we tried!'" (*Player Piano* 311). This again suggests that the 'real', as it is experienced by the ordinary citizens of dystopia, is fraudulent, and that they are deceived by ideological formations. History, one of this dystopia's forms of the authentic, is hidden behind mechanized lives of production and consumption. Lasher's insistence on the status of 'the record' as a force or body of evidence somehow outside the official archive seem naïve, but suggests -- as does the appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* -- that something will, in time, supersede the dystopian state. The horror of stasis which shapes the dystopian reaction against the Wells/ Bellamy technotopia finds its manifestation here as a belief in the ultimate fall of the dystopian

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[24] David Seed, 'Mankind vs. Machines: Vonnegut's *Player Piano*' in *Impossibility Fiction: Alternativity - Extrapolation - Speculation*, ed. by Derek Littlewood and Peter Stockwell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 11-23 (p. 12).

state. The refrain 'to the record' is picked up in the last paragraphs of the *Player Piano*, ironized by Proteus's realization of the widely divergent reasons for the rebellion (not even 'principles'), and by the previous textual use of 'record' -- the replacement of the hands of Rudy Hertz by a tape-player. Lasher believes in a historical continuum when all around him the processes of automation are erasing (recording over) the historical forms of economic and cultural life. As in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the dystopian state attempts to destroy any sense of history as opposition. It is far from certain that the stability of 'the record' is enough to enable it to be oppositional, particularly if it relies upon a government-controlled archive. History is constantly being appropriated by the state as its own legitimating discourse, and its signs turned into simulacra. *Player Piano* suspends any sense of closure, of a strictly defined ending and interpretation of the text, by the multiple viewpoints and toasts in the last paragraphs. Lasher, von Neumann, Finnerty, and Proteus all have their reasons and interpretations and all co-exist within a non-hierarchical zone of discourses. None are privileged, although the scene is mediated by Proteus's viewpoint. The signification of the rebellion is still in play, itself a refusal of the totalized discourse of the dystopian state.

The ending of the text poses problems for the possibility of revolutionary (or utopian) action. The existence of a discourse of the 'other' is something denied by the totalitarian states of dystopias: one must ask, how much does the Ghost Shirt Society offer a glimpse of something beyond the totalizing system? The reader must question the whole possibility of rebellion when the structures of power of the corporate-state are so clearly replicated in the Ghost Shirt Society itself. The eradication of names, replaced by numbers, in the Society repeats the classification scheme of the factory system; the rebellion is split, once again, into the elite and the mass; the protection of the machines is

an ideology even internalized by Finnerty; and the interrogation scene when Proteus is

inducted into the Society prefigures his examination in the courtroom later in the text.

Even the symbolic shirts which provide their name echo the coloured shirts which identify

the different teams in the games at the Meadows. Elsewhere, rebellion becomes

reinscribed into official discourse. The scene where the Old Man, Gelhorne, plans Paul's

exile and downfall, involves the turning of Paul's language against himself: "'I quit'"

becomes reinscribed as part of the games of the bosses, part of the language of the power

elite. The 'fall' of Paul Proteus, and his trial, are staged by the state in order to

symbolically punish the transgressors of the ruling ideology. The spectacle of the trial

becomes a reinscription of resisting behaviour, a reappropriation of rebellion, in the

service of the continuation of the state.

4. Writing Utopia: the Languages of Oppositional Discourse

In a text like *Player Piano*, the protagonist does not possess his own discourse, but is a

'mouthpiece'. One could describe *Player Piano* as Paul Proteus's search for his own

language, a discourse of resistance. EPICAC XIV continues to impose an entirely utilitarian

set of needs largely because the language by which to express other needs (spiritual,

emotional) has been undermined, erased or mechanized. As I noted above, even the social

discourse between Paul and Anita has become a ritualized and mechanized set of

responses ("'I love you Paul'"; "'And I love *you*, Anita'"). The state attempts to reduce

language to that which expresses, and can only reproduce, the terms of its ideological

structures. It is one 'voice', and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this voice is that of Big Brother

and the reduced language of Newspeak. The society of *Player Piano* contains a plurality

of different voices and discourses: the language of Finnerty, PFC Hacketts, Lasher,

Hagstrohm, and particularly the Shah all differ from and are to some extent opposed to the

official language. The use of free indirect discourse in the narration, one which is common

to all the texts in this thesis except Roshwald's *Level 7* and Pohl and Kornbluth's *The*

Space Merchants furthers this blurring of 'voices' and the plurality of discourses within

the dystopian text. It also foregrounds the ambiguity of the dystopian protagonist once

again, for the boundaries between the protagonist's own discourse or voice and that of the

ideology of the state (and its authority-figure representatives) is often indistinct. The

chapters where the Shah visits different aspects of the society of the corporate state (in a

comic use of the trope of the Visitor to Utopia) have an estranging function for the reader,

and site a satirical critique within the frame of the text. It is important to note that the Shah

goes beyond the boundaries of Ilium, and crosses and challenges the tripartite division of

the social space. These chapters, with the play of one language against another, and the

confusions of translation and misunderstanding, explicitly oppose the state ideology of

'truths were few and simple' (*Player Piano* 119).

The principle of social discourse in the text is also that of play, but in the sense of acting,

or of dissimulation. Paul Proteus is therefore required to take on (to play) a number of

roles in the text in order to meet the desires of others: boss, surrogate son, ambitious

husband, pillar of the community, rebel. Lasher's desire for a symbolic act of revolt lead

him to project onto Paul the role of messianic leader, when all Paul wants is the institution

of a utopian space, a zone of escape or of reconciliation. Thus he cries out "'We must meet

in the middle of the bridge!'" (*Player Piano* 103), and searches for an Edenic escape on

the Gottwald farm. Paul Proteus is searching for something which will add to the life he

has: 'the machines themselves were entertaining and delightful' (18). As his reaction at the

machine-smashing in the rebellion shows, he really wants no more than a utopian zone to

call his own within the existing social space.

The human as maker is of course what causes the rebellion to fail. The unfailing gadgeteering instinct of men such as Bud Calhoun necessitates the end of the revolt, and the destruction becomes simply a reason to start building again: 'his hands were busy doing what they liked to do best, Paul supposed -- replacing men like himself with machines' (*Player Piano* 315). The end of the novel depicts Paul, Lasher and Finnerty, arms aloft, apparently marching to their executions, to the words, "'Forward March'" (317). This image of progress (as human surrender) is arresting, but seems extremely pessimistic, where other dystopias, as I shall argue, end in a moment of suspension. There is ambiguity here; John R. May reads the end of the text as depicting 'the futility of rebellion', whereas Thomas Hoffman suggests that:

> the ending is affirmative because it reassures us that humans will continue to rebel against this prisonhouse of their own creation despite the failure of *this* rebellion, *this* man, or *this* period of history.[25]

The very naming of the revolt after, and therefore equating it with, the Ghost Shirt Society seems to foretell its ultimate defeat in the face of superior forces (and superior technology -- magic shirts against rifle bullets). Rebellion is not inscribed into the system of control, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but, as in *Brave New World*, is corralled, and neutralized. The humans are defeated precisely because they are human and not machine; but their impulses will also, ironically, continually necessitate rebellion.

In *Player Piano*, as elsewhere in this thesis, the automation of life is an estranged representation of tendencies towards conformity and over-organization in American

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[25] John R. May, 'Vonnegut's World of Comic Futility' in *The Critical Responses to Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. by Leonard Mustazza (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 123-133 (p. 130). Thomas Hoffman, 'The Theme of Mechanization in *Player Piano*' in *Clockwork Worlds: Mechanized Environments in Science Fiction*, ed. by Richard D. Erlich and Thomas P. Dunn (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 125-135 (p. 130).

society in the 1950s. It is figured, as was Huxley's *Brave New World*, on the Taylorist

factory system and its automation not only of production lines but, metaphorically, also of

its human workers. The technotopian and urban visions of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*

are transformed from that which liberates the human population from the dictates of

routine and work to those which reimpose its imperatives. Where Vonnegut ends his

dystopia in an ambiguous manner, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the subject of chapter

2, offers a retreat from urban configurations of society into an idealized smalltown past,

the memories of childhood, and the natural world itself.

CHAPTER 2:

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE: FIRE, FIREMEN AND THE SUBURBAN

APOCALYPSE OF RAY BRADBURY'S *FAHRENHEIT 451*

Introduction

Ray Bradbury, like the other writers of dystopias in this thesis, grew up during the

Depression years. Born in 1920, Bradbury spent much of his childhood in Waukegan,

Illinois, and the small town is the focus for much of Bradbury's nostalgia. For Bradbury,

the small town and its values, placed in opposition to those of corporate capitalism and

urban life, becomes a place of escape from, or avoidance of, the dystopic configurations of

mid-20th century culture and society. The crisis in the capitalist system after the Wall

Street Crash of 1929, and the Depression years that followed, affected Bradbury

personally: in the years 1926-7 and 1932-3, Bradbury travelled with his family to Arizona

where his father, laid off, hoped to find work. Like many of the writers of dystopias in this

thesis, Bradbury seems a product of his political era, influenced by the years of Depression

and the world war that followed it.

Fahrenheit 451 is, famously, the temperature at which book-paper catches fire and burns.

The world of the novel is that in which books are the locus of control and repression,

imagined as systematised book-burning. The book is, for Bradbury, a repository of those

values worth preserving. In a 1967 preface to *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury writes of his

'great and abiding love of libraries', and this, he explains, was the motivation for writing

Fahrenheit 451. He writes:

It followed then that when Hitler burned a book I felt it as keenly, please forgive me, as his killing a human, for in the long sum of history they are one and the same flesh.[1]

Bradbury refers to the Nazi book-burnings rather than the McCarthyite fires

contemporaneous with the publication of *Fahrenheit 451*, but the potency of the images of

book-burning cannot have been lost in 1953. Jack Zipes argues that 'in *Fahrenheit 451*

specific American problems of the early 1950s are omnipresent and are constantly

projected into the future, estranged, negated', and I would concur with this assessment, as

all dystopian texts offer estranged representations of their period of production.[2] As in the

dystopian worlds of Philip K. Dick (see chapter 5), Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet

Union, mediated through Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, offer models of tyranny for the

dystopian text. Wayne L. Johnson suggests that

> Bradbury was never keen on Orwell's view of the future, and that attitude has
> intensified. Recently he has written:
>
> 'Nineteen eighty-four will never arrive. Yes, the year itself will show up but not as
> a Kremlin in gargoyle or an Orwellian beast. We have for the time being, anyway,
> knocked Big Brother into the next century. With luck and if we keep our eyes on
> the ballot box and our chameleon politicos, he may never return.'[3]

Bradbury was writing in 1979, but perhaps Huxley's *Brave New World*, with its emphasis

on the narcotised happiness of its citizens, was always closer to *Fahrenheit 451*'s

dystopian imagination. Bradbury places an important emphasis on the intervention the

dystopian text makes into the 'real' of the postwar United States: it is *Nineteen Eighty-*

Four itself, the imagination of a totalitarian future, which prevented the rise of Big

[1] Ray Bradbury, 'Introduction' to *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), pp. 9-15 (p. 11).
[2] Jack Zipes, 'Mass Degradation of Humanity and Massive Contradictions in Bradbury's Vision of America in *Fahrenheit 451*', in *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, ed. by Eric S. Rabkin, Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 182-198 (p. 183).
[3] Wayne L. Johnson, *Ray Bradbury* (New York: Ungar, 1980), p. 84.

Brother. The (possible) dystopian state is then effectively and pre-emptively combated by the dystopia itself.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, opposition to the repression and censorship of a dystopian state is focused on books (representing 'high culture'), a locus of repression going as far back in the utopian tradition as Plato's *Republic*. This is reliant on the preservation of cultural values symbolised by, and contained within, the pages of the books in the Waukegan library frequented by Bradbury in his childhood. The fireman-state's abhorrence for books is a symbolic disavowal of the humanist civilization also threatened by postwar developments in advertising, mass consumption, and television. Mass culture, television, and state control are, in *Fahrenheit 451*, loci of power and consumption opposed by, and antithetical to, the 'high culture' of the literary canon and book-learning. In Bradbury's short story 'The Smile', set in a post-nuclear war scenario in which high cultural artefacts are abused and destroyed, the young protagonist (who symbolises a future way out of this self-negating world) steals the smile of Mona Lisa from the ravaged canvas in order to preserve it: the artefacts of 'high' culture have a value which both opposes and transcends the self-destructiveness of contemporary culture.[4] Similarly, Bradbury's reliance on a 'small-town' communitarian ideal, as opposed to the suburban dystopian configurations of *Fahrenheit 451*, reveals his adherence to both the past and the pastoral as zones which oppose the technologies of control of the repressive state. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the protagonist Guy Montag's alienation from his role as a Fireman is figured as a spatial movement from the suburban to a natural landscape, a pastoral vision permeated by memories of childhood. It is an escape from dystopic configurations of the 'real' to one

[4] Ray Bradbury, 'The Smile', *The Day It Rained Forever* (1959) (Harmondsworth: Roc, 1991), pp. 122-127.

filled with the presence of fantasy and imagination, itself symbolised by the internalized books of the dissident men.

1. Emptiness Within and Without: the Body Politic and the Burning World

The world of *Fahrenheit 451* is a totalized police state where agents of the government, known as 'Firemen', control the populace through the destruction of printed material. Books are publicly burned in spectacular raids on secret caches and libraries maintained by dissident individuals. This burning is a manifestation of censorship and control, buttressed by omnipresent, and narcotizing, radio and television. The narrative charts the trajectory of alienation of Guy Montag, a Fireman who begins to doubt, then oppose, the system of control of which he was once a part. *Fahrenheit 451* constructs an opposition between two types of fire: the 'hearth' and 'Salamander' of the title of the first chapter, fire as *warming* (connoting social inclusion) and fire as *burning* (social exclusion). This opposition becomes internalized and is played out as two different and antithetical alternatives, paths, or futures. Fire (as burning) is a technology of control, one that the dystopian protagonist, Montag, must repudiate in his trajectory of alienation, from complicit Fireman, to oppositional Bookman. Montag is, in Bradbury's own phrase, 'a book-burner who suddenly discovers that books are flesh-and-blood ideas and cry out, silently, when put to the torch'.[5] Bradbury's conception of books is as receptacles of the ethical mesh which regulates societal behaviour; the most prominent book in *Fahrenheit 451* is the Bible, traditionally the main text as a source of guidance in Western culture. The society of *Fahrenheit 451* is one without this source of direction, and therefore with no ethical base, and nothing to regulate behaviour other than culturally reinforced habit

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[5] Ray Bradbury, 'Introduction' to *Fahrenheit 451*, pp. 12-13.

(disseminated through the wall-sized television screens) and the repressive action of the firemen themselves.

The text begins with a scene of conflagration, Montag setting fire to piles of books. Following this primary (and primal) book-burning comes his first encounter with Clarisse McClellan who, like many women in these dystopian texts, acts as the catalyst for the alienation of the protagonist, from his position within the dominant ideology and the apparatus of control. Montag's stiff awkwardness in this encounter appears to be that of certainty first undermined by the encroachment of doubt. However, upon his return to his home, he is troubled by 'something [that] lay behind the grill': this 'something' is a book.[6] Therefore, when Montag meets Clarisse McClellan he has already begun to rebel. The text emphasises the duality of both Montag and his wife, Millie: he has 'that other self, the subconscious idiot that ran babbling at times, quite independent of will, habit, and conscience' (*F451* 25). Montag feels 'his body divide itself [...] the two halves grinding one upon the other' (36); there is 'another Mildred [...] a Mildred so deep inside this one, and so bothered, really bothered, that the two women had never met' (59). Montag's bifurcated self is split along the fault-lines of the Hearth and Salamander, the warming fire and the burning fire. The self and the body become metaphoric indicators of the system's repression and of the fracturing such repression will cause. Unlike Orwell's perpetual dystopian tyranny, *Fahrenheit 451* and the other novels I analyse in this thesis project the impossibility of such a static oppression. The contradiction between the (utopian) ideology of the state and its operations of power, all too apparent to the dystopian *apparatchik*, ultimately leads to its fragmentation.

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[6] Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 25. All further page references will be given in the body of the text, abbreviated to *F451*.

Montag's bifurcation is manifested in the growing autonomous behaviour of his body. As in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* the image of the hands is a recurring one in the text: Montag's act of theft in the house of an old woman whose library the firemen burn is described in terms of him losing control of his hands, an image repeated thereafter. Here, the hands signify the fragmentation of Montag's psyche as they begin to act apart from him. David Seed, who explores the metaphor of body and body politic in several articles on postwar dystopias, notes, 'his previously unified self fractures into dissociations of mind from body and limb from limb'.[7] This rebellion replicates the estrangement of Montag from the system (the system losing control over him). The same imagery of bodily dislocation as a symbol of societal fragmentation recurs in Wolfe's *Limbo* (see chapter 3).

The meeting of Montag and Clarisse is the structural accelerator of the process of Montag's alienation from the ideology of the state, of questioning and opposition. Presence is a key attribute of Clarisse which is in polar opposition to the emptiness which marks the world of the Firemen, its culture, and particularly the imagery surrounding Montag's wife Mildred. Montag's first contact with Clarisse complicates this dualism: hers is a ghostliness, a presence-in-absence. Clarisse is first viewed (by the reader and Montag) surrounded by 'moonlight', by wind and 'circling leaves', emphasising her alignment with natural symbols:

> Her face was slender and milk-white, and it was in a kind of gentle hunger that
> touched over everything with a tireless curiosity. It was a look, almost, of pale
> surprise; the dark eyes were so fixed to the world that no move escaped them.
> (*F451* 21).

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[7] David Seed, 'The Flight from the Good Life: *Fahrenheit 451* in the Context of Postwar American Dystopias', *Journal of American Studies*, 28:2 (1994), 225 -240 (p. 234).

Clarisse occupies and embodies the *utopic* space of the text, the interstices, the chinks in this particular world-machine, and is linked to childhood, to nature, and to memory. She names herself as different, and in the oppositions of the dystopian text, therefore deviant. Clarisse is white in the colour-symbolism of *Fahrenheit 451*, a symbolic innocence opposed to the black of the Firemen. Perhaps most importantly of all, she is discovered to be a reader of books, a fellow to Montag in her estrangement from the system.

Montag's wife, Millie, is being 'eaten up' by the inherent contradictions and oppressions of the televisual state, and the reader first encounters her as an attempted suicide. Millie, in fact, undergoes death-in-life (an absence-in-presence), a 'living death'. Death pervades the society of *Fahrenheit 451*, and suicide is a recurring theme in the text. Montag first wonders whether he, like his wife, has suicidal impulses, when Beatty says:

> 'Montag, a funny thing. Heard tell this morning. Fireman in Seattle, purposely set a Mechanical Hound to his own chemical complex and let it loose. What kind of suicide would you call *that*?' (*F451* 42)

Children kill each other and attempt to run Montag down, and do kill Clarisse; the husband of one of Millie's friends threw himself from a building; the parlour walls are filled with spectacles of carnage. Later, after Montag murders his superior, he realises that '*Beatty wanted to die*' (*F451* 114). When we first encounter Millie, Montag has just entered their bedroom:

> It was like coming into the cold marbled room of a mausoleum after the moon has set. Complete darkness, not a hint of the silver world outside, the windows tightly shut, the chamber a tomb-world where no sound from the great city could penetrate. The room was not empty (*F451* 26).

The moon, symbol of Clarisse, has 'set': Montag enters into a dead world, devoid of her influence. Even though Millie was there, '[t]he room was indeed empty' (26). Montag discovers Millie, immobile due to an overdose. There is an indeterminacy of explanation -

- forgetfulness, or a conscious attempt -- but the inversion of the intimate space of the bedroom, the place of warmth and love transformed into a place of cold and death, and Millie's paranoid conformity and terror at Montag's alienation, show her dehumanization by the operations of state control. Millie is described as 'no more than [a] hard stratum of marble' (28); the explicit metaphor of layers makes the human being, the human body, into an abstraction, an archaeological artefact with buried strata of fear, love, and pain. This again signifies the link between the body and the body politic. The state, like Millie, attempts to hide the damage repression causes. Millie's desire for the 'fourth wall' of the parlour screens is a desire for entombment and for the quiescence of the womb. Her overdose is an escaping of pain, the desire for death a way out of repression, fear, and anxiety, and analogous to her constant immersion in radio-sound and the spectacle of the viewscreens. Millie is not alone in her alienation, for when the 'handymen' come to pump her out and clean her blood, one admits '"We get these cases nine or ten a night"' (*F451* 29). The imposition of a conformity of desires and behaviour (signified by her uniformly brittle, artificial and paranoid friends) is intolerable to Millie, and eventually dehumanizes her entirely.

The difference between Millie and Clarisse is clearly shown in the image of the eyes, traditionally the symbol of life. The eye in Philip K. Dick's *Eye in the Sky*, which I will discuss in chapter 5, becomes a cosmic symbol of global systems of surveillance. Clarisse has 'eyes so dark and shining and alive' (*F451* 21), 'two miraculous pieces of amber that might capture and hold him intact' (22); Millie's eyes are 'all glass' (27), like 'two pale moonstones buried in a creek of clear water over which the life of the world ran, not touching them' (27). Both pairs of eyes reflect, but one set are as inert as crystal; the other are alive, and reflect (and contain) Montag. Millie is 'glass', sterile, rigid, dead, again

emphasising her abstraction and dehumanization. Clarisse is also associated with mirrors:

'He saw himself in her eyes, suspended in two shining drops of bright water, himself dark and tiny, in fine detail, the lines about his mouth, everything there' (*F451* 22). This is the double of the mirror in the firehouse, which only reflects Montag to himself, his black- ness, the 'fiery grin'. The reflection in Clarisse's eyes makes him recognise himself and the Other at the same time, brings him to consciousness of his fundamental disjunction from the world and others. Jacques Lacan, in his theory of the 'Mirror Stage', suggests that this stage of the growth of the individual psyche is the point at which the baby recognises, through seeing his or her image in the mirror, the basic disjunction between him/herself and the world as the Other (embodied in the figure of the Mother).[8] This leads to the fragmentation of the consciousness and the production of language. David Seed, using similar depth-models and the terminology of Freudian psychoanalysis, suggests: 'Montag internalizes Beatty's voice as a censorious or punitive force, the voice of the superego resisting taboo thoughts and actions'.[9] This is replicated on the level of narrative discourse, where the image of bodily rebellion (in the hands, as I have already noted) mirrors this fragmentation, and also reflects the fragmentation of society under the rubric of 'body/ body politic'. Montag perceives this rebellion as a 'poisoning' of his body, a takeover of the blood of his hands and arms by an alien presence. Montag's realisation that he has been 'poisoned' has a political significance, for he has internalized the ideology which rationalises oppression, and is only now coming to an understanding of his complicity. The invasion or replacement of the body, recurrent images in the dystopias of the 1950s, has a clear provenance in the Cold War narratives of alien invasion and bodily

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[8] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I', *Écrits*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 1-7.
[9] Seed, p. 234

takeover (such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*), a symbolic self-alienation and metaphor for the effects of systems of control.

The process of recognition in the mirror (as the beginning of selfhood) is to be enacted on a global scale at the end of *Fahrenheit 451*, where Granger describes his and the book-men's evangelistic mission: "'Come on now, we're going to go build a mirror factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them'" (*F451* 149). The world of fire is the world of homogeneity, of refracting surfaces where all is/are alike and must be alike: as Beatty explains, "'Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal'" (*F451* 64). Books are a locus of prohibition because they signify difference. It is Montag's realization of his own difference, of the possibility of otherness, of himself in the mirror of Clarisse's eyes, which estranges him from the firemen and the culture of repression, a realization which will be used to liberate the post-nuclear war world. The surface of the viewscreens, which dominates the life of Millie and her fellow housewives, is another mirror, but one which reflects a distorted and deceiving image.

2. 'Fire, Fire, Burn Books': Spectacle and History

The powerful opening paragraph of the text, a scene of Montag setting fire to piles of books, emphasises the centrality of language and linguistic play to both *Fahrenheit 451* and the dystopian form itself. Donald Watt, in his article 'Burning Bright', which emphasises the linguistic and allusive complexity of the novel, suggests that 'Bradbury is among the most poetic of science fiction writers', and emphasises the care with which the

symbolic structure of the text is prefigured on its very first page.[10] The colour symbolism

of black and white, the colours of fire (red, orange and yellow), and the spectacle of

conflagration, are vividly depicted: Montag 'strode in a swarm of fireflies', '[w]hile the

books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning'

(*F451* 19). The imagery, as Watt suggests, 'consists of its logical derivation from

Montag's perceptions, from his orientation and habits as a fireman'.[11] This play of

imagery also suggests the intoxication with spectacle which is the means of control in the

fireman-state, just as the fragmentation of discourses in the bottling-plant section of *Brave

New World* signifies both the endless circulation of language, and the deliberate

evacuation of meaning from it. *Fahrenheit 451* often has recourse to a highly symbolic

register, particularly so in the final pages of the book. The white of Clarisse McClellan

(opposed to the black of the Firemen) and her alignment with natural symbols emphasises

not only the oppositions which structure the text but also a discourse which itself opposes

the empty play of signifiers which makes up the spectacular system of the fireman-state.

The carefully constructed and 'literary' imagery and symbolism of *Fahrenheit 451* reveals

the extent to which the very textual fabric of the novel is intended to undermine similar

structures in the United States of the early 1950s. The text aligns itself with the books that

are being burnt by Montag and his colleagues, the artefacts of a humanist 'civilization',

where a 'poetic' complexity of language and meaning compromises the ideology of the

state, where, as in Vonnegut's phrase, the 'truths were few and simple'.

The diminution or destruction of language is a key dystopian trope, such as Newspeak in

Nineteen Eighty-Four, or *Player Piano*'s mechanized and ritualized language. Polysemy

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[10] Donald Watt, 'Burning Bright: *Fahrenheit 451* as Symbolic Dystopia' in *Ray Bradbury*, ed. by Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (Edinburgh: Paul Harris Publishing, 1980), pp. 195 - 213 (p. 196).
[11] Watt, p. 200.

opposes the totalizing dystopian state: to control language is to control reality. Beatty says

to the woman whose house he will burn, "'You've been locked up here for years with a

regular damned Tower of Babel'"(*F451* 48). This is a fascinating reference for Beatty to

make, as the Tower of Babel indicates a myth of an originary and unified language, one

which was destroyed in the tower's fall. A library is Babel, which for Beatty signifies a

linguistic confusion which undermines the ideology of the state. The Library of Babel is

then a curiously conflated double symbol, both of a plurality which opposes the

monologism of the state and of a single body of texts or works which provides the means

for intellectual resistance. Fire burns and controls books, but books, conversely, threaten

fire because they threaten the stability of the official discourse. Fire is monological,

totalizing, and attempts to reduce all else to ashes. Fire, in fact, tries to consume

everything and reduce it all to itself. Fire and the fireman-state are metaphors for the

growing conformity of American society in the 1950s, and the domination of television,

consumerism, and suburban lifestyles. All firemen look the same: 'Had he ever seen a

fireman that *didn't* have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue-steel shaved but

unshaved look?' (*F451* 44). They wear the same helmet, his 'symbolic helmet numbered

451' signifying the human as number, a central dystopian motif (such as in Zamiatin's *We*

or Roshwald's *Level 7*).

The very title of the text places books in danger: 451 degrees Fahrenheit is, as the epigraph

reads, the temperature at which book-paper burns. David Seed makes the point about the

text's implicit metafictionality: 'Bradbury implicates the reader from the very start in

illegality, in an oppositional relation to the regime'.[12] As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the

insistence upon books, the written word, as a locus of control, places the reader herself or

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[12] Seed, p. 238.

himself implicitly in opposition to the dictates of the Fireman-state. The title-frame of the

text also transforms books into their own existence as combustible material,

compromising any sense of books as items of opposition. Books are often the locus of

repression in dystopia (and utopia), from Plato's *Republic* through to *Brave New World*

and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, because they contain material antithetical to the ideology of the

dystopian state and also represent a history which the state attempts to control or erase in

order to justify its own origins and oppression. "'A book is a loaded gun in the house next

door'" (*F451* 65) is how Beatty describes texts, as a focus of difference and therefore (in

the ideology of the state) a focus of conflict. In *Fahrenheit 451* books are themselves the

products of a technological era preceding the fireman-state: the state is reliant upon the

destruction of books and the penetration of radio and television into the lives of its

denizens in order to maintain its control. Books compromise completely the world of

surfaces signified by the viewscreens, along with their role as intellectual material. All that

the screens contain, significantly, is 'vacuum'. Metaphorically, books represent the

'underground', the uncontrolled. Ironically, as I will show throughout this thesis, it is the

members of the power elites themselves who preserve the 'archive', the store of

knowledge of the culture: Mond, O'Brien, and Beatty, complicit with the system's power

structures yet also placed outside of them by their access to prohibited material,

paradoxically assert the value of their libraries and archives both by censorship and by

preservation.

Books, in their role as provider of alternative paths, of oppositional ideas, provide the

stimulus for Montag's rebellion; however, how much Montag understands of them is

moot. In his intellectual duel with Beatty, Montag is nonplussed by the welter of

contradictory and confusing quotations, and even the ex-professor Faber's electronic

presence cannot save him from muddle. For Montag, the mere possession of books is of more symbolic importance than reading or understanding them (as a symbol of his alienation), and he is more than willing to use a book to frame a former colleague (to utilise their signification of banned article). Like Winston Smith's diary, the text is invested with significance as an object, because the systems of control attempt to erase or remove them. Montag's rash exposure of the books to Millie and then her uncomprehending friends precipitates his expulsion from society -- which, paradoxically, then saves his life. In a text where books are assigned the greatest value as possible opposition to the repressive state, the protagonist is largely unaware of the full significance of what he reads, and the most important thing is their survival as memory.

At the end of the text, books become people, are transformed through memory from inert object into living being. The processes of dehumanization, of abstraction and reification, are reversed. Texts placed under erasure create problems of transmission, and are inherently unstable as an oppositional discourse to that of the dystopian state. The text ceases to have the ontological stability and materiality of the official discourse (for instance, the Firemen have their rulebooks which contain a history, albeit distorted). However, the process of memorizing books signifies that their materiality is in fact secondary: it is what they contain which is important. This links with the transcendental and spiritual mission of the group of book-men at the end of *Fahrenheit 451*. In the Christian symbolism which shapes the last pages of the novel, what the men want to save is not books, but souls.

However, when books, documents, the materiality of history are erased and utterly mutable, a recourse to memory is a paradoxical solution. It too may be manipulated,

changed, or erased. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, memory becomes another field into which power penetrates. Memory becomes invalidated as any form of opposition because memory as a signifying system itself ceases to have any relation to a physical referent. This is illustrated in *The Martian Chronicles*, where Bradbury complicates the workings of memory when he has one Earth expedition land, only for the astronauts to encounter false manifestations of their own past and memories. Memory there can deceive as well as liberate, representing desire rather than a stable past. Its instability precludes any existence as opposition to the totality of meaning of official discourses. Herbert Marcuse, who was writing in a contemporaneous historical moment, in *Eros and Civilization* describes the processes of remembrance and forgetting:

> This ability to forget -- itself the result of a long and terrible education by experience -- is an indispensable requirement of mental and physical hygiene without which civilized life would be unbearable; but it is also the mental faculty which sustains submissiveness and renunciation. To forget is to forgive what should not be forgiven if justice and freedom are to prevail.[13]

In *Fahrenheit 451* justice and freedom quite clearly do not prevail, and forgetting is a key principle of control in the text. Millie forgets her suicide attempt (either consciously or unconsciously suppresses the memory) and therefore can never come to consciousness as Montag does. An act of remembrance -- where he and Millie first met, something she cannot recall -- is Montag's last thought of his wife as the Bomb explodes, an epitaph and a new beginning.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, memories are not systematically erased, but the burning of books creates a void of history which fire (as spectacle) can only partially mask. Here again we

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[13] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1956) (London: Ark, 1987), p. 232. Marcuse writes in his Preface that the book was derived from a series of lectures given in 1950 and 1951 (p. xii), and as a part of the Frankfurt School of theorists who fled Nazi Germany to the United States, his inquiries into 'civilization' and its postwar discontents have a particular resonance. I will discuss Marcuse more fully in chapter 3.

find the emptiness I noted above. In fact, history has been incorporated into official

discourse: Montag at first believes that '"Houses have always been fireproof" (*F451* 23),

and that Firemen have always set fires, not put them out. The reference to Benjamin

Franklin as the First Fireman (in the sense of setting fires) indicates how the stability of

history is undermined by its incorporation into the ideology of the state. Beatty conducts a

'history lesson' with Montag in an attempt to reincorporate him into official ideology. His

explanation of the rise of the dystopian state runs thus:

> 'It didn't come from the government down. There was no dictum, no declaration,
> no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority
> pressure carried the trick, thank God' (*F451* 64).

In dystopian texts, as I wrote in my Introduction, there is a temporal gap (analogous to the

spatial gap in the Utopian text) between the contemporary world and that of the dystopia,

which may be left unexplained or, as here, described. The relationship of the dystopian

state to history, and its manipulation of that history, is exposed by this explication. Control

also extends to the processes of history itself, a history contained in *Fahrenheit 451* in

fragile and mutable books. The relationship of the state to history is a complex one: Beatty

gives Montag a history 'lesson' which exposes the propaganda of the state, but which is

paradoxically meant to convince Montag of the rightness of the system of control and of

disinformation. As in other utopian and dystopian texts, derived from Dostoevsky's Grand

Inquisitor, Beatty is the Expositor, the figure in a position of authority who is at once

inside and outside the system of control, in that he (it is usually male) has information

unavailable to the ordinary citizen -- and rebellious protagonist -- and is therefore able to

understand the processes of control. Yet, this knowledge is reincorporated into the system

of oppression of the state, and legitimises it. John Huntington argues that:

Firechief Beatty's defence of the bookless future is essentially that of the Grand Inquisitor, with the important change that the mass's fear of freedom is seen to be a historical phenomenon, a failure of education.[14]

This Expositor figure stands in relation yet contradiction to the protagonist, as a Father (or sometimes, as here, a Confessor) figure, as a confidant, or as a colleague; as someone who becomes aware of the protagonist's state of alienation and therefore has power over him; and also a figure for whom the attaining of knowledge/ information does not lead to estrangement, but conversely, to a position of power in the hierarchy.

Beatty's interview with Montag is motivated by the latter's feigned sickness (or perhaps moral alienation) and absence from work. In both *Fahrenheit 451*, and in the earlier short story 'The Pedestrian', alienation is interpreted by the representatives of the state as illness. The automated police car (rather than police men) takes Leonard Mead of 'The Pedestrian' to 'The Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies';[15] Clarisse McClellan describes her state of estrangement as insanity; and Chief Fireman Beatty adopts a medical 'bedside manner' in his explication of the ideology of the fireman-state to Montag. This typing of opposition as illness invalidates it and reappropriates it, undermines its stability and the position of the protagonist. The totality of discourse of the state is re-established by reincorporating that which is outside of it (oppositional discourse) to that which is a subjugated part of it (deviant discourse). Transforming alienation into deviancy voids it of power and of legitimacy, by bringing to bear all the pejorative connotations of the term 'illness'. This medical and legal labelling of opposition to the dystopian state allows it to be contained within the discourse of the dystopian

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[14] John Huntington, 'Utopian and Anti-Utopian Logic: H.G. Wells and his successors', *Science Fiction Studies*, 9:2 (27), (July 1982), 122-146 (p. 136).

[15] Ray Bradbury, 'The Pedestrian', *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953) (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), pp. 5-30 (p. 30).

apparatus of control; this disease may then be 'treated' (as is Winston Smith) or excised (as are Bernard Marx and Helmholtz).

Beatty expounds an ideology whereby the play of empty social discourse, and the controlled production/ consumption of the media and viewscreens, replaces the role of the text. Books deny the circulation of production and consumption and the divorcing of books from their materiality, their status as objects of consumption, can be read as an escape of the production/ consumption cycle. Faber, in his explanation which qualifies Beatty's, emphasises the passivity of people like himself when confronted with this domination of mass communications, though he has, perhaps, been forced into this position by the repression of the firemen, and has internalized the official discourse. Faber is not a consumer, but is, as his name suggests, a maker, a builder of electronic devices. The only television in his home is one he can hide (significantly) behind a painting.

Signs of consumerism are actually scant in *Fahrenheit 451*: Millie asks Montag for a fourth 'parlor wall', and there are some domestic gadgets: 'Toast popped out of the silver toaster, was seized by a spidery metal hand that drenched it with melted butter' (*F451* 31). One notes again the replacement of human hands with mechanical hands, as in *Player Piano*. However, consumption seems to be largely of images, of spectacle, through television. In a system where mass culture creates the needs of consumers, there is a circularity of desire and gratification which cannot be explained by Beatty's model. To explain the oppression of the Firemen as simply the expression of popular will neglects the internalization of control: when needs are created, and commodities fulfil those needs, the origin of desire is obscure. Another Bradbury short story, 'There Will Come Soft Rains', imagines an entirely mechanized house continuing its cycle of domestic maintenance even

after nuclear war. Consumption becomes entirely divorced from human needs, as it does

in Pohl's 'The Midas Plague', where humans employ robots to consume the mechanized

overproduction of commodities (see chapter 7). In 'There Will Come Soft Rains', the

human is signified only by a trace, the shadows of the family burned into the wall after a

nuclear blast, 'five spots of paint -- the man, the woman, the children, the ball' all that

remains.[16] The story narrates the 'death' of the house by fire, but here the domestic fire

repeats the apocalyptic fire which killed its occupants, and the house (as society) is again

burned down and collapses in on itself. The suburban/ domestic and the apocalyptic,

signal features of *Fahrenheit 451*, are here conflated to emphasise the pathos of the

family's (and thereby the whole society's) deaths.

Consumerist technology is the focus of another Bradbury short story, 'The Murderer',

(1953), in which the dystopian protagonist rebels against the tyranny of popular music,

transmitted through ubiquitous miniature radios. In another link to *Fahrenheit 451*, this

ubiquity, of songs and jingles, results in the degrading of language, signified by the

repeating litany 'telephone, wrist radio, intercom' at the end of the story. In an interview

with a psychiatrist (alienation as illness again), the self-named 'Murderer' confesses his

hatred of machines, largely communications devices: "'[t]he first victim, or one of the

first, was my telephone. Murder most foul [....] After that I shot the television set!'".[17] His

act is self-consciously revolutionary: "'I got world-wide coverage'" he boasts, ironically

using the penetration into the lives of the citizenry of the very mass communications he

hates.[18] Like many another dystopian rebel, he is spatially constrained by the dystopian

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[16] Ray Bradbury, 'There Will Come Soft Rains', *The Martian Chronicles* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1958), pp. 205-211 (p. 206).
[17] Ray Bradbury, 'The Murderer', *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953) (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), pp. 91-100 (p. 93).
[18] Bradbury, 'The Murderer', p. 99.

state (in another representation of his alienation) to 'protect' the population, held in a

private cell with cotton wool in his ears. Both escape from the dystopian world and

rebellion against it are offered by this short text, but Brock the Murderer, like Montag the

Fireman, can only rest after he has acted.

The irreality of the televisual spectacle implies a fabricated 'real' which obscures the 'true'

operation of the world of the Firemen. The books which Montag comes to hoard and

which are the focus of censorship exhibit no divorce of spectacle from 'real', language

from 'meaning', sign from referent. All protagonists of dystopias search for the interstitial

or utopic zone of the text: in *Fahrenheit 451* the authentic is found within the pages of

books. As David Seed has suggested, Jean Baudrillard's conception of 'orders of

simulation' maps the division of sign from referent onto a theory of mediated reality and

can be applied to *Fahrenheit 451*.[19] Simulacra are cultural objects 'without origin or

reality', which become detached from the real, which form their own order of

'simulation', and are subject to endless reproduction. Simulacra then form an ideological

façade, behind which the operations of power continue. Bradbury's short story 'Referent'

also suggests that human reality is a falsification, a fabrication. In it, an alien visitor falls

to a dystopian Earth in which a malcontent schoolboy longs for escape. This alien is

transformed by the 'labelling' consciousness of the boy into varying shapes, firstly the

Sandman, symbol of the irreal worlds of sleep and dream. He pleads: '"Atoms are

malleable. You've accepted certain labels on earth, called Man, Woman, Child, Head,

Hands, Fingers, Feet. You've changed from anything into something"'.[20]

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[19] Seed, p. 231.

[20] Ray Bradbury, 'Referent', *The Day It Rained Forever* (1959) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 69-77 (p. 71).

The alien is in fact pure Referent, not a label, a creature of utterly malleable materiality. The 'real' is then a human projection, created by '[m]atrixes. Moulds. Thought habits. Patterns';[21] a simple explanation, that the world is what we make it, belies the complexity of this conception. The 'real' is a falsification, a projection, a 'simulation'; yet, like the Referent, it is moulded into reality by the controlling consciousness of the human spectator. The consumer then is in some a sense also a producer of reality. Language mediates the 'real', just as the telescreens do, yet in *Fahrenheit 451*, it is a naturalized mediation placed in opposition to the control of the televisual spectacle.

The circulation and consumption of signifiers separated from signified and referent is the way in which the official ideology masks its own operation: Millie's 'dialogue' with the parlour walls is utterly vacuous, signifying only her inclusion within a social and televisual ritual. Millie is a consumer of surfaces and a reproducer of the ideology of the state, which replaces actual social intercourse (as between Montag and Clarisse) with a wholly fabricated televisual experience, which explicitly deceives the viewer into believing that they are part of the program. Ideas, questions, thought, are negated in the fake interaction between spectacle and spectator. Millie can recognise no Other, but only herself (and her mirror-image friends). She is sealed off from interaction by her seashells and by her symbolic desire for the 'fourth wall' of the viewscreen. By constructing the viewscreen as 'reality', books are intended by the Firemen to be 'unreal'. An effect of this structuring is that 'reality' (i.e. the quotidian) also becomes 'unreal' compared to the spectacles on the parlour walls. This leads, one assumes, to the death-games played by the children, to Millie's attempted suicide, and to mass alienation and further pacification through the viewscreens.

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[21] Bradbury, 'Referent', p. 75.

The spectacle does provide a sense of grouping, one notes, in the scene between Millie and her friends: they communicate through the medium of the viewscreen, in that all their speech refers to it, and in fact reduces to a circulation of mutually supporting and reinforcing in-group identification tags (and nothing else). When Montag turns off the viewscreen to talk to them, about books, it transpires, they look at him 'with unconcealed irritation and then dislike' (*F451* 93). This is because he denies them their pleasure, but also because he has exposed himself as an alien presence, an outsider to the group and group desires. That television is not by definition malign is argued within the text by Faber, the former literature professor who has taken to electronics:

> "It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books. The same things *could* be in the 'parlor families' today. The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisors, but are not" (*F451* 83).

Technology then can be *detourned*, in the meaning of the Situationists: it can be appropriated from the controlling apparatus and used against it. Faber uses a 'seashell' in-the-ear radio to try to help Montag in his confrontation with Beatty; similarly, Montag uses the flame-thrower to kill Beatty and escape from the city. Such acts, however, must always be ambiguous within dystopian texts, always signifying the control which is the technology's originary use.

The state attempts to 'burn down' history, just as it burns down houses, in part in order to replace it with a forgery voided of conflicting (i.e. oppositional) significance. Faber argues that "'the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now'" (*F451* 87). For those such as Millie, an eternally circulating and refracting Present completely masks this erasure, a Present codified and

commodified in the endless proliferation of images of the viewscreens, and a culture literally burning (up) with its consumption of surfaces. Spectacle is a motif common to most of the dystopian texts in this thesis, and is linked to a fabricated reality and false ideology disseminated by the mass media. The 1950s was the first decade in the United States in which television played a dominant cultural role; in the dystopias of the period, this is imagined as a means of social and political control.

Millie is described as standing in front of the viewscreen: 'Behind her the walls of the room were flooded with green and yellow and orange fireworks sizzling and bursting to some music' (*F451* 65). The viewscreens show representations of fire that are designed to distract, as are the spectacles of mutilation of the White Clowns. Montag is appalled by 'three White Clowns [who] chopped off each other's limbs to the accompaniment of immense incoming tides of laughter' (*F451* 92). This surface, this lack of content, both replicates and masks a void at the core of official discourse. The process of consumption, aligned with the viewscreens and the processes of social interaction, is spectacle: 'So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your daredevils, jet cars, motorcycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex' (*F451* 67). This is bread and circuses, as in the gladiatorial 'Field Days' of Pohl and Kornbluth's *Gladiator-at-Law*. The spectacle of death is one which keeps the citizens pacified (or perhaps narcotized).

At the end of the narrative Montag is chased through the city while the population watch him on their parlour walls. Montag's struggle for escape and life becomes a spectacle, an entertainment: '*So they must have their game out, thought Montag. The circus must go on, even with war beginning within the hour*' (*F451* 124). This short passage makes explicit

the ideological functioning of spectacle within the state, masking the immanence of death. Even in his rebellion, he has in one way been reincorporated into the structures of the state. His escape is covered up and his capture and execution faked to satisfy the logic of the state ideology, the desires of the viewers, and the self-containment of the system. The irony of Montag watching his own death being staged emphasises his own symbolic rebirth. Montag's flight to the river is made more perilous by the introduction of the tv-viewers as participants in the rite of inclusion and exclusion, and his alienation is doubled by the fact that he is not one of those who are watching his escape. As with Millie and her friends, the viewscreen is a boundary marker for group identification: those who do not participate in the televisual culture are deviant. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the telescreens are two-way: those who spectate are also watched. Here, the direction of power is less obvious, but clearly, the consumers of the spectacle are being controlled by those who produce it.

The spectacle of death masks the repressive operation of the state, but paradoxically, it also signifies the immanence of war, of nuclear apocalypse, the signs of which are only fleetingly glimpsed in the text. Jet bombers scream overhead, a constant reminder of war's imminence and immanence. The whole culture is one based on war, economic power and prosperity being explicitly linked to military might: 'We've started and won two atomic wars since 1960! [...] I've heard rumours; the world is starving and we're well fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we are hated so much?' (*F451* 74). In fact, work is almost entirely absent from *Fahrenheit 451*; its world is suburban and middle class. At the end of the text, with the city destroyed, the dissident Granger declares:

> 'some day we'll remember so much that we'll build the biggest goddam steamshovel in history and dig the biggest grave of all time and shove war in and cover it up' (*F451* 149).

The Fireman-state is a warfare state, one in which, like that of the United States in the immediate postwar years, a 'military-industrial' complex tooled for world war then Cold War generates an economy of mass consumption and a society of conforming consumers. In contrast to Vonnegut's *Player Piano* or the dystopian worlds of Frederik Pohl, *Fahrenheit 451* is a world in which consumption occurs apparently without production, and consumption is largely based not on commodities but on spectacle, the consumption of the ephemeral. The world of the city, dominated by the viewscreens, is an unreal world, behind which nature lies. Montag must break through 'the seven veils of unreality' (*F451* 130) when he crosses the river into the wilderness: 'He felt as if he had left a stage behind and many actors[....] He was moving from an unreality that was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new' (*F451* 129). There is a paradoxical circulation between the real and the irreal, where one is overlaid upon the other. This is analogous to the mediated reality of the viewscreens, and which is also found in the dystopias of Philip Dick. This (ir)reality corresponds to a fabricated ideology which hides the true state of the world from its citizens. This true state is found in nature, and in an idealized and mythicised childhood.

3. 'A vast stage without scenery': Utopic Space and the Spatialization of Estrangement

In the dystopias of the 1950s, the protagonist's alienation is married to a search for the authentic which lies behind the ideological 'real' of official discourse, and this is often figured as spatial exclusion. *Fahrenheit 451* shows Montag's alienation both from internal, domestic space of the Firemen, and his flight to the natural world beyond the city's limits. Early in the text, when Montag first leaves the fire station, he walks home, becoming a pedestrian. This aligns him with Leonard Mead of Bradbury's short story 'The

Pedestrian', as does 'The Fireman', an early version of *Fahrenheit 451*, in which Montag

is not 'Guy' Montag but 'Leonard' Montag. In 'The Pedestrian', a lone man is arrested

because his desire to walk in the night air is marked as deviant by a blankly conforming

society. Some of the details of the society and culture clearly place this short text in the

same dystopian world as *Fahrenheit 451*: there is the distinction between inside and

outside as a spatialization of the protagonist's estrangement from society; the soporific

nature of the televisual viewscreens; the destructive nature of the automobile, and the

control of public space; binary oppositions between heat and cold, urban and natural, the

artificial light of the tv and moonlight; emptiness as key signifier of the society; and the

immanence of death. In both texts, the notion of walking outside spatializes the key

dystopian theme of the protagonist's growing estrangement from his culture. In one sense,

then, Montag is already outside the system of control. In 'The Fireman', Montag walks the

city, feeling like "'the only pedestrian in the entire city!'", and he too is stopped:

> So he walked alone, aware of his loneliness, until the police car pulled up and
> flashed its cold white light upon him.
> 'What're you doing?' shouted a voice.
> 'I'm out for a walk'.
> 'He says he's out for a walk'.
> The laughter, the cold, precise turning over of his identity cards, the careful noting
> of his address.[22]

The emptiness of life is spatialized in a deserted cityscape, a zone of isolation, control, and

death. The world of the pedestrian is an empty one, making the procedures of pursuit and

elimination of the outsider much easier for the repressive state. Later, on making his

escape from the world of the firemen, Montag has to run across the highway, transformed

into a killing zone. The 'empty boulevard' is a place where children in stolen cars attempt

to run down stray walkers or destroy each other. This emptiness signifies a psychological

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[22] Ray Bradbury, 'The Fireman', *Galaxy Science Fiction* (February 1951), 4 - 61 (p. 11).

lack of affect, a lack of human empathy which becomes mapped onto the alienating urban space of the city. The city becomes a zone of death, replicating the emptiness within.

Urban space is also identified as automotive space. The city is like a stage set, a 'vast stage without scenery' (*F451* 115), its emptiness furthering the Firemen's imperatives of control, surveillance, and if necessary, pursuit. Montag is almost killed on the highway; Clarisse's reported death is through a hit-and-run incident. For Bradbury, the motor car is a symbol of the invasive and colonising pressures of twentieth century capitalism, a signification also common to American literature of the 1920s and 30s. The car and the highway appear in Bradbury's texts as recurrent motifs of an American twentieth century culture become repressive, imperialist, or even homicidal. In his 1950 short story 'The Highway', a Central American peasant farmer has a large highway at the bottom end of one of his fields: when fleeing American tourists explain to him that the 'end of the world' has come, he responds, '"What do they mean, the world?"'.[23] The motor car thus becomes a symbol of American cultural arrogance and solipsism, as it also does in 'And the Rock Cried Out' (1953), where an American husband and wife are stranded in their automobile in a hostile (and eventually murderously revengeful) South American country after the United States collapses. The motor car in *Fahrenheit 451* and 'The Pedestrian' are technologies antithetical to human life, symbols of a society heading towards ruin. The society of *Fahrenheit 451*, like the car on the highway, is accelerating towards destruction, deliberately: Beatty declares '"Speed up the film"' as a method of control (*F451* 62). In an echo of the slogan from Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, 'dodge the steamroller', Faber says '"Our civilization is flinging itself to pieces. Stand back from the centrifuge"' (*F451* 87).

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[23] Ray Bradbury, 'The Highway' (1950), reprinted in *The Illustrated Man* (1951) (London: Corgi, 1963), pp. 39-42 (p. 42).

Standing back is a political act of opting out. Both Martine of *Limbo* and Montag find that

such an option becomes unavailable. Montag cannot opt out, staying within the system,

but must physically escape.

Montag is chased through the city while pursued by the Mechanical Hound towards the

end of the narrative, which again spatializes his alienation. The Mechanical Hound,

another mechanized and malign transfiguration of the natural, is an artificial tracking

device which corners then dispatches its quarry with a lethal injection. When Montag

leaves the suburban environment and crosses the river into a natural wilderness, he cannot

be followed, even by the Hound, for the pastoral is a space outside the control and

spectacular systems of the firemen. The natural world, like the Green world of Zamiatin's

We or the deer of Vonnegut's 'Deer in the Works', clearly (as exemplified through

Montag's escape) signifies an interstitial space in the state's structures of repression, even

though the space outside the city is explicitly allowed by the state because it poses no

threat. The group of men who live there, the book-preservers, exist, like books, in the

interstices or margins of the system.

Fahrenheit 451, like Montag himself, crosses into more symbolic territory when leaving

the cityscape, coming into a territory immanent with fantasy, memory and childhood.

Childhood becomes a kind of utopian zone in the text, a zone of (temporary) escape. The

only child in the text is Clarisse: the dystopian state is signified by the absence of children

(the discourse of Millie and her friends, or the unseen children who attempt to run down

Montag on the highway). "'Children are ruinous'" says Mrs. Phelps (*F451* 94). The

rejection (or perhaps erasure) of childhood by the fireman-state is an erasure of its own

future. Clarisse's exposure of the numbers of her friends who have died in auto-wrecks or

gun battles signifies how childhood is itself imploding. An idealized childhood is linked

strongly with the past and with the pastoral as the ideal states of *Fahrenheit 451*, and

freedom is explicitly associated with the familial. Childhood (as memory) is also linked

with 'reality', with a zone of unmediated experience placed in opposition to the repression

of city life. Memory is therefore signified as more 'real' than the life of the city: like

childhood, more meaningful in its experience and its associations.

The 'light' of childhood (opposed to the fire of control) is 'rediscovered' in Montag. The

things that Clarisse signifies are internalized, and mapped onto Montag's own memory:

> One time, as a child, in a power failure, his mother had found and lit a last candle
> and there had been a brief hour of rediscovery, of such illumination that space lost
> its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them, and they, mother and son,
> alone, transformed, hoping that the power might not come on again too soon [...]
> (*F451* 22).

To remember is to become estranged, to recapture that which has been erased and

therefore to place oneself in opposition to the culture of repression. To remember is to

recapture childhood, and to undermine the verities and malignities of the culture. Granger,

at the end of the text, emphasises this aspect of remembering:

> 'We're going to meet a lot of lonely people in the next week and the next month
> and the next year. And when they ask us what we're doing, you can say, We're
> remembering (*F451* 149).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, censored information drops into 'memory holes', and it is

Winston Smith's wilful and deliberate act of remembering which signals his resistance.

Those, like Millie, who are completely dominated and dehumanized by the operations of

control, find it hard to remember anything. An act of memory signifies a confrontation of

the repression and invasive pressures of the dystopian state, and an escape to a space

outside the system of control.

Montag's crossing of the river is a symbolic cleansing and baptism. As Montag becomes

progressively more alienated from the state, he has been shedding the significations of fire

and begins to accrue those of water. In a scene where he admits his doubts to Millie, he

says:

> "No, not water; fire. You ever seen a burned house? It smolders for days. Well,
> this fire'll last me the rest of my life. God! I've been trying to put it out, in my
> mind, all night. I'm crazy with trying" (*F451* 59).

Montag refers to his own alienation as drowning: "'It was only the other night everything

was fine and the next thing I know I'm drowning'" (121). Montag becomes self-alienated,

so far as to become someone else. He has internalized Clarrisse's attributes, and in putting

on Faber's clothes to avoid the Mechanical Hound, sheds his old identity. Earlier, Montag

had fantasised that

> he would not be Montag any more, this old man told him, assured him, promised
> him. He would be Montag-plus-Faber, fire plus water, and then, one day, after
> everything had mixed and simmered and worked away in silence, there would be
> neither fire nor water, but wine (*F451* 100).

The transmutation of water into wine has obvious Christian symbolic importance. While

Bradbury confesses no particular religious conviction, it is clear that in the final section of

Fahrenheit 451 Christian symbolism is used to characterize both Montag's trajectory and

the apocalyptic end of the city. Montag is baptised, and reborn. David Punter names

Montag "'Saint Monday'", and indeed, the group of men living in the wilderness seem

like a group of itinerant priests, like those in Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*,

ambiguously preserving knowledge for succeeding generations.[24]

Montag passes from one community of men to another, from Firemen to book-preservers,

each placed in opposition to the other. He brings to the group two Biblical texts, just as he

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[24] David Punter, *The Hidden Script: Writing and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 100.

had shown the Bible to Faber as a token of his alienation. He brings Ecclesiastes, and Revelation, where in 'The Fireman' he had brought Job. Once again in the dystopian text, the apocalyptic is found at the point at which the totalized state is disintegrating. The opposition between *warming* fire and *burning* fire at the beginning of the novel is complicated by apocalyptic fire, that which sweeps away the old and brings about the new dispensation, a fire which symbolizes the purging of corruption in Christian iconography. Apocalyptic fire here, as in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* or Roshwald's *Level 7*, symbolises nuclear war, the onset of which destroys the society that produced it.

Granger, the Farmer (rather than fisher of men), reappropriates the mythical symbol of the Phoenix as the sign of the Human: 'He must have been first cousin to Man. But every time he got himself burnt up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again. And it looks like we're doing the same thing, over and over' (*F451* 148). The Phoenix becomes a symbol of hope, through rebirth, yet at the same time something to be transcended, for Granger goes on to add: '"but we've got one damn thing the Phoenix never had. We know the damn silly thing we just did"' (148). The Phoenix is destined to repeat the process of destruction and rebirth, but in memory, there is hope for an alternative. The Phoenix is a symbol of rebirth and the sign of cyclical history, everything humanity must leave behind. Ironically, this very rebirth is the process by which transcendence is enacted, for without it, nothing would survive.

The ending of *Fahrenheit 451*, like most of the other dystopias in this thesis, remains open. There is a balance, a moment of possibility, in which the narrative ends. Where Paul Proteus and the rebels of *Player Piano* walk with hands aloft, Montag and the group of bookmen walk towards the city and what remains of 'civilization', largely what they carry

inside them. John Huntington criticises the use of books as symbols of freedom in

Fahrenheit 451:

> by becoming a general symbol of the past now denied, the book becomes a symbol
> for all old values, but this symbolism brings up difficulties. First, whatever good
> books have propagated, they have also preached the evils that have oppressed the
> world. The very technology that the novel finds threatening would be impossible
> without books. Second, books can readily inspire a repressed and tradition-bound
> pedantry which, while anti-technological, is also against nature.[25]

The conflation of books with nature, the symbols of the authentic life in *Fahrenheit 451*,

opposes the repressive and malign state of the Firemen, but exposes Bradbury's own

ideological reliance on the high-cultural artefacts of 'Western Civilization'. These are

themselves not 'natural' in terms of the values and life they describe, but are ideologically

produced and producing. The utopian zone in the dystopian text -- here, nature and

literature -- is the space in which the author's own ideological premises are revealed.

This unresolved contradiction corresponds with the lack of closure in the dystopian text. In

the retention and repeating of the venerated texts, humanity may again repeat its mistakes,

yet only the books contain the wisdom which allow humanity to enter the New World.

Fahrenheit 451 is itself a book, itself under threat from the possible world of the Firemen,

and also, one presumes, a text which may contain the wisdom which will allow Granger,

Montag and the book-men to walk (not drive) into a better future. The end of *Fahrenheit

451* then offers the possibility of change, and the institution of another New World after

the obliteration of the old, even if the text ends between the apocalyptic moment and the

new dispensation. The destruction and falsification of the past is often the mode of the

dystopian state's construction, the apocalypticism which runs alongside the Utopian

form's history transformed into a moment of repression or enforced forgetting. Here, the

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[25] Huntington, p. 138.

apocalyptic moment is in the service of remembrance, symbolized in the endurance of the

cultural archive. In Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, which I analyze in chapter 3, the survival of

texts from the past is an entirely ambiguous heritage.

CHAPTER 3:

CYBERNETIC SYSTEMS OF DOMINATION, NUCLEAR WAR AND THE

MECHANIZATION OF THE BODY: BERNARD WOLFE'S *LIMBO*

Introduction

Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo* was published in 1952, the same year as *Player Piano*. Neglected

for years, this dense and allusive dystopian text has recently come under critical scrutiny

for its anticipation of many of the concerns of cyberpunk SF and for its prescient

imagination of cybernetics, rather than mechanization, as a system of domination. Wolfe's

career was eccentric in the extreme: a Yale psychology graduate, he later claimed to have

been on Trotsky's staff in the latter's exile in Mexico, and was the author of several

novels, in varying genres. *Limbo* exuberantly displays its erudition and self-consciousness

in typographic effects, illustrations, intertextuality, and a reigning textual system of

punning which attempts to elude a fixity of meaning and interpretation. Wolfe conflates

both the tradition of anti-realist writing and the utopia/ dystopian paradigm to remarkable

effect. Writing on the form of Utopia and SF, Darko Suvin argues:

> Utopia [...] endeavours to illuminate men's relationships to other men and to their
> surroundings by the basic device of a radically different location for the postulated
> novel human relations of its fable; and I have proposed to call literary genres
> which have such a different formal framework 'estranged'.[1]

The form of utopian fiction, therefore, spatializes this estrangement. *Limbo* is not a utopia,

but clearly signifies its intertextual relationship to the utopian and dystopian tradition. The

text employs both the utopian form and metafictional devices to create estrangement

effects. Patricia Waugh writes, in *Metafiction*:

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[1] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 53.

it can be argued that metafictional novels simultaneously strengthen each reader's sense of an everyday real world while problematizing his or her sense of reality from a conceptual or philosophical point of view.[2]

Taking Suvin and Waugh together, it would seem that the utopian (and dystopian) form and the metafictional text operate in the same way. The estrangement effects sensitize the reader to the very fact of the text's textuality, of the fictionality of the world depicted therein, and expose the formal structures of text and language. *Limbo* is a metafictional dystopia: part of its satiric intent is to foreground -- by displaying its own construction -- the ways in which all worlds are constructed (including the 'real' of the reader). *Limbo*'s textual self-consciousness is also revealed in its generic inclusiveness: David Seed offers dystopia, journal, espionage narrative and scientific experiment as narrative discourses,[3] and David Galloway, in one of the few critical analyses of *Limbo*, writes 'Wolfe had attempted an anti-dystopian novel with the melodrama, the erudite scientific trappings and philosophical jargon carried to their absurd extremes'.[4] Absurdity is in fact a principle of laughter and escape in the text, self-contradiction and linguistic slippage its mode of utopianism.

Limbo is clearly playing games with the form of utopian fiction, and foregrounding its intertextual construction. *Limbo* sets up dystopian binary structures and attempts to complicate, and finally invalidate the binarism by providing a third term. The 'Author' writes in his 'Notes and Warnings' that the 'novel is informed by the 'possibilities of a non-Aristotelian society' (*Limbo* 410), a reference to Count Korzybski's General

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[2] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York & London: Methuen, 1984), p. 33.

[3] David Seed, 'Deconstructing the Body Politic in Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 24:2 (July 1997), 267-288 (p. 267).

[4] David Galloway, 'An Erratic Geography: The Novels of Bernard Wolfe', *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, VII (Spring 1964), 75-86 (p. 78).

Semantics, which influenced William Burroughs and A. E. van Vogt. This 'non-

Aristotelian society' is one where the logic of A, or not-A, is invalid. Louis Marin, in

Utopics: Spatial Play, argues that:

> utopic discourse occupies the empty -- historically empty -- place of the resolution of a contradiction. It is the "zero degree" of the dialectical synthesis of contraries. It edges its way in between the contraries and thus is the discursive expression of the *neutral* (defined as "neither one, nor the other of the contraries").[5]

Limbo's attempt to find this 'non-Aristotelian' logic and society, a way out of the

binaristic systems of 'either/or' which Wolfe suggests underpin the structures of Cold War

conflict, is its utopic dynamic.

1. The Island: Dystopian into Colonial Trajectory

Limbo has, at its centre, a protagonist called Dr Martine, a former military surgeon who

fled from a computerised war to the island of a people known as the Mandunji. The text

narrates his disillusion with the island and a return to his native United States, a post-

apocalyptic dystopian society whose reaction to the horrors of war, and Martine's own war

diary, result in a literalization of the metaphor of the 'arms race', and a system of

amputation to symbolize pacifism (as passivity). Martine's journey is a journey home, a

journey to his past (in a search for healing), and an inversion of the usual Utopian

Stranger/ Guide motif. The society that Martine attempts to create (by surgery) on the

island is an explicitly utopian one in design. It is a society configured on the erasure of

war, an erasure brought about by the surgical excising of aggression. Martine has his own

troubled reasons for attempting this construction, having seen the effects of mass warfare

in his role of military surgeon, and he attempts to excise the cause of this destruction at its

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[5] Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. by Robert A. Volrath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press; London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. xiii.

root, in the minds (and brains) of humanity. It is an act of control, an act of contrition, and

an act of vengeance. The text begins not in the world of the 'real', from which a non-

Utopian traveller narrates a psycho-spatial journey to the Utopian state; the text begins in

the Utopia of Martine, a constructed world of surgically enforced passivity. The text

constructs the arc of Martine's estrangement from his own Utopia, and his journey away

from both the island and the principles which informed his actions. This is a familiar trope

in the postwar dystopian novel, as I showed in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*: the

psychological estrangement of the protagonist is mapped onto a spatial axis. When

Martine leaves the island to go to the Inland Strip, (from sea to mountain, from open to

closed), this is another -- internal -- voyage of discovery, an inversion of the journey into

unmapped regions.

The world of *Limbo* remains divided into two competing power blocs even after the

nuclear war which precipitated Martine's flight. The island is in a remote part of the Indian

Ocean, cut off from all outside influence. At the beginning of *Limbo*, the 'expedition' to

the island of the Mandunji of Theo and the cyborg 'Immobs', who are the representatives

of a post-apocalyptic United States, is in fact an attempt to mine the vital, and rare,

element colombium -- a pun on the archetypal 'discoverer', Columbus, perhaps -- under

the guise of a peaceful training cruise. It signifies the intrusion of the economic structures

of exploitation and commodification into the Mandunji island: what was 'earth' (use

value) becomes 'colombium' (exchange value, commodity). In many of the dystopian

texts of the period, particularly those of Frederik Pohl, commodification and consumerism

are figured in terms of colonial expansion. The consumers/ citizens of other dystopian

worlds are themselves colonized peoples, dominated and manipulated by advertising, the.

space of Utopia become the mental space of desire. Here, Utopia itself is invaded by a commodifying force.

The space of utopia becomes the space of discovery, or, in other words, of colonial expansion and exploitation. The island of the Mandunji is in fact a haven from the depredation of the Immob world: Martine's intrusion is repeated by Theo's invasion, and the text ends with the prospect of Martine and Theo chasing yet another (destructive) invasion. This is figured as the placing of the island onto the map. The island of the Mandunji is no longer utopia once it has been 'discovered', charted, fixed in the world of capitalized space. It compromises the 'real' of capitalized space, by positing an imaginative space outside that of the mapped area. The island of the Mandunji is an 'island which by some miracle, Martine liked to say, had never been charted by any map by any cartographer'.[6] The island is No-place, somewhere outside of the spatially contained 'real'. It is itself in limbo, between worlds, neither one nor the other.

The island, being beyond the surveillance systems of the military, is also a zone of freedom for the renegade scientist. *Limbo* is in a tradition which reaches back at least as far as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: Victor Frankenstein rents a cottage on a remote Scottish island to attempt to create a mate for his Creature; and more directly, in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, an isolated island (discovered by a traveller abandoned at sea) is the site of transgressive experimentation. This island too is off the map, and is, suggestively, somewhere near the Galapagos islands visited by Darwin.

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[6] Bernard Wolfe, *Limbo* (1952) (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1987), pp. 9-10. All further page references will be given in the body of the text.

Martine himself is a vivisectionist. When fearing discovery -- or perhaps rediscovery -- he

says: "'All the experimental animals must be destroyed -- if we turned those four-footed

pacifists loose in the jungle our visitors would certainly come upon them and wonder at

the scars and strange behaviour'" (*Limbo* 30). The island of the scientist is sought out to

shield the acts of transgression from the eyes of 'civilization', and also to contain it. The

beasts of Dr. Moreau are in a direct lineage to Martine's island of the Mandunji: Moreau's

vivisection is replicated in Martine's lobotomies.

His operations are ideologically utopian acts, intended to break the structures of

civilization and repression which inform the text. The operation of Mandunga,

consequently, is actually the attempt to impose quiescence. The tribal elder, Ubu, desires

that all life tends to the inanimate, without conflict, without passion, a state of nirvana.

These are manifested in the two drugs of the island: 'rotabunga' is a Huxleyan *soma*, a

narcotic which provides quiescence; 'ganja', in contrast, excites and stimulates,

particularly sexually. As in *Brave New World*, there is a conjunction of drugs, sexuality

and control. The control of female sexuality is vital to the project of mandunga: for Ubu,

the figure of control and tradition on the island, the female orgasm 'is a sickness' (*Limbo*

19). Martine laments: "'Godamned Siamese twins. I've cut out the aggression, I've cut out

the orgasm'" (*Limbo* 16). Therefore, the act of surgery is at once an act of sexual violence,

an act of power, and of control. In its control of sexuality to form the 'Utopian' society,

Limbo reflects other dystopias, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where sexual acts become the

locus of prohibition and control, or *Brave New World*'s mechanization of reproduction.

The use of drugs as narcotic substances both replicates *Brave New World* and the World

State's use of 'soma' to control its citizens, and anticipates the dystopian worlds of

William Burroughs and other writers of the 1960s.

"*Mandunji* means simply *the sane ones, the normal*" (*Limbo* 27) is how Ubu explains

the name of the island people to the cyborg, Theo. Once again, as in *Fahrenheit 451*, one

finds the conflation of deviance with illness. Any deviation, in behaviour, in emotion, is

signified as sickness. "'A man'', Ubu said, "is well to the extent that his village is well'"

(*Limbo* 18). The individual is subsumed into the group. Any notion of health is regulated

by the group norm, but here it is imposed by the act of surgery. The significations of

sanity and normality become ambiguous, complex: it becomes apparent, as the text

progresses, that Martine is in fact projecting his own psychological damage onto the

surviving world, and his attempt to manufacture an island of total peace is in fact an

abreaction to his experience of war. He does, or tries to do, to their brains what the world

does to their limbs. Both place them in limbo: humanity denatured, decorticated, or

mechanized.

Martine introduces Western technical/ technological/ scientific objects and systems of

thought into the island of the Mandunji, and therefore opens up the static island world to

the forces of technology, production and 'progress'. Martine's work on the island is to

introduce machines, and to make people into machines: predictable, manipulable, and

emotion-free. Once again, in a dystopia of the 1950s the operations of control are

imagined as a mechanization of the body, and a transformation of the human into the

figurative 'robot'. Martine replicates the world of Limbo in his own utopia, producing

what he attempts to cure. Martine's surgery is an attempt to wrest control of humanity

away from the Machine (embodied in the war computer EMSIAC), and place it in the hands

of the human (himself), but ironically, Martine's surgery only serves to transform the

human, once again, into the machine:

> She was naked and Ubu could see the tangle of wires that led from her arms, her
> legs, her chest, her eyelids, from all the orifices of her bronze body, to the
> measuring machines scattered around the room (*Limbo* 13).

The human is made into its antithesis, the machine. The machine is symbolized by the war

computer EMSIAC, which is, like the computer controlled systems of *Level 7* or EPICAC

XIV of *Player Piano*, the emblem of the abdication of human control, the technocratic

reliance on system rather than individual responsibility.

Wolfe's short story 'Self Portrait' of 1951, a miniature foreshadowing of many of *Limbo*'s

concerns, is narrated by a seemingly naïve (or, ambiguously, pragmatic) scientist, working

in a government lab on prosthetic limbs. He yearns for the status of the 'MS' project, one

which is working on artificial intelligence. In a noteworthy anticipation of Vonnegut's

exploration of machines and game theory, the computer (also called EMSIAC) is originally

designed to beat human Grandmasters at chess, but is soon appropriated by the security

state:

> 'they understood that mechanized warfare is only the most complicated game the
> human race has invented so far, an elaborate form of chess which uses the
> population of the world for pawns and the globe for a chessboard'.[7]

The metaphor of war as game is an old one, but the use of chess as a metaphor shows the

dislocation of military strategy from human concerns, very like the dissociation of Push

Button Officer X-127 in Roshwald's *Level 7*. As in *Player Piano*, an opposition between

games-playing and computing machines is set up, but where in *Player Piano* the chess-

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[7] Bernard Wolfe, 'Self Portrait', *Galaxy Science Fiction* (November 1951), 58-83 (p. 71).

playing computer Checker Charley is defeated, in *Limbo* and in 'Self Portrait' the

computer crosses the boundary, to ultimately malign effect. EMSIAC is an effect of the

Cold War:

> 'What he says is that all the industrialized nations must be working away like mad
> on Emsiac, just as they did on the atom bomb, so let's assume before long all the
> big countries will have more or less equal MS machines. All right. A cold war gets
> under way between countries A and B, and pretty soon it reaches the showdown
> stage. Then both countries plug in their Emsiacs and let them calculate the date on
> which hostilities should begin'.[8]

Planes would then bomb the machines, and the cycle of development start again. This

ritualization of conflict, and its reduction to 'scientific war', renders it absurd. It, like the

amputations and Olympic Games of *Limbo*, are in some sense the 'Moral Equivalents of

War', a phrase taken from William James. However, in these equivalents, the factors and

structures which produce war are themselves preserved.

Howard P. Segal suggests that the ethos of technological utopia itself tends to mechanize

the human: '[i]n imitating the machine he has invented, utopian man finds fulfilment'.[9] It

would seem that *Limbo*, with its dominant cyborg imagery, makes explicit the

metaphorical content of the technological utopia. On Martine's arrival in New Jamestown,

the capital city of the postwar United States, he sees that the city is apparently a technical

Utopia after the Wellsian fashion. Martine finds:

> [s]pacious parkways fanned out from one enormous central hub, which seemed to
> contain all the commercial and institutional buildings; and in easy concentric arcs
> between these spokes, along tree-dotted and garden-lined streets and boulevards,
> great meandering stretches of streamlined skyscraper apartments, interspersed with
> sprinklings of smaller individual family units. [...] A whole cosmopolis designed
> from scratch as a *machine a vivre* (*Limbo* 90-91).

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[8] Wolfe,'Self Portrait', p. 72.
[9] Howard P. Segal, *Technological Utopianism in American Culture* (Chicago & London: University of
Chicago Press, 1985), p. 27.

The utopian city, like the human body, is described in terms of the machine. The

conflation of the body and body politic, as I noted in both *Player Piano* and *Fahrenheit*

451, emphasises that the mechanization of one is a symbolic mechanization and

dehumanization of the other. Like the city of Philip Dick's *The Man Who Japed*, this

Wells-inflected place clearly draws upon the tradition of the ideal city, one of the

wellsprings of utopian thought. Utopias such as Campanella's *City of the Sun* use a spatial

model of concentric rings to suggest perfect cosmological order; within the Ideal City

tradition, this division of space also signifies hierarchies and power. In Wells's *When the*

Sleeper Wakes, the concentric circles are pulled through a third plane into a stepped

conical shape, symbolising the site of power and its transmission: downwards.

The language of the passage changes as Martine draws near:

> It was all too hygienic and prissy, a bit too meticulously scrubbed behind the ears,
> too well-groomed, too goddamned aseptic. Wielding their compasses and T-
> squares, the planners had throttled the landscape with geometry. [...] So beautifully
> balanced mathematically, the city was, in another sense, unbalanced (*Limbo* 91).

The utopian city is oppressive in its mathematical exactness, as the world of Zamiatin's

We is symbolized by its elevation of numbers to a principle of social order. Hidden

beneath this city are factories and the 'proles', a disenfranchised pool of workers. The

spatial confinement of the working classes, perhaps patterned on Wells's *The Time*

Machine and its spatialization of power, recurs in Philip Dick's *The Penultimate Truth*, a

dystopia in which those underground exist in a fabricated reality, unaware of the true state

of the world above. The spatial mapping of power -- above and below, the weak and the

strong -- also finds an echo in Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7*, discussed in the next chapter.

The underground workers are the hidden of this dystopia, the unacknowledged victims of

its geometric imposition. The spatialization of power in the dystopian text also suggests a

metaphorical 'underground' as the possibility of a dissident movement, but Martine will

not find this until the end of the text.

Late in the novel Martine travels to confront his antagonist, Helder, and descends into the

'LOS ALAMOS INDUSTRIAL SLOT', a technotopian vision:

> the entire floor of the hollow, at all levels, was strewn with machines and
> manufacturing equipment, the litter of a miraculous century which wrote its fables
> in steel and underscored them in molybdenum: the squat metallic humps of atomic
> breeder reactors, big around as a city block, [...] flame-geysering blast furnaces and
> sparkshowering open hearths and incandescent kilns, [...] all the sleek devices
> invented by men to supplement their own puny fingers and teeth (*Limbo* 332).

The massiveness of the industrial scale dwarfs human agency; as in *Player Piano*, the

industrial space seems one that excludes the human and the natural. Here, with Wells's

The Time Machine again as intertext, a diabolic industry has retreated underground, and

this is the site of power, both electrical /mechanical, and political. As in many of the

dystopias in this thesis, the sites of power recede from the protagonist, and find a physical

analogue in the hiding of the machinery of warfare or control underground.

2. The ideology of Immob: humans into machines

The opposition of human and machine is a central one in *Limbo*, as are the attempts to

transcend that opposition. *Limbo* is the dystopia of the cyborg, because the physical

manifestation of Immob -- the amputations which provide the awful pun of the title --

provide images of Human/Machine beings very different to other dystopias of the early

1950s. The system of voluntary amputations is paradoxically mirrored by a system of

replacement of those limbs by more powerful artificial arms and legs. Vonnegut's *Player*

Piano (published the same year) has its world based on the principle of the human being

replaced by the machine: in others, such as Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, technology is

a tool of the state in a system of control and domination of the populace. In *Limbo*, the images of the machine are EMSIAC, the war-computer which symbolizes both humanity's self-destructiveness and its own abdication to a false determinism; and the Pros, the prosthetic limbs which turn amputees into cyborgs.

The image of the cyborg -- the Human/ Machine -- regulates the imagination of the machine in *Limbo*. The cyborg is the human being melded with the machine, the body erased by, or built into, the products of a technological rationality. The commodification of body parts and the mechanization of the human form is repeated in the 'race' for colombium, the uranium-type element which powers the artificial limbs. Just as the body is mechanized, so is the state, the body politic, as in *Player Piano*. Both signify a worship of the machine. The body as machine is a device for war, even if Theo does not understand this, and he partakes in the Games, which are themselves a 'Moral Equivalent' of war. Klaus Theweleit, in his study of pre-Fascist German militiamen, *Male Fantasies*, describes how the soldiers imagined themselves to be a part of one machine, an image which finds its echo in *Limbo* where the Eastern athletes at the Games move as one. Theweleit also describes how the actual bodies of the men underwent an imaginative reconfiguration: 'The new man is a man whose physique has been mechanized, his psyche eliminated -- or in part displaced into his body armor, his 'predatory' suppleness'.[10] These men imagined their bodies as machines for warfare. In both Fascist discourse and the Immob world, it is clear that the desire for the war-machine is the desire for the erasure or mutilation of the body. It is also the desire for annihilation, a masochistic drive towards

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[10] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Male bodies: Psychoanalyzing the white terror*, trans. Chris Turner and Erica Carter with Stephen Conway, 2 vols (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 162.

self-erasure replicating the dynamics of confrontation and nuclear destruction in the Cold War.

The machine, throughout the dystopias of the 1950s, is the image of the repressive state, and in *Limbo* the symbol of the self-destructiveness of the Cold War. The leader of the post-apocalyptic United States, the Inland Strip, declares that "'Man [...] k.o.'s the machine by incorporating the machine into himself! At last we've got the answer to EMSIAC the machine that incorporated *man* into *it*'" (*Limbo* 101). 'Immob' is the ideology of the Inland Strip:

> The bridging of the gap between the mechanical and the human -- the discovery of the Hyphen between machine and man -- thus enabling man to triumph over the machine because it's *man* who has the Hyphen and not the machine (*Limbo* 142).

The contradiction of the position of Helder and the state is clear: in attempting to defeat the machine, it is incorporated into the human, and this problem finessed by claiming that the human retains control of the 'Hyphen'. What is the difference between the Machine/Human (EMSIAC) and the Human/Machine (Cyborg)? It would seem to be that in the latter, the illusion of control remains intact, even if the outcome is the same. This is explicit from the ending of the text: Immob does not save the human race from another war, but leads only to a new conflagration. Immob provides the rationale for treating human beings as machines, and in the image of Theo, the Pro-Pro cyborg, these words are made flesh (and metal).

In his visit to New Jamestown, Martine attends the University to try to understand more about Immob. The Immob lecturer declares:

> Why should it be that the human brain can produce perfection only outside itself in the machines it conceives and builds? If it can conceive and project such perfection, why can it not apply the same grandiosity of vision to itself, rebuild

itself? The answer is that it can, once it stops being cowed by its own creations. The slogan 'Physician, heal thyself!' yields to the Immob admonition, 'Cyberneticist, redesign thyself!' (*Limbo* 142-3).

Therefore, the machine is 'perfection', and is placed in contradistinction to the Human; the body becomes the boundary between human and machine, the barrier between humans and perfection, and so must be erased. Immob is a way of making people into machines, dodging the 'steamroller' of war, only to be run down by the runaway deification of the machine: '"the electronic brain is pure and self-determined because it is not shackled to arms and legs"' (*Limbo* 145). Purity and control of destiny are located not in the realm of the human, but in that of the machine. Scott Bukatman, in his *Terminal Identity*, recognises the links between the operation of Immob and mandunga: 'In the postwar environment that Martine tours, societies perform lobotomies and amputations on their citizens, not only to prevent the possibility of war, but in order to move closer to the immobile perfection of a machine-like status.'[11]

Mandunga replicates Immob, aiming for quiescence, for one-ness, and for a totality of experience. Without understanding his motives, Martine had been doing what Helder had been doing on a microcosmic, instead of a macrocosmic, scale. At the end of the text, Martine comes out against one-ness, and for double-ness, within the human individual. He declares to Helder and Theo: '"I'm *two* men! I'm both of you, [...] the megalomaniacal 'I'-pusher and the self-annihilating 'It'-seeker"'; and '"you're less than human. Because each of you has denied his doubleness"' (*Limbo* 346). Wholeness, the very nature of humanity, is these two principles held in an 'exquisitely shaky balance' (*Limbo* 346). Yin and yang,

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[11] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham NC & London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 294.

Eros and Thanatos: neither one nor the other, but both. The binarism is invalidated: either/ or becomes both/ and, opposed to the totalized oppositions of the official discourse. This is the utopic space of *Limbo*. David Samuelson also identifies 'the long string of hyphenated false oppositions Wolfe-Martine dredges up during the story', oppositions that echo Montag's bifurcated self in *Fahrenheit 451* and which indicate the psychological damage done to the self.[12] This utopic space, the place outside the ideological and psychological imperatives of the world of *Limbo*, is also signified by typological and linguistic strategems. At the beginning of the text, the reader finds the NO, Martine's refusal of EMSIAC's control over him; at the end one finds the complementary YES to the 'Hyphen -- between Dog and God' (385), which is the human. His 1990 notebook ends with another *re*discovery, the name of his mother -- a final return to the womb -- which, again, is neither one, nor the other, but both: NOYES.

The basis of Immob is totalizing, because it aims to erase the gulf between self and other, to connect everyone with everyone else. Immob is a rationale for domination and exploitation: 'the universe was truly, literally, becoming an appendage to man's ego' (*Limbo* 129). The division between subject and object has broken down. The 'Its', the commodified objects which the subject attempts to combine with in a futile and doomed attempt at gratification, are 'the steamroller' which is to be dodged. Humanity's conquest of Nature under the sign of Immob opens up the 'oceanic' conjunction of self and other, subject and object, through a mythic recovery of megalomania and 'heroism'. Immob does not really provide a Hyphen, a Third Term. Deconstructive thought has it that in a binary opposition, one term is invariably and inevitably privileged over the other. We can see this

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[12] David N. Samuelson, 'The Great American Dystopia', *Extrapolation* 19:2 (1977), 76-87 (p. 84).

here: Immob in fact privileges self over other, and provides a legitimisation of domination, finally revealed through political action at the end of the text. This perpetuation of opposition is repeated in the factionalism within the Immob state. There are two contending wings within the Immob party: the Pro-Pro faction advocates voluntary amputation, and then the replacement of organic limbs with artificial ones; the Anti-Pro wing rejects cyborg limbs, arguing that only in complete immobilization, in amputation and utter passivity, are Immob ideals of pacifism realized.

There is, in Immob, a hatred of the animal, of the carnal, of the Id. This is made explicit in Martine's dialogue with the Anti-Pro amputee, who lays as a baby in a pram. As Martha A. Bartter puts it, 'Immob divides the mind from the body, declares the body evil, and rejects it.'[13] Amputeeism is self-mutilation, the expression of body-hatred and the worshipping of mind (in the image of the 'pure thinking machine'), itself a replication of the dualisms it seeks to transcend. The vol-amp admits that Immob is a completion of Manichean ideas, of the body as filth, and the spirit as purity. Once again, instead of finding a Hyphen, we find the privileging of one term -- mind, or spirit -- over the other. Martha Bartter links Mandunga and Immob in this way: 'Mandunga, like war, is socialized aggression directed against 'the enemy'; Immob, like suicide, is aggression directed against the self.'[14] Both, then, are manifestations of 'aggression', both completely contravening the informing idea of their programs: pacifism. They are manifestations of the very thing they seek to control.

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[13] Martha A. Bartter, *The Way to Ground Zero: The Atomic Bomb in American Science Fiction* (New York, Westport CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 166.
[14] Bartter, *The Way to Ground Zero*, p. 166.

The vol-amp (voluntary amputee), in a central dialogue in *Limbo*, is correct in asserting

that the Pro-Pro faction mirror the ideologies of power associated with pre-World War III

thinking for, as we find out at the end of the text, Helder and his ex-Soviet counterpart

Vishinu have been building their own National Security states and Cold War behind the

facade of brotherhood. However, the position of absolute passivity that the vol-amp

assumes is a complete abdication of responsibility for the continued problems of society,

and its logical conclusion -- if everyone was an Anti-Pro vol-amp -- is simply mass death

through logistical collapse. The Anti-Pro ideal is, like Mandunga, Death-in-Life: Limbo,

Limb-o.

3. Utopia as World/Text

As there are many narratives, and many discourses in *Limbo*, there are many texts. The

text is overloaded, deliberately too-full of information, stuffed with a technical discourse

which collides with the other languages of the text. The problem of knowledge is

replicated on the level of discourse (and this constant shifting is also mirrored in the

ubiquitous punning). History, history-as-myth, medico-technological history and

psychoanalytic discourse, are all problematized by the very act of projecting developments

into an ontologically unstable fictive/ textual 'future' (or 'present'). These often break

through the surface of the narrative to explode the illusion of the fictive 'real': for

instance, Martine refers to the mathematician and cyberneticist Norbert Wiener, and says

that prefrontal lobotomy 'has recently (1948) been having a certain vogue' (*Limbo* 53).

This 'recently' signifies not Martine's lack of knowledge since this date -- since he came

to the island in 1972 -- but the genesis of the novel in the 'real' world. *Limbo* was

published in 1952: this one detail breaks the frame of the text and foregrounds the

fictiveness of the fiction. In fact, the artefacts of the 'real' world invade the fictive future of the text. The many references to Freud, to Wiener, and the 'Author's Notes and Warnings' at the end of the text complicate the ontological status of the texts. What is 'real', what fictive? Martine's personal history of the 1960s (alternate to our own), then his war experiences, which constitute a kind of 'future history' with the (pseudo) legitimisation that this accrues, is complicated by the intrusion into the narrative of first Martine's 1990 diary, then his 1972 text.

The notion of text as authoritative document is undermined by this play of texts. The suspicion of state ideologies and power that we find in all of the dystopias in this thesis becomes, in Wolfe's hands as it does in other texts of 'postmodernist' practice, a distrust of the ideologies and authority of the text itself. The authority of *Limbo* is compromised by its many transgressive constructions. One of which is the 'Author's Notes and Warnings', which like all appendices to fictional texts, exists in a kind of textual limbo. This section attempts to 'explain' or decode the textual games of *Limbo*, but of course only furthers them. It also places the novel once again in the tradition of formal dystopia: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has its own 'explicatory' appendix, whose ontological/ textual status is also problematic. The 'Author' writes: 'Anybody who 'paints a picture' of some coming year is kidding -- he's only fancying up something in the present or past, not blueprinting the future. All such writing is essentially satiric (today-centred), not utopic (tomorrow-centred)' (*Limbo* 412). This statement is itself self-contradictory. The utopia is satiric in its estranging functions: 'satire is always implicit in utopian literature in the sense that the utopian state serves as a standard against which the author's contemporaneous

society can be measured', as Alexandra Aldridge argues.[15] To privilege one form over another on such grounds is spurious. If, as Martha Bartter suggests, 'Wolfe claims to have created a parody of science fiction',[16] perhaps the reader can infer that there is some kind of generic misinformation being perpetrated here, and that perhaps Wolfe protests too much. As Wolfe appears to be using the techniques and strategies of science fiction and dystopia while disavowing any generic allegiance, it seems that, rather ironically, he is attempting to circumvent particular readings of Limbo while attempting to secure its 'seriousness'. This generic inclusiveness is emphasised by the marketing Limbo received on its publication: as David Seed has revealed, its cover was splashed by the promise of a 'novel of action, suspense, adventure, science-fiction and sex'.[17]

The predominant stylistic trope in Limbo is the pun, foregrounding the ambiguity of language, the constant shifting and overlaying of signifiers which make up discourse and text. Carolyn Geduld correctly identifies the pun as 'the central structural principle of Wolfe's novel'.[18] The pun demonstrates the unreliability of any stable link between signifier, signified, and referent. Language is based on difference, yet that difference is itself compromised in Limbo by punning, by contiguity and acoustic similarity. At the beginning of chapter two of Limbo, this punning process is laid bare:

> Measure for measure. A measure operation. 'Measure's in the cold, cold ground', he said under his mask. He was annoyed with himself for indulging in such nonsense but he knew he couldn't stop it, luckily he was light of hand, sly of hand, sleight of hand, his fingers were so agile and dedicated that they did their job even under an avalanche of bad jokes from their massa in the cold, cold groan. (Limbo 15).

[15] Alexandra Aldridge, The Scientific World-View in Dystopia (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1978), p. 6.
[16] Bartter, The Way to Ground Zero, p. 165.
[17] Seed, p. 267.
[18] Carolyn Geduld, Bernard Wolfe (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 72.

David Seed's acute unpacking of this section suggests that 'the distortions of the original line make manifest Martine's latent doubts about the operation and render it as an exercise of colonialist violence against the member of a subjugated race', emphasising the operations of power that exist within discourse.[19] Martine (via free indirect discourse) describes the punning process as 'nonsense', yet 'nonsense' is a direct transgression of the solemn world of Limbo. Later in the text the reader discovers that Martine's original diary has been read by Helder without ambiguity, without irony. Helder seeks sense where there is none, in war itself. Nonsense is non-sense, Martine's method -- linguistically and ethically -- of dealing with the destruction of the Third World War and his role in it, a war driven by the logical imperatives of EMSIAC.

This passage also illustrates another of the text's stylistic tics, the balancing of two or three different (punning) clauses, suspended in the structure of the sentence without privileging one or the other: a denial of closure. Again, we find this on page 98 of *Limbo*: 'It had some slippery aura (error: horror) of meaning'. This explicit foregrounding of the problems of language and knowledge dismantle the construction of the 'real' in the text: the language of the text replicates the slipperiness of all linguistic construction. Cris Nash identifies another metafictional device that *Limbo* uses:

> Whether the 'dismantler', unlike Mann, Joyce and other Modernists, may be inclined to turn for his/her formational premises not to the linear models of music (the ballad, the symphony) but to the visual modes (the so-called static, flat-surfaced, simultaneistic experience of photography, painting) -- or because above all he or she may be concerned to remind us that the book itself is not a transparent, illusionistic medium but rather one of those *objects* of which actuality is made -- 'disintegrative' texts are often ones in which the narrative is subject not

[19] Seed, p. 279.

only to verbal but to graphic patterning, physically, on the page. *Typographic stratagems may take over.*[20]

In fact, *Limbo* is doubly metafictional, for it reproduces its devices from other texts.

Namely, the 'squiggles' from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. On page 291 of *Limbo*, the

doodle is that which Tristram uses to describe in graphic mode the wandering path of his

narrative, and at the end of the 'Author's Notes and Warnings', the squiggle is that of

Corporal Trim's cane. The 'illustrations' of *Limbo* occur in the formal intrusion of

Martine's diary into the text: once again, metafictional devices doubled. As a further

layering of textual levels, Martine hides his (1990) diary within the covers of BASIC

IMMOB TEXT NUMBER TWO (perhaps fearing that, like other totalitarian dystopias, certain

books will be under erasure); BASIC IMMOB TEXT NUMBER ONE is his diary from 1972.

Books within books, texts within texts.

The relation of dystopian texts to textual artefacts within them problematizes the sense of

an archive, the surviving textual body or memory of a culture. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the

repression of the dystopian state finds its locus in books themselves, but Beatty, like his

predecessors Mond and O'Brien, has a knowledge of prohibited material which places him

outside the configurations of control in the text. Paradoxically, Beatty, Mond and O'Brien

preserve the culture they attempt to repress. In Roshwald's *Level 7*, the problem of the

text's transmission to the reader is problematized by its apocalyptic ending; *Limbo*, as

David Samuelson suggests, 'preserves the jettisoned journal, embodies the call for

laughter and itself constitutes an act of genuine aggression against the social-political

[20] Cristopher Nash, *World-Games: The Tradition of Anti-Realist Revolt* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 96.

conditions of Wolfe's time'.[21] On reading *Fahrenheit 451*, for instance, the reader is implicated in the modes of resistance privileged by the text. An engagement with the utopian or dystopian text is an estrangement from, and a confrontation with, the formations of the everyday 'real'.

4. War and its Moral Equivalence

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the historical proximity of World War II and the burgeoning Cold War of the early 1950s, war is the root of the world of *Limbo*. It is the 'steamroller' which Martine and the world of Limbo attempt to dodge. The narrative begins in a post-war world. The moment of catastrophe is not one of rebirth, or of apocalyptic judgement, as the world we first see is the island of the Mandunji, seemingly untouched by the depredations of nuclear warfare or of fallout. As the text progresses, the reader discovers that a part of the United States has survived the nuclear war -- The Inland Strip, perhaps a reference to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Airstrip One -- and so has a large part of the former Soviet Union. Martine's journey back to the place of his birth is at once the recovery of the past and a discovery of a technological, and technocratic, state, based (like all totalitarian states in dystopian fiction) on utopian principles.

Martine, in his escape to the island of Mandunga, had attempted to opt out of the structures of war and domination, but in doing this, he had been acquiescing to the same drives towards quiescence which created Immob, and exhibited the same complicity as the vol-amp. Martine's journey is one of healing, the journey from death, back into life, through a symbolic regression back to the womb and rebirth. The narrative of travel is the

[21] Samuelson, p. 82.

voyage of 'discovery', but what is discovered in this other unmapped zone is the psychosis of the European male. The text structures a narrative journey of self-discovery, areas which have formerly remained unknown, undiscovered, or unacknowledged by the protagonist. Martine travels from '*l'homme naturel*' to 'civilization', although this voyage of rediscovery of his own uncharted/ repressed inner lands inverts this trajectory. Martine must travel back in history, to his own history, visiting New Jamestown, the typical dystopian city, but he is soon impelled to go to the place of his birth (Martinesburg, which was Salt Lake City); to the house of his childhood, where he undergoes a cathartic regressive experience; to a shack from his past, and finally to an (amniotic) salt lake. The psychological content of the travel narrative is quite clear: Martine is travelling back through his psychical history to the womb, in order to undo or 'cure' the damage done by the traumas in his life. *Limbo* makes it clear that to escape from war and the causes of war is not enough, for as certainly as Theo's expedition finds the island, so war will again find Martine out. In global war, there is no place off the map, no utopian zone of freedom. This motif of psychological regression exposes *Limbo*'s engagement with psychoanalytical theory, particularly that of the Freudian Swiss psychoanalyst, Edmund Bergler, a reliance extensively explored in Carolyn Geduld's book-length study of Wolfe.[22] Martine's journey seems loosely based on the pattern of Freudian therapy, his spatial trajectory mapped onto one of healing. As David Samuelson suggests, 'the cure is ostensibly Berglerian analysis'.[23]

[22] Carolyn Geduld, *Bernard Wolfe* (New York: Twayne, 1972).
[23] Samuelson, p. 82.

The division within the human mind in *Limbo* is based on a Freudian model, where the

trauma of coming to selfhood is played out as alienation from the (body of the) mother,

the Oedipal complex, and the fragmentation of the psyche, into Ego, Superego and Id.

Immob is therefore a philosophical and psychological attempt to recapture the 'oceanic'

state of pre-alienated consciousness, before the trauma of selfhood. In fact, one can see

Immob as the attempt to erase the self, to immerse it in a totality of consciousness. It is

clearly linked, however, notably in the 'Author's Notes and Warnings', with another

concept derived from Freud: the Nirvana principle, or Death Instinct.[24] This concept,

which informed Freud's later writing, posits two drives within the human unconscious: the

principle of Life, of sex, called 'Eros'; and the principle of quiescence, of desire for the

absence of pain, called 'Thanatos'. This 'Thanatos' is the Nirvana, or Death instinct, a

desire to return to the state of the inanimate, clearly linked to the desire for a return to the

womb. If one interprets Immob in this way -- and with the 'Author's Note and Warnings',

this is clearly signified -- then Immob becomes not the Hyphen, but the desire for Death.

Wolfe's use of Berglerian analysis, and its reliance on Freudian models to explain the

structures of superpower aggression which inform the Cold War and *Limbo*'s scenarios of

cyclic nuclear conflagration, suggests a retreat from political analysis to that of the

individual or self, which I suggested characterized the move from Popular Front activism

to liberal consensus in the early postwar years. David Seed has suggested that

'[p]sychological analysis was used during World War II and the years that followed it as a

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[24] See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), trans. by Joan Riviere, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1975), pp. 55-56. Also Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961).

means of explaining political action',[25] but Wolfe seems to imply, following the later

Freud, that repression and 'civilization' are inextricable. The 1950s saw a re-evaluation of

Freud in the service of oppositional politics, a trend taken up more fully in the counter-

cultural movement of the 1960s. Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, which was

published in 1953, attempted to graft Freud onto Marx, suggesting that what Freud called

the 'reality principle' (the induced sublimation of pleasure to create the energy for

physical and cultural production) was not in fact a human universal, but a social and

cultural construct and index of capitalist organization. He wrote:

> intensified progress seems to be bound up with intensified unfreedom. Throughout
> the world of industrial civilization, the domination of man by man is growing in
> scope and efficiency. Nor does the trend appear as an incidental, transitory
> regression on the road to progress. Concentration camps, mass exterminations,
> world wars, and atom bombs are no "lapse into barbarism", but the unrepressed
> implementation of the achievements of modern science, technology and
> domination. And the most effective subjugation and destruction of man by man
> takes place at the height of civilization, when the material and intellectual
> attainments of mankind seem to allow the creation of a truly free world.[26]

Marcuse's vision seems almost dystopian. His attempt to re-interpret Freudian

psychoanalytic theory not as a determining originary trauma, but as a programme for

liberation, was echoed in Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* (1959). Brown

suggested a return to a pre-Oedipal 'polymorphous perverse' sexuality as the possible

source of freedom from repression.[27] These expressions of 'Utopian' desire seem a

reaction to the perceived malignities of the organization of life in the United States in the

postwar years, one that oppressed and deformed its citizens.

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[25] Seed, p: 276.
[26] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1956) (London: Ark, 1987), p. 4.
[27] Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (New York: Random House, 1959).

Marcuse suggested a 'phylogenesis/ ontogenesis' pattern in the development of repression.

That is, the arc of repression of the individual subject reproduces in microcosm the arc of

repression of the culture. Therefore, understanding and correcting trauma in the individual

leads on directly to an understanding of how this trauma may be undone in culture and

society. Bergler's analysis of the root of aggression in the subject, explicated by Carolyn

Geduld, then offers an explanation of the aggressive roots of superpower conflict:

> According to Bergler, it is the function of Eros to turn Thanatos from the
> individual to the outer world. But Eros is only partially successful, and there
> remains a residue of Thanatos which is inimical to the ego. In the most simplistic
> sense, the instinctual portion turned outward is 'aggressive'; that turned inwards is
> "mascochistic"; although neither exists in 'pure form'.[28]

Aggression and masochism, the forms of psychological damage in *Limbo*, are both

derived from Thanatos, the drive towards death and quiescence. The structure of

superpower conflict is then a massive externalization of the death instinct, and a self-

sustaining product of repression.

How is this to be undone? Carolyn Geduld suggests that it is in the psycho-spatial journey

of Martine: '*Limbo* has a clear didactic purpose that is based on the idea that human nature

can change'.[29] The emphasis on individual psychology in *Limbo*, which encouraged David

Samuelson to call it the 'Great American Dystopia', suggests that all may make the same

journey of regression and healing. The psychic masochism which characterizes the vol-

amps of *Limbo* is the search for some kind of expiation, from what Martha Bartter calls

'existential shame'. Martine's quest to the 'Old World' is a pilgrimage of sorts, the

journey of utopian tradition transformed into a search for psychological peace and healing.

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[28] Geduld, p. 55.
[29] Geduld, p. 61.

Martine is responsible for the surgery he performed, for not saying 'NO' soon enough. The

lobotomies he performs are both acts of contrition and further shameful deeds. As Theo

and the expedition reach the island, Martine has not escaped the effects of the war and

must escape again, run away again. Martine makes a victim of himself, and under

Mandunga, a victim of others: his work is a manifestation of his own psychological

damage. His diary of 1972 is also a record of despair and disintegration, yet Helder reads it

as a program for salvation. This gulf in understanding -- focused on the problem of irony

and humour -- replicates the language-games of the novel. The diary is another text

(within text), of ambiguous signification.

Martine's former friend, leader of the Inland Strip and ultimate antagonist, Helder,

ostensibly believes in the rationalist, scientistic project, yet this belief leads him to endorse

and exemplify a system of self-mutilation. Helder, who upholds peace and 'progress', we

also find out to be a rapist. In cutting off his own legs, he has performed a rite of expiation,

a symbolic retribution (castration) for this act. The seemingly rational in fact masks an

underlying irrationality. Immob, the ideology of peace, is passivity controlled by

masochism: Immob reinforces the domination/ submission dyad of sado-masochism, not

invalidating it, as it claims to. Physically enforced passivity is victimhood, powerlessness,

and submission. As is clear at the end of the text, Immob is no defence against war,

because it embodies (a typical black humour pun) the relationships of warfare, of winner

and loser, of master and slave, of perpetrator and victim. When Theo gets his 'pros', his

artificial limbs, he uses them to dominate the East Union athletes in the Games. Although

Theo believes in the ideology of Immob where Helder is pragmatic about power, the very

use of the limbs themselves repeats the processes of power and domination. It is also clear

that the limbs themselves cause exploitation: the rare metal colombium is needed to build

the artificial limbs, and this causes intense competition and exploitation by both the Inland

Strip and East Union. It is, in yet another pun, an analogy of the Arms Race. As David

Seed suggests, *Limbo* is pervaded by puns on body metaphors. Limbo (limb-o),

dis*arm*ament, and so forth, are a deliberate attempt to expose and ridicule the metaphors of

the Cold War.

Martine is also complicit in Helder's rape. He covers for him, provides him with an alibi

for his actions, which mirrors providing, through his diary, a rationale for self-mutilation

on a world-wide scale. Martine hates himself and this manifests itself in the 1972 diary:

Martine believes humanity, and therefore the path of 'civilization', to be fundamentally

irrational. War on such a scale can have no other explanation to him. For Helder and the

technocrats, even such destruction can be brought under the aegis of the rational. Scott

Bukatman uses the psychological theory of Georges Bataille to describe the workings of

the Inland Strip and Immob state:

> In *Limbo*, sacrificial mutilation is performed in the *service* of an instrumental,
> managerial reason, and not [...] as a sign of the suspension or transcendence of the
> rational. Wolfe brilliantly demonstrates the power of technocratic society to co-opt
> and assimilate the most apparently subversive doctrines and behaviours.[30]

I would qualify this by arguing that the Immob state does not co-opt mutilation as a

technique of domination: hatred of the body, the death instinct, and self-mutilation form

the very codes of Immob ideological construction. Immob, like Mandunga, is Death-in-

Life.

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[30] Bukatman, p. 294.

The debate between the rational and irrational, of scientism and humanism, is at the core

of the dystopian form. Alexandra Aldridge describes it thus:

> the dystopian novel is not *literally* anti-scientific or anti-technological in the sense that it represents machine-phobia or some other form of neo-Luddism. Instead its authors are, more accurately, anti-scientistic; they have remained watchful over the intrusion of scientific values -- objectivity, neutrality, instrumentalism -- into the social imagination. They have criticized the replacement of a humanist ethos with a scientific/ technological ethos; in short their fiction assails the scientizing of society.[31]

This is symbolized in the machine. As in other totalitarian dystopias of the period, the

machine signifies the domination of technology and of scientistic instrumentality, of a

functionalist ethos which treats humans as machines. The technologies of economic

exploitation and the technologies of war are analogous here: in *Limbo*, the path of

'civilization' is the path of war. Helder's return to a Cold War mentality, his stockpiling of

weapons and contingency plans, and the institution of a National Security state would

seem to suggest that war is cyclic and inbuilt into 'civilization' itself. Helder has

abandoned himself to the machine of war, and the machine is the symbol of determinism.

However, there are ways to resist *Limbo*; there is finally, a utopian zone uncovered in the

dystopian text. First, the reader discovers -- with Martine -- that not all the citizens of the

Inland Strip are devotees of Immob. By chance, Martine encounters a war veteran, like

himself; and one who shows physical rather than psychological scars of the war. Don

Thurman is also an amputee, but an involuntary one: he lost his leg in the war. Because of

this, Immob and voluntary amputation repulses him, and he outlines to Martine a

burgeoning group of opposition, who are waiting for an opportunity to act: "'Maybe, when

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[31] Aldridge, p. 18.

the war's far enough along, there'll be a chance for us to do something. We're discussing

it now. We're waiting to hear from our friends in the union about it'" (*Limbo* 360). Like

Martine, they have come to the conclusion that passivity, or escape, is not enough, and

there must be action to go with it. It is collective action, across the borders of state and

war: the Hyphen is between people. Importantly, when Martine tells the rancher of

'Martine', the idea of text and interpretation are central:

> 'Still, the Notebook, parts of it....'
> 'Confused too, like it's author. Sure! But it didn't have any of the meanings Helder
> read into it -- Martine wasn't confused about Helder's meanings, at least' (*Limbo*
> 361).

Ambiguity, complexity, and indeterminacy are the things that Helder attempts to erase in

his 'authoritative' annotated version of Martine's diary. This is actually given in the *text of*

Limbo, and its presence reveals the gulf between text and gloss. Textual authority is once

again undermined by one text colliding with, and compromising, another.

The utopian zone of *Limbo*, the zone of escape and freedom, is laughter. To laugh at

oneself and the world is a denial of the machine. Martine says to Theo, "'Laughter,

nothing but laughter, is the final answer to the steamroller'" (*Limbo* 384), though Theo is

crying. The machine is without laughter, without humour, and without irony. Helder is

locked into the cycle of war because he cannot see the irony in Martine's notebook, for to

laugh is to see disjunction, to play with the slippage of words, to deny a final, authoritative

meaning to events or texts. Carolyn Geduld suggests that 'the very sanity of a civilization

appears to depend on whether its members think jokes are funny or miss the humor and

take them seriously'.[32] The zone of laughter is also a zone of Limbo, because with laughter

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[32] Geduld, p. 46.

comes understanding, understanding of complicity: "'There's something else that distinguishes man from animal: he's secretly in cahoots with the steamroller and knows it -- it's from the cave of this secret knowledge, maybe, that most anxiously anticipatory human laughter comes. Laughter is a sort of short-circuited sob'" (*Limbo* 384), says Martine.

This zone of laughter seems to oppose the principle of the machine with that of a sentimentalized 'human'.[33] If so, the text would ultimately fall into the either/or trap that it seeks to criticise. Martha Bartter suggests that '[d]enial of self denies humour; joy comes from accepting oneself. Thus it becomes radically important that the Mandunji learn to laugh'.[34] Selfhood, in her estimation, is delivered by laughter, though this statement itself rests on liberal humanist assumptions about selfhood and identity. David Samuelson correctly identifies laughter with the search for wholeness in *Limbo*, a laughter mediated through textual satire and the comic. The reader is then included in this search, in a hermeneutics of healing. This healing, it must be said, has a reliance on Berglerian psychoanalytic models which are not without their problems.

In *Limbo*, the impulses towards war in 'Western civilization' repeat the impulses towards death in the Oedipal subject. The cure for this is not in the removal of the instruments of

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[33] The French philosopher Henri Bergson, who privileged an intuitive and creative human interaction with life as a means of experiencing the 'essence' of things, similarly relied on an opposition between the human and the machine in his conception of laughter and how it is produced. Bergson suggested, in *Laughter* (1911), that the human attributes of adaptability, plasticity and novelty were antithetical to the repetition and 'inelasticity' of the machine. He wrote: '*The attributes, gestures and movements of the human being are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine*', Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Claudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 29.

[34] Bartter, *The Way to Ground Zero*, p. 166.

warfare (nuclear weapons, or human limbs themselves) but in the repression which returns in the human self in aggression towards others. The way out of *Limbo*, Wolfe suggests, is patterned in Martine's own Freudian regression, back beyond the site of the originary trauma. At the end of *Limbo* war again is imminent, and though Martine has achieved regression and some sort of peace, the world awaits its own restorative. Unlike *Fahrenheit 451*, the moment of apocalypse has not come, and may be avoided.

At the end of the text, all are in limbo: Martine and Theo are suspended in their chase to the island; Ubu stands and watches a plane (which one?) approach; Martine's partner Ooda awaits the birth of another child; and the island is poised between stasis and dynamism, tradition and novelty, mandunga and machine, Utopia and History. This lack of closure once again emphasises the indeterminacy of the text, the explicit denial of fixed meanings. The reader is freed from the limbo of textual authority to speculate on his or her own endings to the text. Even as the text ends, this is itself frustrated by the 'Author's Notes and Warnings' section, a kind of false ending. Endings, and their apocalyptic/ eschatological significations, are explicitly avoided. Like the rebels of *Player Piano*, the group of Bookmen in *Fahrenheit 451*, or the protagonists of Dick's and Pohl's dystopias, the protagonists are left in a moment of textual suspension, with the possibilities of utopia, dystopia and apocalypse all still in play.

CHAPTER 4:

THE SECRET MACHINERY OF ARMAGEDDON: MORDECAI ROSHWALD'S

LEVEL 7

Introduction

Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7*, which imagines a superpower confrontation which results

in global destruction, enacted by two parallel underground command bunkers, was

produced from Roshwald's training as a sociologist, a background different from the

professional and science fiction writers found elsewhere in this thesis. David Seed has

suggested that Roshwald's status as an outsider -- he was Polish-born and taught in Israel

and Britain before moving to America -- offered him a peculiarly estranged perspective for

the imagination of dystopia. Roshwald also used the non-fiction essay form to critique

American conformity and organization, and Seed places *Level 7* in this light.[1] The

imagination of a computerised world dovetails with the concerns of other American

dystopias of the 1950s, as I have attempted to show: EPICAC XIV of Vonnegut's *Player*

Piano and EMSIAC of Wolfe's *Limbo* are war-computers whose hegemony continues into

peacetime. *Level 7*'s computer produces the world in secret: it underlies, physically and

metaphorically, the structure of Cold War conflict.

1. Going Underground

Level 7 takes the form of a diary written by Push Button Officer X-127, one of four whose

one and only task is to push the buttons which launch nuclear missiles, and they are

supported by a range of military personnel living in a sealed command centre. On the first

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[1] David Seed, 'Push-Button Holocaust: Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7*', *Foundation* 57 (1993), 68-86 (p. 68).

page of *Level 7*, X-127 writes : 'this diary is being written in dungeons'.[2] The text of the

protagonist (here a diary) is a common dystopian device: Winston Smith's signal act of

rebellion is to begin a handwritten diary in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The diary is a history of

Armageddon, a testament: but for whom? 'Introduction to whom? I ask myself. What

chance is there that the diary will ever see daylight?' (*Level 7* 1). It is the same question

that Winston Smith asks himself, and at the end of Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* the four

remaining rebels drink a toast 'to the record'. The diaries, the toast, are for the future, for

posterity: it is an opportunity for the protagonists to oppose the verities of official

discourse by setting them down. The diary is itself a record, a document for a future

reader. As I have attempted to show in other dystopia's in this thesis, the archive -- the

textual museum as a culture's collective memory and history -- is paradoxically preserved,

even in a system of censorship or book-burning, by the upper echelons of the dystopia's

power elites. X-127's diary, David Seed suggests, is patterned on that of the narrator of

Zamiatin's classic dystopia *We*, and *Level 7*'s own apocalyptic ending complicates the

relationship between reader and text:

> the very possibility of such a reader's existence is brought into question by the
> ending of Roshwald's novel where the narrator dies along with the rest of
> humanity. Not only does the transmission of the narrative become an enigma but
> the novel unsettlingly predicts the reader's own demise.[3]

Unlike Winston Smith's diary in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, X-127's record is not under

erasure, itself not an act of dissent; however, it does narrate his trajectory of estrangement

away from the ideology of the military, patterned as an impulse towards individuation.

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[2] Mordecai Roshwald, *Level 7* (1959) (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1989), p. 1. All further page references will be given in the body of the text.
[3] Seed, p. 70.

The use of the word 'dungeons' signifies the fact that in a post-nuclear war bunker, survival means being sealed in a prison for life. The bunker is a prison, and is also the image of an dystopian ordered society, where names are replaced with numbers (as in Zamiatin's *We*), where life is circumscribed physically and mentally by routine and sealed doors, and where all are under constant surveillance by unseen guards (as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). On the first page of the text one finds the repetition of 'daylight' and 'sunlight': the sun is a key image in *Level 7*. The last phrase of the text runs 'mother sun I I', the sun (punning on son, *the* son, Christ) symbolizing life, nature, and light. It is a symbol of goodness, of the natural world forsaken by the descent into Level 7's hermetically sealed environment, and also of the natural world destroyed by the end of the novel. The sun is also a bleak reference to the light of a nuclear explosion, and it is a leak from Level 7's 'artificial sun', its nuclear reactor, which results in the death of all its inhabitants. This replacement of the natural by the artificial is another strong dystopian motif; like the efficient control systems of *Brave New World* or *Player Piano*, this replacement replicates the replacement of the human by the machine, of natural processes (childbirth, or play) by artificial ones. In *Level 7*, it also suggests the replacement of human feeling with robotic obedience, of conscience by callousness.

The human is present in the Level 7 bunker, and thereby in the chain of command, but as an alibi: there is no conscious decision to be made. In fact, when one of the officers breaks down and refuses to push the last set of launch buttons, he is hauled away and someone else launches the weapons. The officers are, ironically, trained only to push buttons; their actual training is in the excision of empathic feeling toward his (all the Push Button Officers are male) fellow human beings. There is no decision and therefore no

responsibility -- even though one of the officers believes himself to be the greatest mass

murderer who ever lived. This conscience represents a failure of training, the resurfacing

of compassion and guilt signifying the imperfect nature of indoctrination. Even the

formerly cold narrator X-127 finally comes to an understanding of the enormity of his

actions -- but only after he has done them. He overcomes his emotional autism at the cost

of the murder of billions of people, and this lack of empathy is why he is a Push Button

Officer.

On the second page of *Level 7*, X-127 describes his commanding officer (the only visible

figure of authority in the text):

> he was always obeyed, but seldom respected; and never treated as a friend. Our
> attitude probably resembled that of a bunch of privileged officer-cadets under a
> veteran sergeant who ruled as a god on the parade ground but with whom they
> would not dream of associating with in private (*Level 7* 2).

The hierarchical system of the Army engenders classism, elitism, and a belief in the

dispensability of inferiors. Paradoxically, in the world of Level 7 to be promoted is to

descend, a sign of Roshwald's play with spatial metaphors and up/ down oppositions in

Level 7. X-127 also states that their trainers were 'inferior to us in technical education, in

I.Q. and - so we thought - in his indispensability for modern warfare' (*Level 7* 2). The

system of levels that structure the text is replicated in the aristocratic -- or perhaps

technocratic -- indoctrination of the Army, and in the actual hierarchical system of the

military itself. The Army becomes a symbol of the way in which society is organized:

rigidly hierarchical, power moving in a downward direction only, its personnel brutalized

and de-humanized (in the text's liberal sense of removal of feeling/empathy). This creates

the conditions for obedience to orders of mass destruction: moral/ethical concerns have

been erased. The military discourse is one of superiority: the objectives of military

strategy are implied to be both impenetrable to the untrained mind, and of overriding importance. The priority of military discourse over civilian (or human*ist*) discourse is one that excludes and denigrates opposition on the grounds of competence -- that is to say, on technical grounds -- while reinforcing its position of power.

The creation of the 'robotic' Push Button Officers is analogous to the construction of a mass society which cannot analyze or criticize these developments, as C. Wright Mills suggested happened in the United States in the 1950s. The destruction or negation of the individual is the means of creating ideological uniformity. Without the individual, ethical judgement and political conscience, the safeguards to tyrannical power in the theory of liberal democracy, are eliminated. When he is posted to Level 7, X-127 must leave his old life at once, and he rationalizes this by lauding his training: 'One purpose of a military training is to accustom you to obey orders without asking questions' (*Level 7* 4). Obviously, to obey orders is the *only* purpose. It destroys the human system of ethical judgement, which the text codes in opposition to the mechanic instrumentalism of X-127, and the Army in general. It later emerges that X-127 will never leave the station even if there is no war, and that his relatives have been told that he is dead. He is treated as an object, an unthinking machine, which is what he has been trained to be. The emphasis on X-127's serial nomenclature and his status as a 'Push Button Officer' suggests that he has been as mechanized as his environment. Where the mechanization of life in *Player Piano* led directly to the replacement of the human, in *Fahrenheit 451* to an abstraction of the body and self-alienation, and in *Limbo* to a cyborgization of the body, in *Level 7* the protagonist becomes a metaphorical robot, literally programmed to carry out his orders. Carolyn Wendell emphasises the pervasiveness of the metaphor of push-button:

> Button pushing [...] becomes an appropriate metaphor for the society and its dwellers, who neither act nor feel. Instead, they push buttons to communicate, to propose marriage and to marry, to ask for help when ill, to vote on world affairs.[4]

All actions, including those which result in millions of deaths, are reduced to one, button pushing, just as the totalitarian state attempts to erase difference. X-127 has, in effect, been abducted, disappeared: like Winston Smith, made unperson. Level 7 is a place of detention; it is, in fact, the perfect prison. No-one is able to leave, and they have been indoctrinated to believe that no-one will want to leave. When nuclear war occurs, the outside world is destroyed, erased; the ideal prison is one in a wasteland, where escape itself means death.

X-127 narrates a spatial journey across a 'barren territory' to get to Level 7. This is a symbolic wasteland, prefiguring the nuclear apocalypse to come; and it is the spatial/temporal hiatus of the utopian zone, the unmapped space: 'I had never seen [it] before' (*Level 7* 5). His removal from the continuum of history is analogous to the shipwreck of the *voyage imaginaire*, or the sleep of William Morris's Guest in *News From Nowhere*, creating the textual space of utopia (and dystopia), the space of imagination; and also Winston Smith's job of excising the politically undesirable from history in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This again shows the level of formal self-consciousness at work in the text. It also allows the societal reconfiguration which structures the utopian/dystopian text. Here, as in Zamiatin's *We*, society is reconstructed under serial nomenclature. The erasure of names is again an attempt to erase the personal, the significations of feeling or empathy. X-127 and his colleagues are removed physically from society, but must also be dislocated

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[4] Carolyn Wendell, 'The Death of the Heart in *Level 7*' in *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World*, ed. by Carl B. Yoke (New York, Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 117-124 (p. 121).

from the structures and codes of civilian life. They are told: "'you will find new friends

and create new families'" (*Level 7* 18), a phrase which has ominous overtones of New

Orders, and the obsessions with purity, elitism and separation which dominate Fascist

discourse -- as I shall explore further below in Gabriel Tarde's *Underground Man* (1905).

2. Technologies of Control: the Mechanization of Life

As in *Player Piano*, the world of *Level 7* is constructed and controlled along mechanical

lines. Level 7 itself is automated and artificial. The artificiality and fabrication of Level

7's, and X-127's, ideology is represented in spatial terms. As I suggested in my

Introduction, the physical environment of the bunker signifies a spatialization of ideology,

the physical structure of X-127's world exposing the dictates of security and exclusion

which maintain the Cold War conflict. Life is automated: the inhabitants of Level 7 are

designated by numbers and are metaphorical 'robots'; the food process is mechanized, and

while the 'synthetic multi-purpose food' is a familiar SF device, the regulation of the

domestic arrangements is reminiscent of the refectory scenes in B. F. Skinner's 1948

utopia, *Walden Two*. The automation of domestic life and the communalization of

mealtimes are also signal features of dystopia: there are several scenes in *Nineteen Eighty-*

Four, for example, where Winston Smith has to endure the oppressive company of his

colleagues at mealtimes. This signifies the erasure of privacy in the dystopian text, for

even mealtimes must be specularized, placed under the controlling gaze of fellow human

beings. Erasure of privacy becomes a principle of control. X-127 is surprised to find out

that his living arrangements -- sharing a bedroom and shower with one other Officer -- is a

position of status and privilege. Others sleep in dormitories and must share one shower

among fifty. X-127 rationalizes this by asserting: 'it must have been the sheer sweat of

building *anything* down here which accounted for the fact that his bed-living-room was

made so small'(*Level 7* 11). This may be so -- even though the privileging of technical

explanations is indicative of X-127's mechanized mind -- but the erasure of space

emphasises the military and carceral aspects of life. To cramp and deny space is to squeeze

out leisure, to restrict the personnel in their habits and choices outside that of the strictly

military.

There are loudspeakers in every room, loudspeakers which issue orders, and which listen

in to the conversations of Level 7's personnel. This is a direct analogue of the telescreens

in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: the call of '"Attention, please, attention!"' (*Level 7* 12)

reproduces the announcements of Minitrue. X-127 suggests: 'There must be a system of

supervision which enables the command to hear what we say even in the "privacy" of our

own rooms' (*Level 7* 22). Although there must be a human operative of the loudspeakers,

X-127 never encounters anyone with such a designation on their badge; similarly, the

orders he receives in the PBX Operations Room are entirely disembodied. A suggestion of

visual as well as aural surveillance is made when X-127 discusses the fail-safe nature of

the system of Level 7: 'anybody walking up to the door appears on the screen of an

anonymous watcher' (*Level 7* 35). The figure, the physical body of authority is entirely,

and one must assume, deliberately absent. For the system of control to be total, the

embodiment of authority must be removed. Control is constructed through surveillance:

the gaze of others and the intrusion of the microphones. The setting up of the system of

surveillance relies upon the internalization of control to be maintained. Michel Foucault's

illuminating use of the image of the Panopticon, a circular prison with transparent cells

open at all times to the examining gaze of the wardens, emphasises the dual play of forces

upon the prisoner: 'the gaze, and interiorization'.[5] The gaze must be internalized so that, in

effect, the prisoner controls himself or herself. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a system of

circulating surveillance exists to ensure the control of the citizens/personnel of dystopia.

Level 7 is a prison: X-127 realizes this when he writes, 'I had some questions I felt like

asking -- notably, whether a man condemned to solitary confinement but allowed to

hammer his head against the wall could be called free' (*Level 7* 61).

The dystopian society of *Level 7* therefore is both prison and miniature totalized state.

Foucault's argues that power and control become depersonalized, removed from the body

of authority:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes
> responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously
> upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he
> simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.[6]

The principle of control consists in the removal of the outward signs of control:

responsibility is shifted from those at the top of the hierarchy to those who must carry out

their orders. Thus, X-127 must press the buttons in the PBX Operations Room, even

though he is technically unnecessary. The system of control operates to conceal the true

centres of power. The idea of deterministic Cold War confrontation is an ideological alibi

for military domination; in the same way, the removal of the signs of authority attempts to

conceal the sites of power and control. At the end of *Level 7*, it is revealed that nuclear war

arrives by technological accident. This is another alibi; the order to fire may have been

given by computer, and X-127 may have pushed the buttons automatically, but the orders

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[5] Michel Foucault, 'The Eye of Power', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972 - 1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, trans. by Colin Gordon *et al* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 146-165, (p. 154).

[6] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (1975) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 203.

to make nuclear weapons, build Level 7, and pursue superpower confrontation were made

by a human being. It is this very erasure (or simulated erasure) of human decision which

Level 7 criticises.

X-127 himself is prey to this ideological deferral of responsibility: 'my colleague and I do

not decide which button to push' (*Level 7* 21). Unlike his fellow Push Button Officer X-

117, he does not consider himself a mass-murderer even at the end, though he sympathises

with his colleague's tortured conscience. David Seed correctly identifies the irony in X-

127's reaction: 'the brief glimpse of [X-117's] corpse has a far greater humanising impact

on X-127 than the idea that he participated in the slaughter of millions'.[7] The defender and

rationalizer of the system of Level 7 in the text is X-107, X-127's room-mate. The

dialogues between the two (X-127 as Stranger, X-107 as Guide) replicate the form of

Utopian discourse. Explanations for the way in which the society operates are given by X-

107, who is an instrumentalist, a rationalist. Like Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*, X-107

believes this to be the best of all possible worlds (a phrase which actually appears on page

43 of *Level 7*), and that they must make the best of their lot. As X-127 states: 'we usually

arrive at the conclusion that arrangements on Level 7 have been made in the best of all

possible ways. Any alternative arrangements which we think up turn out, on examination,

to be less perfect' (*Level 7* 34). Under this rationale, Level 7 becomes the ideal of an

automated Utopia, their conformism transforming their prison into utopia through the

admiration of technical ingenuity. They are circumscribed and unfree, but applaud the

system which has created the conditions of their subjection. Unlike the mechanized state

of *Player Piano*, the Fireman-state of *Fahrenheit 451*, or Immob of *Limbo* there seems to

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[7] Seed, p. 80.

be no sustaining and Utopian ideology in *Level 7*. The systems of control in those texts are in the service of ideals of order, efficiency or peace; *Level 7* is patterned on the typical techno-utopia of efficiency and scientific advance, as is *Player Piano*, but X-107's panegyrics to the bunker's rational planning and mechanized environment are the only ideological justifications provided. In fact, the denizens of Level 7 attempt to construct their own myths and ideals, their own ideological justifications, for their subjection.

X-107 declares: "'To achieve all this is nothing less than a miracle of human ingenuity and scientific progress'" (*Level 7* 44). Those minds in the service of a technical rationality (who have internalized the ideology of technology, war, domination, and suffering) defend their enforced lack on technical grounds. X-107 says "'would you rather starve in a library?'" (44), to justify the lack of cultural artefacts in Level 7, but it is that choice which is false, and one which exposes military priorities and the state ideology. The human being is reduced to his or her role in the functioning of technocratic society. As in other anti-utopias, the erasure of culture is allied to the domination and alienation of the human subjects. As there is no culture in Level 7 other than the endlessly circulating music tapes, the personnel have to create their own: R-747's mythic narratives, and X-127's own diary. X-107 suggests that some people "'can feel free in a small room, if they are able to think or write'" (24). This is the motive for X-127's diary, just as it was for Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Freedom is signified as valuable in the structure of the text through the diary itself: it opposes the regimen, the technical instrumentalism, and the mechanic obedience of Level 7's system. Unlike Winston Smith, X-127 is allowed to think, but he is not allowed to act.

Technology in *Level 7* becomes the machinery of control. The key images of the machine

are that of the loudspeaker (surveillance and orders); the nuclear weapons system

(catastrophe/death); the system of Level 7 itself (mechanistic, dehumanized structure); the

very personnel themselves (the type of the alienated individual); and the button, a

metonym of automation. Technology is in the hands of the power elite and is used against

the denizens of Level 7, and also against the civilian world, which is destroyed. As in

other dystopias the image of the machine is malign; it is placed in contradistinction to that

of the human, the emotional, the empathic, the loving. It colonizes the human and natural,

replacing them with the mechanistic and artificial. The domination of the machine in *Level

7* is total: X-127's rediscovery of emotions within himself only occurs as he, and the

world, are dying.

When, like X-117, he begins to display signs of discontent (in other words, humanity), he

is treated as ill, and brainwashed into passive 'health'. The coding of the protagonist's

rebellion as illness is, as I have shown, a strong dystopian motif, such as Montag's

alienation from the state in *Fahrenheit 451*. X-117 falls 'ill', and his own analysis of his

physical symptoms -- 'a punishment from 'above' for his readiness to push buttons and

destroy the world' (*Level 7* 58) -- is a rationalization of his body's paradoxical refusal to

act: the act of obedience. The psychologist P-867 would rather see his symptoms not as

rebellion, but the manifestation of deep-seated emotional problems. Freudian analysis

(represented in a crude and stylized caricature) is itself an instrument of repression in

Level 7, its emphasis on the latent content of behaviour itself concealing the ideologically

unacceptable manifest explanations. Throughout the text one finds the repeated

significations of levels: physical, mental, (inter)textual. This also links to the political

analysis of superpower conflict: that the machinery of war is hidden beneath the surface of everyday life.

3. The Metaphor of Levels ·

The denizens of Level 7 are given lectures upon the functioning of, and ideological justification for, their state. A philosopher, Ph-107, discourses on democracy: Level 7, he claims, is the purest democracy because people take orders from an anonymous source -- 'impersonal commands' -- which represents the will of the people -- 'the supra-personal personification of us all' (*Level 7* 50). Thus, the system of control outlined above as Panopticism is used, ironically, to negate any wishes for democracy or questioning. Ph-107 argues, '"Don't we all, implicitly or explicitly, agree with each command we receive?"' (51). This is spurious, not least because the 'citizens' of Level 7 have been chosen specifically because they have no will, and will obey any order. The democracy outlined here is dictatorship in another guise, at another level.

The diary format includes many other voices than X-127's own: the rationality of X-107; the propaganda of Ph-107; the cod-Freudian psychology of P-867; and K-117's anxieties, which come to be mirrored in X-127's own doubts and fears. Both David Dowling and David Seed have identified this plurality of voices as central to *Level 7*'s textual fabric. David Dowling suggests that '[t]he varieties of language in the book, from the speeches which come through the loudspeakers to the narrator's low-keyed reporting, indicate the various frameworks of response available to the survivor'.[8] From the beginning the play of voices, of discourses, positions both the protagonist and the reader. X-127's ironization of,

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[8] David Dowling, *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p. 66.

and eventual alienation from, the discourses of Ph-107 and X-107 (their identical numbers

signifying their roles as apologists) signifies his growing estrangement from the ideology

of Level 7. As I have previously suggested, this variety of languages or discourses, this

heteroglossia in Bakhtin's term, itself opposes the monological official discourse. In

setting down his diary, X-127 has attempted to 'write utopia', to do what Tom Moylan

called 'the most utopian of actions within literary discourse'.[9]

X-127 has, in fact, been questioning the operations of the state all along, and his diary is in

its very existence a challenge to the imperatives which brought him to, and sealed him

forever into, the Level 7 bunker. The diary suggests, as does Winston Smith's, an

individual resistance to the organization and institutionalization of his everyday life. As

early as his second day in Level 7 (the entry for March 23) X-127 asks, rhetorically,

"'Why the hell did they pick me for training as a push button officer'", implying an

alienation or dissatisfaction with the way he has been treated (*Level 7* 21). He also takes

secret satisfaction in the failure of the operations of the mechanized environment: "'So the

arrangements on Level 7 are *not* perfect, after all!'" he writes, somewhat delightedly (65).

The text maps a path of discovery for the protagonist: the narrative exposes X-127's

journey from pure instrument, through doubt, self-pity and self-realization, to empathy

with the suffering of others, and finally love of humanity, albeit too late. This journey is

not an easy one: immediately before his role in pushing the buttons which launch the

missiles, there is a week's gap in his diary entries, a blank space which signifies his

'madness', a psychological disintegration brought about by the life in the bunker. X-127,

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[9] Tom Moylan, *Demand The Impossible* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 39.

by his own admission, had been going insane, though perhaps one should read this as

going *sane* in the inverted world of *Level 7*. The week's gap in the text represents X-127's

time being 'reconditioned' by the 'psychology department', an attempt (which succeeds

temporarily) to restore the training which rendered him a moral automaton. Once again in

a dystopia of the 1950s the individual is placed in opposition to the control systems of the

state, revealing an ideological commitment to the discovery and maintenance of selfhood

as a means of both understanding and resisting uniformity and oppression. His path

towards individuation *is* an expression of his alienation from the ideology of Level 7, one

that attempts to manufacture and maintain human 'robots' to unquestioningly carry out the

orders for global destruction. X-127's own realization that he is more than an instrument

comes soon after X-117's breakdown: 'I can pity myself and torment myself, and an

electronic gadget cannot do that' (*Level 7* 57). Importantly, X-127 finally understands the

disjunction between himself and a machine. This self-discovery is also a realization of

pain. One might want to type X-127's mental journey as a discovery of levels within

himself, a metaphorical 'underground' within that is alienated from, and in fact desires to

rebel against, the situation he is in. This replicates the significations of levels, as we see in

the title, the hierarchical structure of power and discourse imposed by the military, the

latent/manifest dyad of Freudian analysis, and the layering of voices within the text (text

as diary, diary as text).

Another level of discourse is the new myths which X-127 and R-747 attempt to create.

David Seed argues that these suggest 'that there is no supporting myth which can make

sense of this new world and that is why one of the operatives composes a story which

attempts to mythologise the new dispensation'.[10] They are at once metafictional devices

(exposing the levels of text and intertext, the mythic material which itself informs *Level*

7); making an argument about the pervasiveness of myth, and its manipulability for

ideological ends; and reflecting the human need to tell each other stories (again reflecting

on the textual status of the diary, which is X-127 telling a narrative to himself). X-127

creates a story outside the diegetic frame of the narrative -- 'The Story of the Mushroom' -

- and then inserts it into the main body of the narrative. This again foregrounds the sense

of textual construction, of the self-reflexivity of *Level 7*. The 'Story of the Mushroom' is

intended by X-127 to be a new pedagogic tale for future inhabitants of Level 7. At another

level -- one the reader will be able to decode -- it becomes an anti-nuclear weapon parable.

It describes the horror of humankind's presumptions of power, and exposes how

destructive -- and ultimately self-destructive -- the human race is. Unlike R-747's

cautionary tale, whose 'moral' is simple, The 'Story of the Mushroom' represents nuclear

power as a corruption of the natural, and becomes a parable of technical apocalypse. It is

almost a rehearsal of the narrative of *Level 7* in miniature: a self-reflexive tale *en abyme*.

'Seven levels down is the physical limit. How many can the spirit endure?' (*Level 7* 80).

The physical levels become an explicit textual coding of the metaphorical dimensions of

Level 7: mental, spiritual, political. The structure of levels is as much symbolic as

physical and spatial. Before the war starts, the personnel are given lectures on the other

levels, which, again, is a way of narrating information in the Utopian form of Guide and

Stranger. Level 7 is the offensive military capability; Level 6 the defensive. Level 5 is for

the Power Elite -- 'top administrators, scientists, politicians, ex-generals [...] and their

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[10] Seed, p. 79.

families' (*Level 7* 100); Levels 4 and 3 are for lesser apparatchiks, technicians, and other elite personnel. Survival depends on depth: only those in these zones have any possibility of surviving a nuclear war. Levels 2 and 1 '"are too close to the surface to resist an all-out enemy attack"' (*Level 7* 107). These are the public shelters, but when the war occurs few have been built. The text clearly exposes the dispensability of the civilian population in the logic of the military. These shelters are in fact ideological alibis for the survival strategies of the military-techno-political power elites. X-127 comes to an understanding that they are simply propaganda: 'they will mislead the safety-seeking masses into supposing they can find it from ten to a hundred feet underground!' (*Level 7* 108). The upper levels are a deception to conceal the facts of survival, that only for those deep underground -- in the levels held exclusively by the elites -- will there be a chance of life. There are, then, other levels here, of information and disinformation. X-127 and his colleagues in Level 7 are allowed access to this information because it will reinforce their sense of privilege and status; but also because they are sealed in, and the military imperatives of secrecy cannot be endangered.

The metaphorical aspects of life underground have a clear provenance in the circles of Dante's *Inferno*, and in the dystopian tradition in Wells's *The Time Machine*, with its spatialization of power, which finds its echo in Philip K. Dick's *The Penultimate Truth* (see chapter 6). In the 1950s, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* also uses this metaphor to signal alienation and exclusion. The first part of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, narrated by a man self-excluded from the mainstream of society, is an invective against the dictates of Reason, and what seems to be the utopian impulse, characterized as the desire to build the 'Palace of Crystal'. This (nameless) Underground

Man suggests that 'there is no guaranteeing [...] that it will not be, for instance, frightfully dull then (for what will one have to do when everything is calculated and tabulated), but on the other hand everything will be extraordinarily rational'.[11] Humanity, he suggests, is a creature not of Reason but of will: 'one may choose what is contrary to one's own interests, and sometimes one *positively ought*'.[12] Individual will and choice are primary: reason and order (signified by the metaphor of mathematics, as in Zamiatin's *We*) are impositions upon it. The 'underground' then becomes the (hidden or unseen) forces of unreason that will inevitably break up the projects of utopia, as we have seen in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Limbo*, where nuclear war destabilises or destroys the totalized state. The Underground Man's insistence on the will of the individual explicitly opposes the logic and rationality of the technological utopia with the irrepressible irrationality of the human being. In the dystopias of the 1950s, this emphasis on human will becomes the ideological importance of human liberty and a privileging of selfhood above the uniform mass.

The Underground Man also declares that '[e]very decent man of our age must be a coward and a slave. That is his normal condition. Of that I am firmly persuaded. He is made and constructed to this very end'.[13] X-127 *is* a coward in that he is complicit in the malign ideology of the warfare state, and *Level 7* in part narrates the discovery of his own 'underground' feelings of dissent. He, and all the other 'numbers' and Push Button Officers of Level 7 are certainly as slaves, unable to leave their bunker, having internalized the rationale for their subjection, deliberately constructed to be mechanically

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[11] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Undergound* (1864), trans. by Constance Garnett, ed. by Philip Smith (New York: Dover, 1992), p. 17.

[12] Dostoevsky, p. 17.

[13] Dostoevsky, p. 31.

obedient. X-127 may be, in the Underground Man's phrase, a 'piano key', a machine to be

played upon (in a fascinating precursor of Vonnegut), but his discovery of his own

individuality and will, figured through his diary, also suggests that even such careful

conditioning as that undergone by X-127 cannot prevent his ultimate alienation from the

system.

The departure of the human race underground is prefigured in an early 20th century utopia

by Gabriel de Tarde, Underground Man.[14] In this text, the catastrophic cooling of the

Earth (some kind of cosmic cataclysm sweeping away a decadent older -- capitalist --

civilization, and creating the space for the imagination of utopia) results in the moving

underground of the remnants of (Western) civilization, and the construction of a utopian

realm. In one sense, Underground Man is a typical technological Utopia in its ideological

reliance on humanity's domination and exploitation of nature and its assumptions about

human adaptability and will to survive. Underground Man becomes a technological

Cockaygne, with all wants provided by the 'conquest of nature'. Its ideological premises

align the text with an elitist and racist ideology which justifies the exclusion of Chinese

'savages', the 'purification of society', the escaping of the 'flood of civilization' ('flood'

being a word which constantly reappears in Fascist discourse), and the maintenance of

despotism and hero-worship. It is a Utopia which finds its mirror-image in Nineteen

Eighty-Four and Brave New World, and of course, Level 7. It clearly illuminates the

dystopian practice of Level 7, and its reversals of the Western mythic location of death (the

land underground) expose Level 7's own intertexts. Dante's Divine Comedy, with

Inferno's system of circles and levels, is an obvious precursor. The seventh circle of Hell

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[14] Gabriel Tarde, Underground Man (1905) (Westport CT: Hyperion, 1974).

is that of the Violent: against others, against the self, and against God. As Level 7 is the

command centre for the Earth's violent end, this intertext illuminates how the mythos of

underground and death informs Roshwald's text. X-127 himself introduces intertexts to

analyze and situate Level 7's position in literary discourse: 'Is not Level 7 a sort of Hades

or Sheol where being is dimmed to half-being, at best?' (*Level 7* 16). Self-consciousness

about literary forebears therefore extends to the diegetic level: a game of knowledge is

played out between text and reader, between X-127 and his projected diary-reader.

4. The Discourses of Security and Secrecy

The nuclear command centre of Level 7 is shrouded in secrecy; X-127 and his fellow

Push Button Officers are the secret machines which administer the brief nuclear war. X-

127 pushes buttons when ordered to by the disembodied voice of authority, as if typing on

a typewriter, or to use a contemporary analogy, playing a video game. Death and war are

specularized. X-127 gets pleasure from watching the graphics of destruction:

> Aesthetically the picture was quite pleasing. Red blobs and blue and yellow spots,
> some on the red blobs and some outside them. But the colour was still restricted to
> Zone A. The *other zones remained white, like a continent waiting for an explorer*
> to map it (*Level 7* 118).

This stylized play of spots and blobs, couched in the metaphor of spatial domination that

informs many of the dystopias in this thesis, emphasises X-127's almost childlike

appreciation of the 'game' he is playing and his unawareness, or perhaps suppression of

the knowledge, of its consequences. War in this scenario becomes banal, merely the

interaction of a person and a VDU, the relationship of spectator and abstract visual event.

War becomes a simulation, following Jean Baudrillard's use of the term: it becomes a

sign-system which has no relation to any real-world referent. It also becomes divorced

from moral considerations in this abstraction. Perhaps the only way that even the alienated

and non-empathic Push Button Officers can destroy millions of people is to have their actions reduced to the status of a routine, a spectacle, a game.

Later it emerges that the war began by accident, although at first, X-127 responds to their enemy's protestations that their 'first strike' had been a 'technical mishap' with archetypal Cold War rhetoric: 'a treacherous attempt by the enemy'; 'his viciousness was beyond reasoning with'; the 'atrocious extremes the enemy was likely to go [to]' (*Level 7* 123;124). This again signifies *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as intertext: the discourse of war is the same, be it between Oceania and Eurasia/Eastasia, or the US and USSR. The talk of 'atrocious extremes' also masks levels of discourse: the extremes to which X-127's own side will go once the process of nuclear warfare has been engaged.

X-127 is startled to hear that the nuclear exchange was started by accident. The passage where an explanation is given for this is worth analysing at length:

> [The speaker] went on to explain that for safety's sake we had not relied entirely on our leaders, who, being human, were subject to human weakness and fallibility and could be sick, meet with accidents and what not. Certainly they *could* have given an order to attack, but in fact they did *not* issue such an order. It was done by a mysterious gadget called an atomphone (*Level 7* 126).

Just as two Push Button Officers are required in the PBX Operations Room to push the buttons simultaneously, the decision for war cannot be entrusted to any one person, or group of persons. The human element, which is paradoxically present in Level 7 even though it is technically redundant, is completely distrusted. As in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, the computer/machine is invested with responsibility because of the perceived fallibility of human beings, and the machine becomes, by implication, infallible in its automatic reactions. X-127 is shocked to hear that a machine has given the order to launch

the missiles: even he needed an ideology of human control and decision in order to carry out his function.

The automation of the machinery of war represents *Level 7*'s analysis of the superpower conflict. Merritt Abrash defines Level 7 as 'the ultimate refinement of deterrence as a logically foolproof system'.[15] Abrash interprets this decision to remove the possibility of human 'physical, mental or emotional aberrations' as entirely consistent with the logic of deterrence: the structure itself becomes entrusted with maintaining the peaceful balance, and 'nothing can defuse it short of alteration of the system to a point where the logic no longer applies'.[16] Abrash seems to suggest that the scenario of accidental nuclear war is itself part of the logic of deterrence, and that once the breakdown has occurred, '[t]he rest is predictable [...] in a few weeks no one is left alive except the inhabitants of Level 7 and its enemy counterpart'.[17] However, by making the first cause of war a technical accident, *Level 7* runs the risk of absolving humanity from responsibility for its occurrence. It would then become simply the logical endpoint of the structure of superpower confrontation.

5. Apocalypse and After

The diary form of *Level 7* splits the narrative into units of days. This is itself arbitrary and artificial, because in a completely controlled environment, the diurnal cycle is of little consequence. In fact this is made clear by the Push Button Officers' 24-hour, 4-shift regimen, and the privacy arrangements between married couples: 'down here "day" and

[15] Merritt Abrash, 'Through Logic to Apocalypse: Science Fiction Scenarios of Nuclear Deterrence Breakdown', *Science Fiction Studies*, 13:39 (July 1986), 129-138 (p. 132).
[16] Abrash, 'Through Logic to Apocalypse', p. 132; p. 129.
[17] Abrash, 'Through Logic to Apocalypse', p. 132.

"night" mean very little' (*Level 7* 90). However, X-127 still clings to the forms of human time-structure that exist above ground: even a 'robot' (*as* Martha A. Bartter calls him) needs the habit of chronological time to function. Part of the diary -- between July 3 and September 11 -- is missing: it has been torn out by P-867. This signifies the fragility of the textual artefact and, once again, that the text is threatening to the structures of control in its very existence.

Another time-marker is the dream of 500 years. In it, X-127 imagines himself to be inside the effluent tank, and the signs indicate the projected duration of Level 7's existence. The text links 'the smell, the pit, the 500 years' (*Level 7* 34), which seems to signify that X-127 imagines Level 7 to be an excremental hell. Rather than an underground Eden, the space of Level 7 becomes a half-millennium of ordure. X-127 is, in fact, obsessed with time, by shifts, days, by the 500 years, by the half-hour of recreational time he gets in the lounge. The mechanic system of Level 7 erases time, turns the *kairos* -- significant time -- of waiting for the end into *chronos* -- pure duration.

I derive these terms from Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. In this text, Kermode suggests that narrative is produced by the human desire for endings. He writes:

> The physician Alkmeon observed, with Aristotle's approval, that men die because they cannot join the beginning and the end. What they, the dying men, can do is to imagine a significance for themselves in these unremembered but imaginable events.[18]

Kermode suggests that narration is a means of transforming *chronos* into *kairos*, a way of producing meaning. If one takes this to be the case, then the *voyage imaginaire* that X-127

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[18] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 4.

narrates for himself is an attempt to discover the meaning of his existence in Level 7. The dream of 500 years is an attempt to find an ending, an end-point, to X-127's own seemingly endless and identical routine. This places X-127 in a rather different position to the ascribed him by Carolyn Wendell: '[e]ven the narrator is only marginally and occasionally sympathetic, and he is certainly never very interesting as an individual'.[19] I would suggest that this misses the point: X-127 is a mechanical being at the beginning of the text, and he narrates his own internal journey, a quest for meaning and individuation, which is only achieved when he becomes the Last Man. This reading is borne out by the last word of the text: 'I'. He becomes a human being (in the ideology of the text, one who feels) in his last thoughts, though the process of questioning the dominant ideology is implied by his act of writing the diary. His diary, his narrative, is an attempt to turn the *chronos* of his existence into *kairos*. Ironically, this can only be done by the onset of nuclear war, for this is the only thing that can provide meaning to his role as Push Button Officer.

The formal problem of transmission of *Last Man* texts, at issue in *Level 7*, is illuminated by another of Kermode's suggestions. He states: 'We project ourselves -- a small, humble elect, perhaps -- past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle'.[20] What status does the text ascribe to itself, and in what position do we find ourselves as readers? Other texts avoid this impasse by narrating in the third person, or by positing an alien intelligence as meta-textual editor; *Level 7* is left in a post-apocalyptic textual limbo. The text must assume some status as a surviving found object, which places the readers as ourselves survivors of the apocalyptic moment.

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[19] Wendell, p. 117.
[20] Kermode, p. 8.

If we follow Kermode, then the narration of the Last Man becomes a way of perceiving

the structure of the superpower conflict, a means of narrating oneself out of the

oppositional logic of deterrence. It is only then -- as Merritt Abrash suggests, 'only in the

process of creating fiction about the logic of nuclear war can the logic [of deterrence] be

traced' -- that we may see its madness.[21] In *The Way to Ground Zero*, Martha A. Bartter

writes:

> Contemporary writers have no trouble picturing Armageddon but do not show it
> followed by a thousand years of love and peace enjoyed by a redeemed elect.
> Instead, they either explore ways to control human nature and thus continue the
> (temporary) avoidance of nuclear holocaust, or they show a secular Armageddon
> that leaves survivors (if any) in a degraded Eden where unredeemed human nature
> will continue in a downward spiral.[22]

In fact, many of the dystopias in this thesis do have trouble picturing Armageddon, and

use nuclear war as a structural gap between the time of its production and the putative

'historical' time of the narrative in the near future. As I suggested in my Introduction, the

apocalyptic moment in dystopia usually opens the space for the imagination either of the

dystopian society or the possibility of a new dispensation, a reconstructed world after the

fall of tyranny. *Level 7* is unlike the other dystopias in its imagination of the end of the

world; as there is no possibility of rebirth or regeneration, for humanity has perished along

with the Earth. As we can see, *Level 7* is not a text which posits some kind of perpetuation

of humanity after the catastrophe. X-127 is indeed the Last Man, although an 'other' is

suggested as the (implied) reader of his diary.

W. Warren Wagar, in *Terminal Visions*, defines eschatological fictions along the Christian

model: that of a 'pre-heavenly utopia', an apocalyptic moment (Day of Judgement), and

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[21] Abrash, 'Through Logic to Apocalypse', p. 130.
[22] Martha A. Bartter, *The Way to Ground Zero: The Atom Bomb in American Science Fiction* (New York, Westport CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 214.

the reign of the Kingdom of Heaven.[23] As we saw above, Tarde's *Underground Man*

adhered to this structure. This would suggest, then, that both Utopian/Dystopian texts and

the imagination of 'Last Things' is a Western, Christian one. Krishan Kumar, in *Utopia*

and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times, does in fact argue that the Utopian form is one that is

derived from Christian mythology. Kumar argues that atomic/nuclear terminal fictions are

patterned upon the eschatological structures of religious thought. Although he types such

'terminal' fictions as 'secular eschatology', and asserts that these ignore 'religious belief

or puts the old visions to use as metaphors for modern anxiety', one wonders how these

secular Endings can at once be infused by (Biblical) codings of the End and also maintain

their 'secular' status.[24] For if they mirror the structure of religious apocalypse, then the

argument can be made that they do not signify a particular and culturally specific anxiety,

but replicate a mythic type which patterns these narratives.

Gary K. Wolfe's writing on texts of nuclear war reflects this very argument. He

acknowledges that 'nuclear holocaust certainly was a favourite theme in the 1950s', but

reduces this theme to a structural device.[25] He argues that the resemblances between texts

of nuclear Armageddon, and those of other types of catastrophe, (such as a natural

disaster, plague, or cosmic catastrophe), show the nuclear war scenario to be a formal

estrangement device, a way for the science-fiction text to explore the structures of our

own world through the technique of defamiliarization. Wolfe is surely correct in this

assertion. *Level 7*, as I have argued, exposes the discourses of security and deterrence

through its fictive scenario of nuclear war. However, to reduce the atomic/nuclear war

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[23] W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 7.
[24] Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 4.
[25] Gary K. Wolfe, *The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 126.

texts to merely a subset of eschatological visions (or estrangement devices) undermines and underestimates the ways in which these texts expose the structures of American political, economic and cultural life in Fifties America. They would become types, universalized, not fictions grounded in the reality of the Cold War.

Patrick Mannix, in his *The Rhetoric of Anti-Nuclear Fiction*, argues that 'life on Level 7 is symbolic of life in a country armed with nuclear weapons', and that '[l]ike Level 7 the nuclear strategic balance has become the environment in which we live our lives'.[26] His reading of the text sites *Level 7* in the structures of cultural discourse, the 'official definitions of reality', which themselves created the conditions of nuclear fear. Mannix continues, 'If we accept the idea that Level 7 is a symbol of our own world, we may begin to see how the debilitating effects of Level 7 on its inhabitants parallel the impact of MAD on us'.[27] While it is equally undesirable to attempt to posit too direct a relation between texts of nuclear war -- such as *Level 7* -- and the 'real' conditions of the Cold War, the utopian and dystopian form operates by imagining estranged versions of the contemporaneous 'real', and its focus alters in reaction to changing social forces and anxieties. Wagar in fact acknowledges this to be the case when he writes of 'the profound effect of the First and Second world wars and the US -- Soviet Cold War on the apocalyptic imagination';[28] and the quotation I offered from Wolfe above supports this reading. It is something of a paradox, then, that they both attempt to sever this connection by asserting a predominantly structural or formal significance.

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[26] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Anti-Nuclear Fiction: Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 99.
[27] Mannix, p. 100
[28] Mannix, p. 110

The post-apocalyptic world in *Level 7* is explored not by X-127, but by two people nearer

the surface, who sacrifice themselves to send back reports of the devastation. Ironically,

they are heard by radio, the medium which allowed spying on the personnel of Level 7,

and the device which gave the order for war to begin. Radio transforms from the

technology of domination to the technology of communication. In the same way, Level 7

keeps in touch with fellow survivors by radio until they, too, begin to die. The couple

become explorers: the surface is a true waste-land, all signs of humanity erased but a

twisted steel frame and the tarmacadam road. The Green World of Zamiatin's *We*, or the

natural world of *Fahrenheit 451* is no longer available as a space of opposition to, or

escape from, the control systems of dystopia. The 'explorers' send their bulletins back

from 'Another planet' (*Level 7* 154) -- not *Terra Incognita*, but *Terra Morta*. '[T]here is

so little to report. Complete destruction is complete destruction' (*Level 7* 151). David

Seed illuminates the apocalyptic resonance of these scenes by describing their journey as

an 'act of witness'; they testify to the world's end.[29]

The explorers' journey into the wasteland ends in disappointment and death. However, it

mirrors X-127's own emotional trajectory. After their last report, X-127 confesses that

'[s]omething seems to have changed inside'; 'It is a warm feeling -- warm towards them.

But it has enough warmth for humanity in general, for any living thing' (*Level 7* 155). X-

127 finds empathy only when life has been exterminated. Christian iconography structures

this transformation, as it did in *Fahrenheit 451*: Level 7 becomes an Ark amidst the

symbolic flood, and the two explorers are self-proclaimed 'doves' (*Level 7* 153). The dove

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[29] Seed, p. 80.

is a symbol of Christ, and through their martyrdom X-127 finds some kind of redemption before his death.

In the end, Level 7 is destroyed by the atom just as the rest of the world had been. This is inverted, to ironic effect: it is the civilian use of nuclear power, rather than the military, which destroys Level 7, the command centre for nuclear extinction. 'The source of life down here, our man-made sun, now sends its death-dealing rays through Level 7' (*Level 7* 178). The attempted inversion of the mythos of above and below, promoted by official discourse, reasserts itself. Level 7 exists at the apex (or nadir) of an inverted pyramid, but rather than this signifying survival, it only allows the protracted spectacle of other people's deaths before one's own. The cave becomes a grave, the shelter a mausoleum. Level 7 reverts to its mythic type of Hades. Before he expires, X-127 crawls around the bunker, corpses blocking his path. Level 7 literally becomes a charnel house; or, 'the place looked like a battlefield' (*Level 7* 179). The bunker, instead of being removed from, and immune to, the effects of war, becomes the last place to feel them.

X-127 achieves some kind of moral sense alongside his emotional awareness. 'Either it is good to kill, and then to kill off humanity is good; or it is evil to kill, in which case killing with any weapons is wrong' (*Level 7* 165). The instrumentalism which marked his -- and all others' -- domination by the mechanistic system of Level 7 is transformed into ethical judgements about what is right and wrong. The logic of superpower confrontation attempts to erase these ethical issues, by presenting the structure *as* a machine, and transforming the operators of the system into 'robots'. These 'robots' acquiesce in this process because it absolves them from responsibility: they only follow orders, push

buttons. They become not a name, an identity, but 'X-127'; and X-127's last word is an assertion of identity, when this very lack of identity made him into a good officer -- and a good murderer. Even X-107, the mouthpiece of instrumentalist rationality, uncovers his humanity at the end, reveals a past, a history, an identity, which the system had to suppress to make him a Push Button Officer. X-127 is not alone, therefore, in his path to understanding.

Unlike the other dystopias in this thesis, *Level 7* ends seemingly without hope. There is no moment of suspension wherein the protagonists are caught. *Push Button Officer X-127,* like everyone else on Earth, perishes, and Nature -- elsewhere the Green World, a force of opposition to the dystopian state -- is transformed into the wasteland. However, the paradoxical and problematic matter of the text's transmission is finally a chink in this global bleakness: the survival of the archive, as in *Fahrenheit 451* or Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* and its transmission to the reader of *Level 7,* offers at least the possibility of action and change. X-127's achievement of individual will, expressed through his diary, in a sense defeats apocalypse, because the text is transmitted to we, the readers. Projected beyond the end, the reader of *Level 7* is exposed to an estranged representation of superpower conflict and the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction, a representation which attempts to reveal and undermine the ideological constructions of the Cold War.

CHAPTER 5:

MAPS OF POWER: HISTORY, TYRANNY AND THE IDEOLOGICAL

CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY IN PHILIP DICK'S DYSTOPIAS OF THE 1950s

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Introduction

This is the first of two chapters on the dystopias of Philip K. Dick, whose *oeuvre* has

become the focus for much critical analysis and debate in the last three decades. His large

and varied output, and the film adaptations of his novels, have kept him at the forefront of

SF critical practice. His reliance on the imagination of totalitarian political structures for

his dystopian worlds, and in fact his earlier works as a whole, have suffered from

comparative critical neglect, and in this chapter I will focus on four of Dick's texts from

the 1950s, whose themes of repression, surveillance and spectacle, and totalized social and

political structures, place him at the centre of this thesis's analyses.

Sociological and political texts of the 1950s, such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*,

William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* or Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society*

understood the nature of everyday existence in the United States to be somehow malign

and inauthentic, and offered analysis or opposition to this reality. As I have reiterated

throughout this thesis, images of mechanization of the human body and of society, as

symbols of alienation and oppressive conformity, are indices of anxieties of the 1950s and

early 60s, and Dick's work in this period, largely of a dystopian form, imagines a series of

police states or dictatorships which dominates its citizens. Dick was evidently ambiguous

regarding his own opposition to the prevailing forms of everyday life: he notes in his

Exegesis that 'I may not have been/am CP [Communist Party], but the basic Marxian

sociological view of capitalism -- negative -- is there. Good'.[1] However, Dick reacted

strongly against Thomas Disch's assertion that he was a Marxist: "'anyone who

understands [...] *Man Who Japed* would never make the mistake of thinking I was a

Communist or Marxist"'.[2] Gregg Rickman's biography seems to suggest that Dick was a

product of his milieu: a Berkeley liberal, antagonistic to forms of a nascent internal

security apparatus (the 'Red Squad', FBI, and so forth, which fuelled Dick's later

'paranoid' fears of persecution by the authorities -- perhaps not without reason), fascinated

by but abhorring Nazism, and also antagonistic to communism (though this was perhaps

more dictated by what he saw as the malignity of Commun*ists* themselves, and

particularly their embodiment in the CPUSA). However, Dick was radical enough to think

that something was fundamentally wrong with the United States of the 1950s and early

1960s, and his dystopias are attempts to metaphorically expose this system.

Solar Lottery (1955), *The Man Who Japed* (1956) and *The World Jones Made* (1956) are

all near-future dystopias set in a United States which has approached a bureaucratic and

oppressive stasis. *Solar Lottery*'s society, one dominated by multinational corporations

which reduce their employees to serfdom, is presided over by a dictatorial leader, one

Reese Verrick. The protagonist, Benteley, rebels against his conditions of unfreedom and

seeks to bring down the fraudulent system. The system is apparently democratic, intended

to prevent the conditions of oppression it furthers, by the raising of citizens to the

leadership by random means. Of course, this 'random' act is in fact manipulated by the

power elite to further their own rule. *The Man Who Japed* features Allen Purcell, a

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[1] Lawrence Sutin, *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* (1989) (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 91, quoting from Philip K. Dick's *Exegesis* 011.

[2] Gregg Rickman, *To the High Castle: Philip K. Dick, A Life, 1928-1962* (Long Beach, CA: Fragments West/ The Valentine Press, 1989), p. 297.

manager in the propaganda wing of the telecommunications industry (one which is in thrall to the government), finds himself satirizing the grey, puritanical and matriarchal society of 'Morec' that he once promoted. There are two central characters in *The World Jones Made*: Floyd Jones, the precognitive and Hitlerian leader who overthrows the conformist state of FedGov and its ideology of 'Relativism'; and Cussick, the secret policeman who remains a part of the system, then is forced into resisting Jones's despotic rule. All three texts describe elites who maintain their domination through economic and social organization, through surveillance and a secret police corps, and through a naturalized ideology which masks the operations of the power elites. The dissidence of the protagonists takes the form of an estrangement from the ideological imperatives of the state, an alienation which forces them to resist the control systems which are beginning to fragment.

Philip K. Dick's dystopian novels of the 1950s share a focus upon the totalitarian states of the 1940s, of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union, to provide templates for their imagination of police states. In *The World Jones Made*, the rise of a demagogic dictator -- Hitler in 1930s Germany -- becomes the model for the rise to power of Floyd Jones in a dystopian world state. The repeating of the Europe of the 1930s in the American 1950s suggests a cyclical model of history, which in turn implies that oppression is a consequence of ongoing historical forces. Dick's 'pessimism' has been noted by Stanislaw Lem, who wrote that 'Dick sees our world as the best of the worst, and there are no other worlds. According to him, we are everywhere damned, even where we cannot go'.[3] Indeed, writing in 1955, Dick himself suggested that '[a]ll responsible writers, to some

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[3] Stanislaw Lem, 'Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case - With Exceptions', *Microworlds* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace, 1984), pp. 45 - 105 (p. 81).

degree, have become involuntary criers of doom, because doom is in the wind'.[4] As I

suggested in my Introduction, the horrors of Nazi Germany and the prospect of imminent

global annihilation informed the retreat from utopia and the dominance of the dystopian

form in the 1950s. Post-nuclear war clouds of ash are a recurrent image in Dick's 1950s

short stories, and Germany also provides a recurrent touchstone. Lawrence Sutin, one of

Dick's biographers, has noted that Germany assumes a particular place in Philip Dick's

oeuvre. Dick was influenced by German culture, especially of the Romantic period, and

particularly in the field of music. However, the horrors of Nazism dominate the

significations of Germany and Germans in his texts. For instance, in *Solar Lottery*, the

economic system of the imagined dystopia is constructed upon the hegemony of five vast

corporations called 'Hills', one being I. G. Chemie, an important company in the Nazi

warfare state. The economic and political life of this dystopia is therefore dominated by

blocs which are German in name and signify the oppression which the Nazi warfare state

represented; the fraudulent structure of a random political game masks the operation of

power elites to control the world economic system and its citizens. German then signifies

bureaucratic, undemocratic, repressive, mechanistic: the typical dystopian codings of

modern industrial/ late capitalist socio-economic structures.

Again, we find in *The Man in the High Castle*, the Nazi terror state (which is linked to a

Thanatos-like death instinct in the apocalyptic Operation Dandelion) is opposed to the

flawed but relatively benign Japanese occupying regime.[5] Where the Nazis seek to

destroy, the Japanese seek to preserve (albeit largely the commodified -- or faked --

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[4] Philip K. Dick, 'Pessimism in Science Fiction', in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Lawrence Sutin (New York: Pantheon, 1995), pp. 54-56 (p. 54).
[5] Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

artefacts of pre-war American popular culture); where the Nazi secret agent would kill the writer of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, the Japanese consul Mr. Tagomi takes an ethical position in his confrontation with the Nazi authorities and saves the seemingly doomed Frank Frink. In one more example, in *Dr. Bloodmoney*, published in 1964, the German scientist Dr. Bluthgeld (perhaps modelled on the German-born scientist, and campaigner for the use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese, Edward Teller, and certainly echoing *Dr. Strangelove*) is the agent of a nuclear armageddon, and even after this has occurred, still seeks to destroy. These significations surrounding German and Germany seem to be those of an American culture moulded by the Second World War, simplistic and nationalistic. They also anticipate some of the anti-German fears which were generated by the economic success of the rebuilt postwar (West) Germany. However, Darko Suvin makes an important point when he argues for 'Dick's pervasive, intimate, and astoundingly rich understanding of the affinities between German and American fascism, born of the same social classes of big speculators and small shopkeepers'.[6] Totalitarianism is then a political structure born from the imperatives of control and domination of the power elites, rather than being the tyrannical rule of one person.

1. The Ideological Construction of Reality

As Jake Jakaitis notes in his essay 'Two Cases of Conscience', the discourse of *loyalty* was part of the structure of security and political control in the United States from the 1940s and throughout the 1950s.[7] Loyalty oaths in *Solar Lottery* become more than a token of communal belonging, but the means of political and economic enfranchisement

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[6] Darko Suvin, 'Artifice as Refuge and World-View: Philip K. Dick's Foci', in *Philip K. Dick*, ed. by Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (New York: Taplinger, 1983), pp. 73-95 (p. 81).

[7] Jake Jakaitis, 'Two Cases of Conscience: Loyalty and Race in *The Crack in Space* and *Counter-Clock World*' in *Philip K. Dick: Contemporary Critical Interpretations*, ed. by Samuel J. Umland (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 169-195.

itself; without them, the citizen must wait for the 'random' twitch of the bottle-game.

Loyalty becomes bound up with patriotism, security, trust; ultimately, it signifies

passivity, the erasure of judgement, the carrying out of orders no matter what they are. In

the immediate post-war period, this carries much political freight, and signifies the

defence of Nazi war criminals at the Nuremberg trials. As in *The World Jones Made*, we

find World War II and particularly the horrors of Nazi Germany becoming a model for

Dick's imagination of a totalitarian dystopia, and a way of understanding the American

mid-1950s.

Loyalty is also a key theme in Dick's 1957 novel *Eye in the Sky*, which begins with the

protagonist Jack Hamilton having an interview with his employer. He works for

'California Maintenance Labs': he is a 'young technician from the nearby guided missile

plant'.[8] The name of the company signifies nothing of its military production: it is a

deliberate masking of the reality of the production in terms of a discourse of secrecy and

security. It is a typical mid-50s American corporation: 'the thick, opaque presence of

middle-aged businessmen billowed up around him: a compound of cigar smoke,

deodorant, and shoe polish. A constant mutter drifted around the long steel table'(*Eye* 1:7).

The interview is about Hamilton's wife: a 'plant security-risk'. Marsha Hamilton is, in

fact, a left-liberal, and a member of the Democratic party. She has been marginally

politically active, signing petitions and writing letters: she is not accused of being, or of

supporting, any organisation which is itself 'dangerous' or threatening to the military. In

fact, two of the campaigns she is allied with are the Civil Liberties Union ('described by

some as pro-left') and the Society for the Advancement of Coloured People. The interview

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[8] Philip K. Dick, *Eye in the Sky* (1957) (London: Legend, 1991), chapter 1, p . 6. All further chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text.

constitutes accusation by innuendo and reveals a paranoid discourse of security and

secrecy. It also shows a wide-ranging state surveillance system: the 'security cop'

McFeyffe reads from a file compiled and disseminated by the FBI. As Jakaitis notes, the

text sets up a double-bind for the protagonist around the two signs of security and loyalty.

'Loyalty' becomes the alibi for a system of control and conformism, political and

economic. Hamilton is offered a choice: prevent his wife from engaging in liberal politics;

divorce her; or lose his job. Loyalty to his employer, to his country and to his wife are

placed in positions of mutual exclusivity. Jakaitis analyses the text thus:

> attention to Dick's political anxieties and his own comments of the novel expose
> *Eye in the Sky* as an attack on totalitarianism, cold war McCarthyism, and the
> House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) as 'paradigms of evil' [...]
> and as the author's attempt to symbolically resolve social contradictions and enact
> his own moral obligation to oppose any authority that equates dissent with
> treason.[9]

The title of *Eye in the Sky*, which the protagonists actually encounter as a manifestation of

the all-seeing eye of God, also has a political resonance, exposing fears of surveillance.

Surveillance and spectacle are recurrent motifs in the dystopias of the 1950s and 1960s,

but have particular importance in those of Dick. Often, in the shape of the television

screen, both principles are intertwined. Spectacle operates as an ideological screen behind

which the principles of surveillance and control operate. Those who watch the spectacle

via television are unaware that it provides the means to watch them.

Eye in the Sky, originally titled *With Opened Mind*, was written, Lawrence Sutin suggests,

in 1955. The world of the narrative 'real', the diegetic world, is close to the American

1950s. The novum here is a 'Bevatron', the beam of which a party of tourists fall into. *Eye*

in the Sky is the first of Dick's novels of communal hallucination, which also include *Ubik*

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[9] Jakaitis, p. 176.

and *A Maze of Death*. As they lay on the floor of the Bevatron, the party successively enter

four worlds constructed out of the mindsets of four of the victims, each of which diverges

from the conditions of a normative 'reality'. Mrs Pritchet's world is prim and prudish;

Silvester's is invested with the power of an interventionary God of Wrath; Joan Reiss's

world is a paranoid vision in which the inanimate is hostile or homicidal; and the security

officer McFeyffe's is a caricature world of gangsterism and brutality. Merritt Abrash is

correct in suggesting the Utopian character of (some) of the worlds the protagonists have

to pass through:

> but each of the universes they go through is utopian only for the mind which
> dominates it and frighteningly bizarre for everyone else. It might be inferred that
> Dick considers every utopian scheme to be the objectification of someone's self-
> interest.[10]

I would qualify this by suggesting that Silvester's and Mrs. Pritchet's worlds *are* utopian

for them -- a Utopia of Revelation and a Utopia of Hygiene respectively -- but those of

Joan Reiss and the security officer McFeyffe are clearly dystopian, one brutally paranoid

and the other 'a world of exaggerated class warfare'.[11] Each of the worlds the protagonists

pass through are projections not only of a single distorted consciousness but also contain

an aspect of the ideological construction of the diegetic 'real' narrative level.

Peter Fitting interprets *Eye in the Sky* as a critique of 'consensus democracy' and pluralism

in the United States in the 1950s: that this is in itself an illusory ideological construction

which collapses under the prerogatives of power and security.[12] I would agree with this but

qualify it by arguing that the construction of authority is validated by consent to its

[10] Merritt Abrash, 'Elusive Utopias: Societies as Mechanisms in the Early Fiction of Philip K. Dick' in *Clockwork Worlds: Mechanized Environments in SF*, edited by Richard D. Erlich and Thomas P. Dunn (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 115-123 (p. 121).
[11] Peter Fitting, 'Reality as Ideological Construct: A Reading of Five Novels by Philip K. Dick', in *On Philip K. Dick*, edited by R.D. Mullen *et al* (Terre Haute: TH-SFS, inc., 1992), pp. 92-110 (p. 94).
[12] Fitting, pp. 96-7.

dictates, and Hamilton's realization of its fictiveness is the base on which his rebellion rests. This notion of the fictiveness of reality finds a curious analogue in the influential sociological text of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). In this theoretical text, Berger and Luckmann argue that reality is not simply an objective physical world, nor is it a purely subjective experience and/ or projection; the 'reality of everyday life' is the 'paramount' reality among many other subjective ones,[13] what Brian McHale has called a 'collective fiction' that human beings are socialized into, which is constructed and maintained by processes of social interaction, language and institutionalized patterns of behaviour.[14] In a dialectical movement which reveals their indebtedness to Marxian models, Berger and Luckmann suggest that human beings both produce, and are produced by, 'reality': *'Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product'*.[15] Its application to Dick's totalitarian dystopias of the 1950s would suggest that protagonists like Hamilton, Cussick and Benteley have to overcome the internalization of the ideological constructions of reality in order to come to a consciousness of the wrongs of the system they were once a part of. In Dick's 1960s dystopias, which I will analyse in my next chapter, this collective fiction becomes an entirely fabricated world which screens the operations of power and dispossession.

Peter Fitting emphasises the point that the 'normative' reality which is reimposed at the end of *Eye in the Sky* is not a liberal, consensual one, but the McCarthyite 'real' where Hamilton is destined to lose his job. He argues:

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[13] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in The Sociology of Knowledge* (1966) (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 35.
[14] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Methuen: London, 1987), p. 37.
[15] Berger and Luckmann, p. 79.

> In this reenactment of the witch-hunts of the 1950s -- McFeyffe is a caricatural portrait of Senator Joe McCarthy -- a group of extremists attempts to impose their construction of reality on others, *and they succeed*, both in the novel and, I might add, in the 'real' world of the US in the 1950s.[16]

The succession of projected worlds which makes up *Eye in the Sky* suggests that reality is not a material fact but a world which is ideologically produced and mediated. The world of the McCarthyite 'real' that the protagonists return to is also ideologically produced and, like the world of Joan Reiss and McFeyffe, may also be a collectively experienced paranoid and delusional projection. Pessimistically, in *Eye in the Sky* there can be no overthrow of malign forces, or as in *The World Jones Made*, the hoped for (and expected) downfall of dictatorship through unforeseen circumstances or the 'path of history'. In *Eye in the Sky*, the most that can be fought for is a zone of autonomy from the control-structures of the dominant, military-industrial, corporate state; a Utopian zone in a dystopian text.

The worlds of *Eye in the Sky* are projected from the consciousnesses of the Bevatron's victims, entirely fabricated and mediated. In *The Man Who Japed*, the fabrication of reality occurs through the medium of an advertising agency; ironically, it later becomes the means by which the system of Morec can be challenged. Allen Purcell heads an advertising agency which supplies material for the government-controlled Telemedia, the telecommunications 'ministry'. As in Orwell's dystopian world, power and the media are inextricably linked: it is the mass media which is the means by which repression is constructed and continued. The structure of the industry is itself illusory, for Purcell's agency has the appearance of independence, but in fact works only for Telemedia. His agency is in fact an outer arm of the government machinery, and the work it does is

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[16] Fitting, p. 97.

political and cultural indoctrination. The 'real' of *The Man Who Japed* is ideologically

reinforced by the messages contained within Purcell's 'packets', the advertising

campaigns. The structures of power, privilege and status are coded within them. This

operation of textual levels is doubled when we find that one of Purcell's packets, a parable

of planting a tree, in fact contains a different 'message' from the one he (consciously)

intended. Purcell, in the tradition of the dystopian protagonist, is in a position to

understand the ideologically constructed form of the 'real' and it is this which generates

his trajectory of alienation. Later, television, rather than being the opiate of the masses,

becomes the instrument of liberation. Purcell and his staff 'jape' Major Streiter and Morec

by resorting to a previous model, that of Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. It is claimed that in

order to survive after the last war, and to rebuild, the Major and his family actually ate his

enemies. It has metaphorical resonance, of course; the dystopian society does indeed

'devour' its citizens by oppressing and dominating them, even if it does not destroy them,

as happens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Like the world of Wolfe's *Limbo*, the Morec state is divisive, unbalanced. The laughter

generated by Purcell's 'japes' provides a zone of both a negation of its dictates and a

celebration of other principles. It is a zone where, once again, its writ does not and cannot

run, and it is unsanctioned, unlike the Health Resort and the Other World, which provide

outlets for malcontents, corralled and controlled. It is dangerous because, in undermining

the solemnity of Morec, it refuses its dominion. Laughter is then the utopic zone of *The*

Man Who Japed, just as it is in *Limbo*. The conjunction of laughter and television also

occurs in *Solar Lottery* but to different effect. As in *Fahrenheit 451*, television becomes a

means of controlling the community, with alienation from that community an index of

rebellion. Ted Benteley visits two old friends early in the novel, who are quite content

with the society around them. Al Davis is Organization Man personified, cheerfully

passive and willing to align himself with whatever ideology his corporate employers

subject him to. His wife Laura is the *hausfrau*, consumed with domestic matters and tied

to the conformist community of the television, but like Montag's wife Milly, this

adherence to the community has an underlying edge of desperation and hysteria. When

Benteley turns the television off during the Assassination Convention:

> Laura appeared in the doorway. Her rage was gone; now her face was flooded with peevish anxiety. 'Al, couldn't we please get the convention? I can hear the neighbours' set and they're choosing the assassin *right now!*'[17] (*Solar Lottery* 4: 49).

Benteley departs into the night, and like Montag, can hear its 'tinny scream'; 'The metallic

cheers of thousands rolled out after him, into the chill night darkness' (*Solar Lottery* 4:

49). Benteley is alienated from this society of the spectacle, for he comes to realise that the

spectacle masks a more sinister reality:

> 'Everything is thin and empty and metallic. Games, lotteries -- a bright kid's toy! [...] Positions for sale, cynicism, luxury and poverty, indifference [...] noisy tv sets shrilling away. A man goes out to murder another man and everybody claps their hands and watches' (*Solar Lottery* 8: 84).

The spectacle of murder is exactly what Montag has to face in *Fahrenheit 451*, with

himself as the victim. Television here is an opiate, with the spectacle of death (after a good

meal) analogous to bread and circuses, the form of words also used to describe the

gladiatorial 'Field Days' in Pohl and Kornbluth's *Gladiator-at-Law*.

In *The Man Who Japed*, the economic structure of the dystopian world is modelled on the

kind of corporate totalism dominant in 1950s America, anxiety about which is exemplified

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[17] Philip K. Dick, *Solar Lottery* (1955) (New York: Collier, 1992). chapter 4, p. 49. All further chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text.

in William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*. Dick's indebtedness to other texts has

been mentioned by some critics (such as Thomas M. Disch, who notes similarities

between *Solar Lottery* and Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*), but with *The Man Who*

Japed the influence of Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* can be discerned,

another dystopia in which the protagonist is a middle-ranking member of an advertising

agency which dominates the world-structure. The protagonist of *The Man Who Japed* is

one Allen Purcell, the head of a small advertizing agency which carries out the work of

political indoctrination for the state. The ideology of the state, called 'Morec', which is

perhaps an allusion to American right-wing political groups such as 'Moral Rearmament',

is a kind of moral and physical Spartanism (or perhaps Puritanism) which prizes hard

work and denial and the minimizing of pleasure. Purcell's alienation from the official

ideology takes the form of dreams and fugue states in which he 'japes' or satirizes the

symbols of this particular world order.

Loyalty is also a subsidiary theme in *The Man Who Japed*. Purcell's antagonist is Luddy,

an employee he dismissed earlier in the text due to his perceived disloyalty. In fact, what

Luddy shows is a pragmatic attitude towards what he perceives to be the prevailing

orthodoxy, siding with the (higher) authority of Sue Frost rather than his immediate

superior Purcell, shifting his loyalty from the Agency and his boss to the wider political

and ideological hegemony. He does this for pragmatic reasons -- he thinks that Purcell is

heading for defeat on the issue -- and this is opposed to Purcell's principled stand. Dick

follows the dystopian tradition in making the protagonist one who believes in some kind

of principle (such as Winston Smith's ideal of freedom in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), in

conflict with the dominant ideology and those of his peers who align themselves, for

reasons of status, power, or cowardice, with the state. The dystopian protagonist discovers, in fact, some kind of higher loyalty to a principle or ideal which countermands the imperatives of the system he was once a part of.

The openings of both texts are very similar: *The Space Merchants* begins with the protagonist Mitchell Courtenay in his apartment before the start of the working day, as does *The Man Who Japed*; the rooms they live in are a testimony to megalopolitan overpopulation, with Courtenay's two-room flat replete with space-saving gadgets and appliances, and the Purcells' very room moulding itself to their changing requirements, with wardrobes retreating into walls and cookers extruding themselves. The economic system of *The Space Merchants* (see chapter 7) is rampant, polluting capitalism, the artificial ideologically constructed to be prized over the (now non-existent) natural. This is more akin to the economic structure of *Solar Lottery*, with its prescient scenario of over-production and the construction of a society of consumption:

> In the early twentieth century the problem of production had been solved; after that it was the problem of consumption that plagued society. In the 1950's and 60's, consumer commodities and farm products began to pile up in vast towering mountains all over the Western World. As much as possible was given away -- but that threatened to subvert the open market. By 1980, a pro tem solution was to heap up the products and burn them: billions of dollars' worth, week after week (*Solar Lottery* 2: 16).

Like *The Space Merchants* or 'The Midas Plague' (see chapter 7), this dystopian scenario is predicated on an unbroken trajectory of economic growth, one that has ceased to be credible since the early 1970s. The solution to the problem of overproduction is ironic: to ensure that the capitalist economy of exchange value over use value does not collapse, goods are destroyed rather than distributed. A *utopia* of the elimination of material want is implied but negated by the system's own self-preserving strategy.

Solar Lottery, published in book form in 1955, was Dick's first published science fiction novel, though perhaps not the first written. It imagines a world ostensibly run by a randomly selected president, the Quizmaster, who controls the 'bottle game', a lottery system by which citizens are raised and lowered in a social system of privilege and power. This 'game' is fixed, intended to maintain the current power-hierarchies, which is perhaps derived from the scandals involving corrupt quiz-games on American television in the 1950s. As in many of Dick's texts, and in most of the dystopian novels in this thesis, a media spectacle masks the operations of centralized power. The economic and social structure is divided into 'Hills', vast multinational corporations which demand 'fealty oaths' from their employees, tying them to a condition of serfdom. In return for employment, employees give up other rights: freedom, movement, decision. The Hill -- perhaps a reference to Capitol Hill, the seat of political power in the United States -- provides housing, credits, and status, but once the oath is given, it may not be broken. The novel begins with the dystopian protagonist Ted Benteley beginning the trajectory of estrangement that we find in all dystopian texts. Enlisted by the dissident figure Leon Cartwright, who has been working inside the system of the 'bottle game', Benteley helps overthrow the dictatorial world leader and eventually becomes leader himself.

Benteley, like his counterpart in rebellion Cartwright, is ideologically bound to a past vision of economic and social construction. Benteley wants to be 'free of the Hill system', because he believes in a myth of individuality and entrepreneurship at odds with the regulated and authoritarian structure of the world state. This is a common Dick scenario: artisanship, and individual activity are always assigned value in the system of the text.

Thus we find the characters Hamilton and Laws at the end of *Eye in the Sky* leaving the

corporation that employs them (which makes weapons for the US Government) and

setting up business on their own, building hi-fi equipment. This solution is unavailable in

Solar Lottery: those without fealty descend to the level of the 'unks', the unclassifieds, a

vast labour pool, disenfranchised and dominated. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the social

system is structured as concentric rings of power, with Benteley in the position of Winston

Smith, in the Outer Party level, with the 'unks' as the 'proles'.

Solar Lottery's Ted Benteley, Jake Jakaitis argues, 'exists in a loyalty trap', caught in a

double bind: unfree and exploited as a 'serf', outcast and dominated as an 'unk'.[18]

Similarly, Paul Proteus in *Player Piano* is cast out of his position of privilege and

becomes unclassified, without a number or occupation. Jakaitis describes Benteley's

position thus:

> He conceives of himself as an average man in an average life in a society whose
> laws he wants to respect, but through his association with Verrick he realizes that
> the society and the lottery itself are corrupt.[19]

Like Cussick, the secret policeman in *The World Jones Made*, Benteley wants to remain

loyal to the system but finds that he cannot ultimately do so. Jakaitis locates this tension in

the dystopian protagonist between opposing forces of *loyalty* and *conscience*; however, if

loyalty is constructed by the ideology of the system to buttress the extant structure, then

surely the value-systems which form 'conscience' will also be a construct. Jakaitis's

analysis seems to depend on the belief that a sense of conscience is somehow innate, exists

outside of, above, or despite the ideological constructions of the dystopian society.

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[18] Jakaitis, p. 172, 173.
[19] Jakaitis, p. 173.

Rather than opposing principles of loyalty and conscience, a debate between loyalty and

protest is made explicit by Benteley at the end of *Solar Lottery*:

> 'But what are you supposed to do in a society that's corrupt? Are you supposed to
> obey corrupt laws? Is it a crime to break a law that's a rotten law, or an oath that's
> rotten?' (*Solar Lottery* 14: 156).

In *The Man Who Japed*, the honourable loyalty that Purcell evinces finds its response in

those at Telemedia who stay to help his jape once his dismissal becomes official. The text

demonstrates a belief in the potential for opposition in, and mobilization of, a certain

section of the citizenry: these are the 'little people', those who are not part of the structures

of power. In fact, nearly all of those of 'decision-making rank' in the Telemedia

organization abandon Purcell. It is the ordinary working women and men who work on his

behalf. There seems to be no 'unk' class, as in *Solar Lottery*, a completely disenfranchised

-- and absent -- majority; some kind of political action is possible. As I note below,

however, it requires the appropriation of the very technology of state oppression.

2. Circles & Zones

As I suggested in my Introduction, the physical environments of the dystopian worlds

have a metaphorical significance. The physical world of the utopia or dystopia signifies a

spatialization of ideology, one which exposes the imperatives of power and exclusion of

the state. The estrangement of the dissident protagonist is often figured in terms of a

spatial exile or search for zone of freedom from the control systems of the state. The space

of the dystopian cities that appear in Dick's texts is sparely described; Patricia Warrick is

correct in stating that 'Dick's landscapes are sketched in so sparsely that they are often

interchangeable from one novel to the next. Two words define them all: barren and

decaying'.[20] However, in *The Man Who Japed* one does find a description of the city of Newer York: 'Beyond his office window lay the city, flat except for the Morec spire set dead-center. The city radiated in concentric zones, careful lines and swirls that intersected in an orderly manner' (*Japed* 8: 53).

Circles are a key motif in *The Man Who Japed*, to which I will return, but here I wish to concentrate on the shape of the city itself. The city of concentric circles signifies a hierarchical structure of power, and a kind of orderliness that signifies a repressive kind of rationality. Many cities in the utopian tradition have been circular (Campanella's City of the Sun, Cabet's Icaria), and Wells's imagination of a dystopian London in *When the Sleeper Wakes* is enclosed by a perimeter wall. Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*, as I argued in chapter 3, describes the city as a conjunction of circle and right angle. The city of concentric circles therefore becomes the anti-utopian city, where a utopian society itself turns out to be dystopian in its methods of control. The physical space of the city, one of geometric precision and order, opposes human freedom, just as the mathematical imperatives of Zamiatin's *We* designate an inflexible and malign stasis.

As in other dystopias, ostensibly Utopian communal ideals become oppressive mechanisms of control. In *The Man Who Japed*, Allen and Janet Purcell live in a communal block, sharing bathroom facilities, although mealtimes are not communalized in this dystopia, as they usually are. This communalization is seen to be oppressive; the erasure of privacy (yet another key motif) is enforced by a rigorously pursued communal policing system, with the mechanical 'juveniles' videotaping everything. (The word

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[20] Patricia S. Warrick, *Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 19.

'juveniles' itself sets off intertextual connotations: one thinks of the way in which young

children are encouraged to inform on their parents in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which had its

analogues in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union, and the homicidal children of

Fahrenheit 451). The community sessions are rites of confession, expiation, and

punishment:

> Here, official nosing and snooping originated. In this room a man's business was
> everybody's business. Centuries of Christian confessional culminated when the
> block assembled to explore its members' souls.[21]

There are two scenes of communal inquiry, where Purcell first ensures that some kind of

justice is done, and then faces accusations himself, and these are central to the exposition

of the repressive Morec system. Clearly, the spectacle of accusation (often by association

and implication rather than by direct proof) refers to the McCarthy era and the hearings of

HUAC. The same mixture of prurience, hysteria, and hypocrisy is apparent in both forms of

'show trial' (for Stalin's trials must also have been a precursor).

Evidence is collected by the ubiquitous juveniles, electronic surveillance machines:

> The juveniles did not accuse; they only reported what they heard and saw. They
> couldn't color their information and they couldn't make it up. Since the victim was
> indicted mechanically he was safe from hysterical hearsay, from malice and
> paranoia. But there could be no question of guilt; the evidence was already in
> (*Japed* 6: 45).

Paradoxically, the tyranny of the bureaucratic machine is validated by its very mechanical-

ness; the machine appears to be the recorder of crimes only, not the accuser. The machine

would therefore be unbiased, and always correct. As in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, where

the running of human affairs is handed over to EPICAC XIV as it is a machine and

(therefore) incapable of error, this represents an anti-humanist abdication of responsibility

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[21] Philip K. Dick, *The Man Who Japed* (1956) (London: Methuen, 1978), chapter 6, p. 44. All further
chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text.

on the part of societal leadership. The appearance of impartiality obscures the oppressive

fact of the need for the presence of the juveniles at all. Mechanized systems of justice also

appear in the final scenes of *Player Piano* and in Pohl and Kornbluth's *Gladiator-at-Law*,

where 'natural' law and justice is circumvented in the name of efficiency.

In this system, guilt is not to be established but is a given. If one was not guilty, one would

not be accused. The system is therefore one of control and punishment rather than

'justice', because there is no possibility of innocence. As Purcell's own prosecution makes

clear, this collecting of evidence is *not* neutral; his embrace of Gretchen Malparto is

innocent, but can be used by Luddy to discredit him by smear-tactics. However, Purcell is

not alone in his distaste for the system: his neighbour, Mr. Wales, is another Dickian,

honourable 'little man'. Wales sets out a conception of justice at odds with Morec's

operation: "'These meetings [...] operate on the idea that a man is morally responsible to

his community. That's a good idea. But his community is also morally responsible to

him'" (*Japed* 6: 49). This is an ideal of communitarian citizenship, a dual responsibility

resting upon a relationship between citizen and state which cannot exist in a dystopian

society: that the state is allowed to exist by the collective consent of its citizens, and

operates in their name. The hive, which dominates the imagery of the dystopian city, is the

negation of this ideal.

However, there *are* zones of escape and freedom constructed in the text, spaces where the

writ of Morec does not run. Hokkaido is a wasteland, but beneath it Purcell finds Gates

and Sugarmann, who are archivists of the 'kipple' of the past, in possession of the books

and objects of our own society. 'Kipple' is a word that recurs throughout Dick's work, and

signifies an entropic trash which collects and clogs up the workings of everyday life. They

are free from Morec and its laws, and salvage objects in order to sell them to collectors.

What they actually do is turn the artefacts of the past into commodities, as happens in

Dick's later alternate-world novel, *The Man in the High Castle*, where pre-World War II

American artefacts become immensely valuable to a conquering and imperialistic

Japanese force. The preservation of the archive, the cultural artefacts of a society, is here

ironically predicated not on an ephemeral cultural 'value' but on economic value. Gates

and Sugarmann's relationship to the past is more parasitic than the leader of the dystopian

dissidents, Leon Cartwright, who the reader first encounters in 'his ancient '82 Chevrolet'

(Solar Lottery 2: 15): 'Everything about him breathed obsolescence and age [...] The

buildings on both sides of Cartwright were old and faded, thin peeling things of dusty

windows and drab neon signs. They were relics of the last century, like himself and his

car' (2: 15-16). Cartwright is himself of the past. As in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the

past stands in opposition to the commodifying and repressive configurations of the

narrative present. Cartwright (a name with significations of an older technological era)

opposes Reese Verrick, whose attitude to the past is more like one of the conqueror or

plunderer:

> Benteley touched a dully-gleaming panel. The wood was corroded, but strangely
> smooth, as if a layer of cloudy light had settled over it and worked its way into the
> material. 'This wood', Verrick said, noticing Benteley, 'is from a medieval bawdy
> house' *(Solar Lottery* 5: 54).

For Verrick, the objects of the past become one more thing to be exploited. As in *Player*

Piano, where the homes of Proteus and the Kroners simulate or import items from other,

older, houses, or in Pohl's dystopias of consumption, the commodification of the past is a

key index of an exploitative dystopian system.

Like Benteley, Cartwright clings to notions of freedom and individuality out of place in the world of the quiz. Similarly, Sue Frost scoffs at Purcell in *The Man Who Japed*: "'Mr Purcell believes in the unique individual'" (*Japed* 3: 21). Individuality is, of course, another key concern in the dystopian tradition, the value of which has been obscured by the totalized regimes. Dystopian cities tend toward the image of the hive: the individual has meaning only in context of the furtherance of the society, only exists as a cog in a machine, a key metaphor for this thesis. Cartwright, Benteley and Purcell are cultural throwbacks in their belief in the individual, as is Winston Smith, who is famously 'The Last Man in Europe'. The trajectory of the dystopian protagonist is from conformity to rebellion, and this is in large part mapped onto a discovery of an individual will or potentiality for action. Push Button Officer X-127 of *Level 7*, for instance, moves from a metaphorical 'robot' status to the discovery of individual identity through the medium of his diary. Many critics have noted the overwhelming dominance of the male protagonist in dystopias over the female, and the dystopian rebel mythos does have a problematic reliance on ideals of male heroism, which are themselves open to critique as expressing a desire for sovereignty and domination over the environment and other people. Conversely, the dystopian individualist represents a reaction against, and attempt to (fictively) escape, the structures of control and domination of the technological/ capitalist matrix. I shall explore this issue more fully with regard to the works of Frederik Pohl in chapter 7.

The Man Who Japed is like Vonnegut's *Player Piano* in its projection of the tyranny of the Mom. Morec is not quite a matriarchy, but those in positions of power (and repression) are middle-aged women: Ida Pease Hoyt, Sue Frost (suggestions of frigidity, and indeed she has a 'forthright -- almost masculine -- handshake'(*Japed* 2: 13)), and Mrs.

Birmingham represent a prudish repressiveness one can also find in the domineering

mother-figure in *Eye in the Sky*. Of course, a matriarchy has often been the paranoid model

for a dystopian society in traditional (male) science fiction. Dick's portrayal of women

notoriously tends towards the stereotypical, and indeed, Purcell is here duped (and

kidnapped) by a dark-haired young woman, and who is the (albeit unwitting) agent of his

downfall. The only (mildly) positive depiction of a female character in *The Man Who*

Japed is Janet Purcell, a rather timorous woman, though loyal wife. She is actually alien to

the society of Morec, represented by the triumvirate of women: she comes from the

'colonies', frontier worlds, and is therefore untainted by its matriarchal tendencies. Sue

Frost signifies the male fear of the female taking on male attributes; Myron Mavis, whose

surname is female, represents the inverse, the male denatured, emasculated, by the system.

The same significations will be found later in this thesis in Frederik Pohl and Cyril

Kornbluth's *Gladiator-at-Law*. *Solar Lottery* represents a battle for supremacy between

male combatants: Verrick, Cartwright, Benteley. Female characters are adjuncts or prizes:

Lori, Eleanor Stevens, and Rita Cartwright play out subsidiary roles in the narrative,

passive to the male active. Here, as in other dystopian texts of the period, women are (at

best) catalyzers of the male protagonist's estrangement from the system. None feature the

trajectory of alienation of the woman herself. Thomas M. Disch has suggested that Dick's

dystopian fiction represents 'self-consistent allegories of a more-or-less Marxist bent'.[22]

Dick himself was somewhat ambiguous about it, disputing this claim, but also in the

Exegesis admitting that all the early novels did contain a critique of capitalism. Perhaps we

can see that this emphasis on analyses of structures of class and power in the early

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[22] Thomas M. Disch, 'Toward the Transcendent: An Introduction to *Solar Lottery* and Other Works' in *Philip K. Dick*, ed. by Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (New York: Taplinger. 1983), pp. 13-26 (p. 23).

dystopias, the traditionally male bias of much SF writing and reception, added to Dick's

own somewhat ambiguous attitude towards women, results in marked blind spots towards

gender politics in his dystopias of the 1950s, and others in Dick's *oeuvre*.

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Other zones of freedom in *The Man Who Japed* are the Health Resort and the Other

World. The Health Resort is a refuge for misfits, for the rebellious, and for those opposed

to Morec. Again, we find the coding of rebellion as illness that can be found in Bradbury's

Fahrenheit 451 and numerous other dystopian texts.

> Nobody had accurate figures on the number of renegades who had fled to the
> Resort; because of the onus, the relatives preferred to state that the missing
> individual had gone to the colonies. Colonists, were, after all, only failures; a
> noose was a voluntary expatriate who had declared himself an enemy of moral
> civilization (*Japed* 3: 22).

The Health Resort and Other World are then places outside the political control of Morec.

Like utopian zones in other dystopian texts, they are off the map of power. The model of

concentric circles is both a plan of a politically geocentric cosmos and a map of

hierarchical power. The rings are (spatially): Statue -- Spire -- Park -- City -- Earth -- Solar

System -- Colonies. The colonies are a New Frontier, far from the centre of control and

therefore signifying some form of freedom. Janet Purcell comes from a planet of 'goats

and rocks' but displays a far more liberal attitude than any of the women in positions of

power in Morec. Myron Mavis escapes to a 'new world of opportunity' (or freedom) at the

end of the text, even though Purcell rejects flight in order to continue the fight on Earth.

The Health Resort is a more ambiguous zone than other utopian spaces. Dr. Malparto is a

quack obsessed with psionic powers, and his psychoanalytic posturings are comically

burlesqued. However, in a more sinister fashion, Malparto drugs and abducts Purcell and

transports him to the Other World, where he finds himself in an alternate Chicago which is a slightly estranged depiction of our own world. He finds there an alternate identity, another wife, and most strangely to him, an American 1950s-style house with many rooms, set in a large garden. There ensues an attempt to convince him that either he has dreamed his past life as Allen Purcell, or that he is in a coma at the Health Resort, and is dreaming this experience. This kind of reality-breakdown cannot be sustained in what is essentially a 'straight' diegetic narrative -- unlike Dick's later collapsing narrative levels in *Ubik* -- and Purcell realises his deception almost immediately, and arranges his passage back to Earth's 'reality'. He manages this by offering violence in an attempt to hold-up a coffee-shop, and is therefore excluded from the peaceful community of Other World. Also found there are more relaxed attitudes to nudity and sexual conduct, but this utopia is not for Purcell. The Health Resort and Other World is therefore ambiguous: sanctuary, but not utopia.

In *Solar Lottery*, there are two off-world zones which play an important role. The first is the Moon, where the telepaths take Cartwright to protect him from assassination. The Moon is a kind of interzone: it is itself a kind of resort, a place of pleasure, but also one where the opposing forces of Cartwright and Verrick are held in suspension while a Judge deliberates on Benteley's future. It is a kind of *heterotopia*, Foucault's term for a space in which different orders are held in suspension without allowing one to become dominant. Ultimately this suspension is ended when Cartwright shoots Verrick to close this part of the narrative.

The second zone is Flame Disc, the mythical planet 'discovered' by John Preston. Flame disc *is* a kind of utopia: 'the mythical tenth planet of the Sol System, the legendary Flame Disc, John Preston's fabulous world, beyond the known universe' (*Solar Lottery* 2: 25). Again, this is a place *not on the map*, like the island of the Mandunji in Wolfe's *Limbo*. The Prestonites attempt to find a kind of new Eden, analogous to the voyages of 'discovery' which informed the first Utopia, that of Thomas More. Utopia, no longer available on a totally mapped earth, is transferred to the unmapped zone: Outer Space. In fact, I think that Dick is referring even more clearly to the tradition of the imaginary *eutopos*: the legend of Prester John, which can also be found in Dick's short story 'Souvenir'. Prester John was an historical Christian King, but in myth has become the sovereign of a legendary land in Asia, which was full of marvels and abundance, a kind of Cockaygne.

One of the dictator Floyd Jones's slogans, in *The World Jones Made*, is 'ON TO THE STARS'. In this text, the rise of Jones is enabled through the appearance of spore-like alien 'drifters', which creates the conditions for his paranoid and fascistic discourse to take hold. Unknown to him, the former government had been working on a program to colonise Venus, in the shape of genetically engineered human beings. The rhetoric of space exploration clearly masks domination and exploitation, unlike the optimistic evocation of 'progress' at the end of *Solar Lottery*. In a central passage, the text links Utopia, space exploration, and, I would suggest, metafictional critique of naïve space-opera SF:

> Utopia. The Golden Age. They had not found it on Earth; the last war had made them see it was never coming. From Earth they had turned to the other planets; they had built up romantic fiction, told themselves pleasant lies. The other planets, they said, were green, fertile worlds, water-sparkling valleys, thick-wooded hills,

> Paradise: the ancient, eternal hope. But the other planets were nightmares of frozen methane gas, miles of stark rock .[23]

Utopia, once displaced on Earth (the no-place), becomes displaced not in time, as in the later Utopian tradition, but to *outer* space. Thus, as at the end of Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*, the two protagonists leave in a rocket to Venus to create a new Utopian world there, and there are innumerable other examples. In the above passage, Utopia becomes a dreaming of paradise when confronted with a dystopian reality. It is false escape, 'lies'. Yet this is opposed within the text by the Refuge, an entirely fabricated environment where the genetically engineered 'Venusians' live, and the inversion of the Refuge at the end of the text when the fleeing dissidents Cussick and Nina create their own environmental bubble, their own Refuge, on Venus. The 'Venusians' repeat the constant play of the illusion/reality dyad. They are themselves constructed beings, genetically engineered mutants; and they are prey to fears that their Venusian environmental chamber is in fact a lie intended to prevent their escape. The Refuge becomes a metaphor of the textual world of *The World Jones Made*. Just as they are trapped inside their bubble -- the Refuge as prison -- the other humans are locked inside the prison of ideology, the naturalized forms of 'reality'.

Venus becomes the Utopian space of *The World Jones Made*. The Venusians create an anti-industrial, anti-capitalist, agrarian realm, where the usual Dickian positive attributes of artisanship and community are shown in full. It is something of a magical realm, with domesticated alien animals and flying 'dobbin', a strange indigenous species. Venus is a world of wonder, the World the Venusians Made. They are described as 'gnomish', but

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[23] Philip K. Dick, *The World Jones Made* (1956) (London: HarperCollins, 1994), chapter 11, pp. 102-3. All further chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text.

they are actually more childlike, their innocence protected (or perhaps nurtured) by the

Refuge. They have been shielded from the ideological conditions of the dystopian 'real'.

This dystopian construction of reality on Earth is opposed to their construction of society.

Yet even here, dystopian elements intrude. The native -- intelligent -- animals are

'domesticated', and intended as a source of labour to increase the Venusians time for

'constructive planning' (*Jones* 19:188): the conditions of domination and exploitation.

> Smooth-surfaced roads linked each of the individual settlements with the others. In front of Dieter's cabin stood a crude metal vehicle he and Garry had built: metal hammered from sheets rolled in their own furnace (*Jones* 20:187).

Therefore, they construct beginnings of an industrial society, and a modern transportation

system. The seeds of the oppression which grips the earth are embedded in this nascent

civilization.

The mythos of discovery, like the growing civilization on Venus, is ambiguous. Jake

Jakaitis rightly criticises *Solar Lottery* for locating 'the conclusion firmly within 1950s

notions of progress, themselves implicitly governed by manifest destiny'.[24] The

Prestonites, those who believe in Flame Disc, journey out to find the mythical planet.

They find not Preston, but a machine which declaims this expansionist rhetoric:

> 'it's the highest goal of man -- the need to grow and advance...to find new things...to expand. To spread out, reach areas, experiences, comprehend and live in an evolving fashion. To push aside routine and repetition, to break out of mindless monotony and thrust forward. To keep moving on...' (*Solar Lottery* 17: 200).

This passage suggests a kind of Manifest Destiny which encompasses the entire human

race. Like *The Man Who Japed* and *The World Jones Made*, the ending of this dystopia is

positive, with the possibility of change or renewal implicit, if not explicit. The rebellion of

Cartwright and Benteley has worked, and the tyranny of Reese Verrick is ended. Stanislaw

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[24] Jakaitis, pp. 173-4.

Lem calls Dick 'an inverted apologist for "progress", because he connects unlimited

progress in the field of the instrumentally realizable with bottomless pessimism in the field

of human consequences of such progress in civilization.'[25] I would have to qualify this

statement with regard to Dick's early dystopias, because Dick does allow the possibility of

change to exist. The system is not closed.

In *The World Jones Made*, the dictator Jones is finally defeated by forces than he cannot

anticipate, the sealing off of the Solar system by an alien race. The system of information

used by all the dictatorial powers in these early dystopias are narrow; there are areas

beyond the known which can cause their fall. This is spatialized in *Solar Lottery* with the

journey to Flame Disc and John Preston; the ending of the text signifies the breaking of

bounds, the explosion of the limits of the Solar System symbolizing the explosion of the

Quiz system. Gary K. Wolfe has analysed the barrier as an image in SF and sees it as a

symbolic line between the Known and the Unknown.[26] In *Solar Lottery* and *The World*

Jones Made, it is the unknown which causes the downfall of the dystopian dictator. Carlo

Pagetti identifies this narrative trope in his essay 'Dick and Meta SF': 'At times, behind

the forces of "chance" strong organizations are hidden that manipulate reality; but, in their

turn, these organizations are shattered when faced with the imponderable events that they

have not foreseen'.[27] Pagetti also uses the phrase 'wheel of fate', and this metaphor of the

circle is one which pervades *The Man Who Japed*. The circle is a recurrent motif

throughout the text (even down to the psionic flash cards Malparto uses -- Purcell guesses

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[25] Stanislaw Lem, 'Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case - With Exceptions', *Microworlds* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1984), pp. 45-105 (p. 79).

[26] Gary K. Wolfe, *The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction* (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 1979).

[27] Carlo Pagetti, 'Dick and Meta SF' in *On Philip K. Dick: 40 Articles for Science Fiction Studies*, ed. by R.D. Mullen *et al* (Terre Haut: TH-SFS, Inc., 1992), pp. 18-25 (pp. 19-20).

'circle' both times), and suggests a circular conception of history. The idea of a path of history informs the text's implied future destruction of the Morec state, modelled on the fall of Empires throughout history.

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4. The Spectacle of History

The totalitarian system in *The World Jones Made* is a world state called FedGov, which itself suggests a suspicion of a centralized federal state. As in other early Dick novels and the tradition of anti-utopia, a Wellsian world state becomes the instrument of control rather than progress, technocracy turned into repressive state bureaucracy. Jones's antagonist is Cussick, originally a secret policeman in the FedGov state. Cussick, like Winston Smith of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Paul Proteus of *Player Piano*, is an *apparatchik*, someone in the lower reaches of the power elite. Unlike these anti-utopian protagonists, whose alienation from the state and its ideology determines the narrative trajectory, Cussick remains a defender of the state and is relentlessly opposed to Jones. In fact, Cussick only becomes a rebel part-way through the text when the system of government changes; he is opposed to Jones's ideology rather than the instrumentality of state repression *per se*. Dick therefore complicates the usual anti-utopian motifs: the protagonist is implicated in the structures of control, but never renounces this complicity.

Floyd Jones is less an anti-utopian rebel, or anti-state revolutionary, than someone intent on a *coup d'état*. Jones is never inside the system; he is first revealed in a marginal social milieu, in a fairground. This is actually a double marginalization, as he is a conspicuously unsuccessful fortune-teller, paradoxically because he tells the 'truth' about the future, but can only see his own. 'Nobody waited in line: the exhibit was ignored' (*Jones* 2: 21).

Jones opposes the world state but is intent on taking over the bureaucratic system and using it for his own ends. He initially changes the structures of repression: "'When I came into power I had the Security setup disbanded and atomized. The structure is gone -- the camps are closed'", Jones tells Pearson. Yet, towards the end of the text (when Jones already knows of his own defeat) he attempts to recreate this Security system: "'I've got to have the police back. The secret service has to be re-created, by people who are experts'" (*Jones* 16:156, 158). The imperatives of power and security have their own logic, which reassert themselves in times of crisis. The text suggests, then, that it is the structures of power and domination which determine repression rather than the acts of a dictator, perhaps implied by Dick's use of the anonymous name 'Jones' for his dictator. Totalitarianism is not mere despotism: the very structure of the totalitarian state constantly recreates the conditions of its own domination.

The state which Jones overthrows is based on a principle called Relativism. This is a political and philosophical ideology which states that everyone is entitled to hold whatever opinion he or she may wish, however bigoted, destructive, or dangerous; the 'fail-safe' is that no-one may act to force these opinions upon anyone else. Relativism posits an absolute freedom to hold political views, relying on a consensual principle: that if *you* do not oppress *me*, *I* will not oppress *you*. The paradox of this situation is that this individual refusal to impose oneself on another rests on the juridical prohibition of such an act. In other words, the principle of Relativism is *not* internalized by all, and therefore the state must act to enforce this ideology of 'freedom'. The contradictions in this ideology mean that the protagonist of the text professes liberal sentiments but is a member of a secret police set up to deal with those who do attempt to force their opinions on others. In

practice, this means most political action; it also results in the self-perpetuation of the state, as those who preach against Relativism itself are violating its very principles. It is, therefore, a Catch-22. The system is unable to cope with the rise of Jones, because although it is designed to end political strife, it is in fact a recipe for social atomization and alienation, and when a mass movement arises the prospect of mass political action to oppose Jones is ruled out by the principles of Relativism itself.

The other part of Relativism falls under Jones' psionic abilities. His precognitive ability invalidates the state's assertion that only 'true' statements can be broadcast without fear of prosecution: as Jones can see into the future, his pronouncements and predictions become self-evidently 'true'. Jones's precognitive talent is the 'novum' (Suvin's term) of the text, generating the narrative momentum. The text, I think, sets up a determinism predicated by a precognitive ability but seeks to limit it to enable its defeat. In his later texts (such as *Ubik* or *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*) the precognitive talent is different in nature. There is no 'one' future, history a determined and unalterable path. Precogs perceive a multiplicity of possible futures, rather than a single line; the moment of precognition is a bifurcation point, where a single time-line of 'history' behind breaks into a web of different futures, only one of which will occur. (The genre of alternative history utilized in *The Man in the High Castle* complicates this structure, whereby a multiplicity of past, presents and futures co-exist). Jones's deterministic precognitive ability is possibly a product of the text's overlaying of the historical 1930s onto 50s America. The historical inevitability suggested by a cyclical pattern is repeated in Jones's certain knowledge of the future.

The problem with a completely determinist precognitive ability is that, once known by other characters in the text, it reduces their agency to nil. It is the degree zero of free will. The characters become passive, mere puppets in the narrative scheme. Freedom is in fact a key theme in *The World Jones Made*: when Jones is released from prison when his first predictions 'come true', Pearson says, "'He's a free man. To do as he pleases'" (*Jones* 5:47). This is entirely erroneous and highly ironic. Jones believes himself to be no more free of deterministic 'history' than anyone else; it is simply that the future 'history' he sees is his own rise to power. Ideologically, Jones's belief in the historic inevitability of his coming to power is consistent with the Nazi belief in destiny to buttress the establishment of tyranny. Jones's rise and eventual fall are determined, and this determinism opposes the illusion of free will enjoyed by Cussick and the rest of humanity. Actually, Jones's ability acts as a kind of vortex, sucking up everyone else's free will, as they no longer believe that they have one. When the future appears determined everyone behaves passively -- and can therefore be manipulated.

The actual precognitive ability is narratively problematic. Jones becomes increasingly weary as the text progresses, weighed down by the tedium of having to do everything twice. Yet, the narrative seems to imply that even when he lives events for the first time, Jones knows what is going to happen and what to say. Yet he must experience events for the first time in his time-self which is a year ahead of the narrative 'Present'; if he already knows when he experiences them in the 'year ahead', the text falls into an unlooked-for infinite regress, where the precognitive year ahead continually multiplies itself. For example, Cussick meets Jones first on 4 April 1995 in a narrative 'Present' (although this is actually a flashback to a narrative 'past'). That means that Jones has experienced a full

year ahead and his future time-self is experiencing 4 April 1996 *at the same time* as he is talking to Cussick. At this point Jones knows what will happen up to and including 4 April 1996 because he has already experienced it; however, he does not know what will happen on 5 April 1996 as he talks to Cussick on 4 April 1995. Therefore there *is* an unknown, and Jones must experience the year-ahead events for the first time, must react naively, without precognition, to the unfolding events of 4 April 1996. However, Jones appears to 'remember' both ways. The 4 April 1996 self will have memories of the discussion with Cussick; paradoxically, the 4 April 1995 self appears to experience the events of the year ahead also as 'memories', even those which are occurring to the 1996 self experientially *at the same time*, so to speak, as Jones talks to Cussick. This explication appears confusing because it is; and I believe that the novum is itself self-contradictory and confused. Dick's later conception of precognitive abilities allows for more free will and a great deal more narrative elegance.

Jones's ability is itself flawed. He meets Cussick, but later fails to recognise him because he has 'changed' in appearance; he completely fails to recognise the importance of the Refuge and the Venusians, and Cussick and Rafferty are able to launch them with little apparent difficulty; and Jones's defeat comes because he fails to see the importance of the drifters beyond his own ideology of alien invasion. This last is an effect of the 'year-ahead' limitation, but the other two are failures in scope. At the beginning of the text, Jones's predictions are of 'THE FUTURE OF MANKIND (NO PERSONAL FORTUNES)' because the only future he can perceive is his own. He believes the future of mankind to be his own future, and this hubris is replicated in his final attempt to perpetuate his reign *post mortem*. Jones is no seer: his predictions are narrowly defined.

In the same way, *Solar Lottery* is concerned with chance and determinism as parts of the trajectory and control systems of the dystopian state. The society of *Solar Lottery* is seemingly structured upon a system of chance: 'Nobody can gain power and hold it; nobody knows what his status will be next year, next week. Nobody can plan to be a dictator: it comes and goes according to subatomic random particles' (*Solar Lottery* 3:37). Chance is introjected into the political system explicitly to avoid dictatorial rule. However, it becomes clear that this is merely an ideological alibi which masks the realities of power: people like Reese Verrick manipulate the system for their own ends, which are the maintenance of their own positions of power. There is a constant debate between principles of free will, determinism (fate) and 'chance' in both *Solar Lottery* and *The World Jones Made*. When faced with Verrick's massing powers, Cartwright becomes fatalistic, almost resigned to his own doom. It is only when the protecting bodyguard of teeps (telepaths) is destroyed that Cartwright can regain his sense of free will. *Solar Lottery*'s element of Minimax, and the random principle itself, are both predicated in a world where telepaths can read one's mind; they know what you are going to do at the same moment that you do. Free will is abolished in such a world, as it is in that of Jones. It is as if your every move is already known. Randomness becomes an instrument of liberation, of breaking out of this determined path. Ironically, the game of chance is itself fraudulent; the 'good' Leon Cartwright has been manipulating the lottery technology to elevate first himself, then Benteley to the position of Quizmaster.

The problem of free will and determinism is central to the trajectory of the dystopian rebel. Patricia Warrick argues 'Those in political power tend to reduce to slaves those who

are meant to serve. When this happens, the slave must rebel, but unfortunately, most rebels are merely people trying to exchange one set of chains for another'.[28] The rebel must overcome any sense of the oppressive system as a determined state of affairs: in contradiction to Warrick, I would argue that the trajectory of alienation and rebellion of the dystopian protagonist rests on a growing recognition that some kind of free will is possible, and a desire for freedom even if it ends in defeat. It is the protagonist's estrangement, from a naturalized ideology which attempts to occlude all other forms of discourse and opposition, and which in *Solar Lottery* and *The World Jones Made* suggests that history or fate is so determined that dissidence is futile, which enables rebellion.

As I wrote above, the principle of Relativism is *not* internalized by all, and so the state must enforce its ideology of 'freedom'. Unlike Dick's 1960s dystopias, where the fabrication of reality is so seamless that it seems entirely natural to the deceived population, his 1950s dystopias rely on extant police states to reinforce control. This suggests that Relativism is a repressive system, with its apparatus of secret police and concentration camps, but not a truly totalitarian one, where control is internalized by those oppressed. Cussick does internalize the ideology of Relativism, but it is clear that many others have not. Cussick's alienation from this ideology, and exposure of its contradictions, is the typical dystopian trajectory: a fracturing of this ideological framework in the mind of the protagonist leads to rebellion, which creates a parallel fragmentation in the control systems of the dystopian state. It is the realization that the ideology of the state, which attempts to efface its own status as ideology and represent itself as the natural state of human affairs, is in fact an artificial and imposed construct,

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[28] Warrick, *Mind in Motion*, p. 37.

and not 'natural' at all, which constitutes the alienation of the protagonist. As I stated

above, *The World Jones Made* was not the title given to the text by Dick but by the then

editor of his books, and must be treated, therefore, with a degree of caution. However, it

does signify the constructed nature of reality, a motif central to all of Dick's dystopias,

though the texts of the 1950s and 1960s differ in their analyses of power. In the 1950s

dystopias, a human power elite can be confronted by the dissident protagonist; by the

1960s, power is diffused by the media and an ideological spectacle is reality itself.

In Dick's *1950s dystopias there is usually a hope that some kind of 'real' can be regained;*

the difficulty is in revealing the layers of illusion, forgery, or lies. Similarly, power elites

can be confronted and overthrown, where in the 1960s texts power recedes from the

protagonists. Peter Fitting calls this tendency the *appeal to metaphysics* in Dick. He

writes:

> Dick's characters often react to the discovery of the breakdown of reality by
> attempting to find something or someone 'behind' phenomenal reality. [...] The
> possibility of an answer 'behind' phenomenal reality is more of a temptation than a
> resolution.[29]

Fitting posits a different solution to this problem, a practical one: an understanding that the

nature of reality is an ideological construction, and to behave accordingly if one is in

disagreement with it. The emphasis on illusion and the use of the term 'charlatan' signifies

that characters within *The World Jones Made* seem to understand that there is this

disjunction between the world as it seems to be and the world as it is. Indeed, as a secret

policeman, Cussick could hardly be unaware of this disjunction in the political sphere.

Cussick seems to able to function with this destructive knowledge held in suspension, and

seems to have truly internalized the ideology of FedGov and Relativism. That Cussick is a

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[29] Fitting, p. 95.

secret policeman is indicative of the structures of the totalized states in Dick's 50s

dystopias. Where, in the 1960s dystopias I shall analyze in the next chapter (*The*

Penultimate Truth and *The Simulacra*) the fabrication of reality is itself the means by

which the dispossessed citizenry are controlled, in *The World Jones Made*, for instance,

there is a necessity for a functioning police state to maintain the control of the dictatorial

regime. In the 1960s texts, reality itself is so mediated by spectacle that the citizens are

unaware of their own oppression.

Clearly, the rise of Jones is modelled on the rise of Hitler, and the narrative of the fictive

1990s a repetition of the 'real' (historical) 1930s. As David Seed writes: 'In *The World*

Jones Made (1956) he tried out the experiment of overlaid historical periods, depicting the

age of McCarthyism -- itself shown as an era of recuperation after a nuclear war -- as a

rerun of the 1930s'.[30] The historical paradigm of the 1930s is then blended with the 'real'

historical 1950s in an extremely pessimistic extrapolation. For the 1950s reader, the

parallels with McCarthyism are surely inescapable. By the time of Dick's later dystopias,

the demagogic dictator has himself or herself been replaced by a false and deceiving

media figurehead, like the '*der Alte*' simulacrum-President of *The Simulacra* or the

Eisenhower-like Yancy. Jones is in fact the agent of economic forces which operate to

protect the existing (capitalist) system. I have noted above that Jones appears to take over

the machinery of repression rather than change it (or institute it himself). With his rhetoric

of the protection of the Solar System from alien invasion, and the ideology of exploration,

colonization and exploitation, Jones seems a continuation -- of a more despotic kind -- of

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[30] David Seed,'Mediated Realities in the Works of Philip K. Dick' in *Postmodern Studies 11: Narrative Turns and Minor Genres in Postmodernism*, ed. by Theo D'Haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 203-225 (p. 212).

the already extant power structure. As a reporter says at the scene of the failed

assassination attempt: "'He's got a lot of rich backers'" (*Jones* 13:124). The operation of

the mob -- once again the appearance -- masks the operation of the rich, and perhaps big

business. Darko Suvin noted the same analysis of the 'affinities between German and

American fascism, born of the same social classes of big speculators and small

shopkeepers'.[31]

Jones's book is referred to as '*The Moral Struggle*' (*Jones* 8:83). This is an unambiguous

reference to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. References to the smashing of windows (*Krystalnacht*),

mobs, mass rallies, 'grey uniformed shapes', and Jones's own quasi-miraculous escape

from assassination attempts all signify parallels with Hitler. He is even mentioned: "'Do

you think Hitler was a precog?'" asks Pearson (*Jones* 5:45). Jones also has a fear of

otherness which many have seen as underlying Nazi obsessions with purity and

extermination. Jones's obsession is fixed on the vegetable 'drifters', beings far removed

from his own paranoid fantasies of "'Filthy, loathsome, alien, insect eyes'" and

"'Mindless hordes of filthy alien beings'" (*Jones* 5:44). The trope of invasion is of course

a major component of the imagination in mid-50s America. The plethora of alien invasion

themes (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Invaders from Mars, The Day the Earth Stood*

Still, The Thing and so on) signify a paranoid strain in the culture of the period, fuelled by

McCarthyite fears of 'Communist infiltration' and Cold War anxieties. Dick clearly (and

for the period, perhaps a little dangerously) links the 'alien invasion' fears to Fascist and

Nazi discourse. This is signified in the early scene in the carnival. A 'war veteran' shows

disgust for the 'freaks' and makes a distinction between them and 'people' with rights,

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[31] Suvin, 'Artifice as Refuge and World-View', p. 81.

abuses someone as a 'freak-lover' (with its connotations of racism which would be all too apparent to the contemporary reader), and then says: "'Did we fight a war, did we beat those Jews and atheists and Reds, so people could be any damn kind of freak they want? Believe any kind of egghead trash?'" (*Jones* 2:16). The conflation of conformism, hatred of otherness, anti-Semitism, Red-baiting, racism, religiosity, and anti-intellectualism is concise and telling. It is the rhetoric of the McCarthyite demagogue, just as it is the rhetoric of the fascist. 'Freak' and 'egghead' (a derogatory term from the period) become words which signify an allegiance to a particular ideological position, their use both excluding the denigrated Other and emphasising the abuser's own position within the dominant ideological system. The spatialized and televisual estrangement of other dystopian texts here becomes an alienation in terms of political discourse, one which echoes the emphasis on loyalty oaths in *Solar Lottery* and in the American 1950s.

The fall of Jones is precipitated by the action of alien beings, just as was his rise. The alien becomes not that which is merely *other* but that which is unknown. Jones causes his own death to occur because he has failed to foresee the meaning of the drifters. The conception of a vast alien vegetable existence is completely beyond his frame of knowledge or understanding. The understanding of the drifters as intergalactic pollen explodes his Earth- and Human-based paradigms. Jones is defeated by his own narrowness, his own limitations, and it is ironic that the Human race is sealed off in its own area, enclosed eternally within its own paradigms. As throughout the text, the metaphor of spatial enclosure signifies the narrowness of ideological constructions of reality.

Solar Lottery, The Man Who Japed, and *The World Jones Made* imagine worlds in which

a power elite and dictatorial ruler oppress the disenfranchised mass of population through

a Utopian ideology, televisual spectacle and the operations of a police state. There is the

possibility of escape, to the Flame Disc, the Refuge, Venus or from the dictates of the

corporation. The multiplicity of 'reals' in *Eye in the Sky* seems to suggest that in the

diegetic real of Cal Main, where the 'real' is a military-industrial corporate capitalism,

supported by the discourses of security and secrecy and sustained by the rhetoric of the

Cold War, is dominant but *not* the only possible reality. This is the formal operation of the

Utopian text itself, in compromising the constructions of the 'real' by offering an

alternative. The rebellion of the protagonists of Dick's 1950s dystopias come to an

understanding of the fraudulent and malign 'reality' through an estrangement from, and

exposure of, its ideological premises and operations. In Dick's dystopian novels of the

1960s, the world of the 'real' proves to be itself entirely constructed, and television is the

instrument of oppression. This is the focus of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 6:

THE UNIVERSE OF AUTHENTIC FAKES: THE FABRICATION OF

EVERYDAY LIFE IN PHILIP K. DICK'S 1960s DYSTOPIAS

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore Philip K. Dick's dystopias of the 1960s, which differ from his

texts of the 1950s in emphasising not totalized structures of control or historical models of

totalitarian oppression, but the fabricated nature of the 'real', either in entirely artificial

and mechanized environments (as in *The Penultimate Truth*) or in a system of televisual

deception which induces the mass of population to accede to the structures of power and

disenfranchisement. Another of Dick's 1960s dystopias -- *The Simulacra* -- introduces the

vital motif of the simulacra, which provides the title for the text. The OED defines the

word 'simulacrum' as a 'mere image' or 'specious imitation', and is related to 'simulation'

which has a history of usage which denotes falsity or fakery. The idea of falseness or

imitation is common to the novels which form the bulk of Dick's dystopian output in the

1960s, and is directly linked to the image of the simulacra.

Simulation and simulacra are also part of Jean Baudrillard's theorising of the postmodern

'Hyperreal': he posits four successive stages of the image:

> -- it is the reflection of a basic reality
> -- it masks and perverts a basic reality
> -- it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
> -- it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum.[1]

David Seed, in his analysis of mediation in Dick's novels, uses Baudrillard's terminology

but, citing Christopher Norris, exposes Baudrillard's problematic retention of the true/

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[1] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11.

false dyad in this formulation. Image and reality are placed in contradistinction, when the 'era of simulation' that we live in has (according to Baudrillard) erased this distinction.[2] I would suggest that *The Simulacra* and *The Penultimate Truth* both offer a sense of an ultimately recoverable 'reality', once the matrix of deceptions and simulations has been penetrated; *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) further complicates this problem of recovering the real, and by the time of *Ubik* (1969) this possibility has disappeared in a narrative spiral of infinite regress.

A political reading of *Ubik* or the novels of the 1970s must then be reliant on an analysis such as that employed by Peter Fitting in 'Reality as Ideological Construct': that Dick's novels expose the constructed and therefore Ideological forms of what we perceive to be the 'real'.[3] Fitting's (albeit seductive) use of Althusser's formulation of Ideology in fact separates out image and reality from texts where the two are commingled inextricably, where there is no reality but the subjective or the *ersatz*. The possibility of political action or change (the trajectory of alienation of the dystopian protagonist, and the narrative of rebellion of the dystopian text) is negated if there is no recoverable real; one becomes reliant (as did Dick himself) in a religious or mystic transcendence, such as the vision of 'anamnesis' in which he perceived the 1st century AD underlying -- and poking through -- the fabric of 20th century California. It is no coincidence that by the 1970s Dick had stopped writing the kind of political dystopia we find in *The Simulacra* or *The Penultimate Truth*. The turn from political engagement in the Popular Front era, to liberal consensus in the post-war period, a movement I outlined in my Introduction and which I suggest

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[2] David Seed, 'Mediated Realities in the Works of Philip K. Dick', in *Postmodern Studies 11: Narrative Turns and Minor Genres in Postmodernism*, ed. by Theo D'Haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 203-225 (p. 206).

[3] Peter Fitting, 'Reality as Ideological Construct: A Reading of Five Novels by Philip K. Dick', in *On Philip K. Dick: 40 Articles from Science Fiction Studies*, ed. by R.D. Mullen *et al* (Terre Haute: TH-SFS, 1992), pp. 92-110.

characterizes the ideological commitments of the 1950s dystopias, is manifested in Dick's

novels as the turn from the imagination of repressive police states to ones where subjective

experience might be so fabricated that ideological manipulation and power is diffuse and

immanent.

By the end of the 1960s, for Dick, there was no 'real', no quotidian or everyday

experience. For him, the world was immanent with religious revelation. It is important to

note, then, the key role moments of discovery or *revelation* of the 'truth' which appear in

the texts under discussion, particularly with regard to the utopian and dystopian tradition.

In those dystopias I have already analyzed, an apocalyptic moment often creates the textual

space of dystopia, and the eschatological pattern of revelation (such as in *Fahrenheit 451*)

enables the re-placement of the dystopian society with a new dispensation. For Dick, the

moment of revelation is not apocalyptic but a showing of the 'real' actually underlying

what can be sensorially perceived. The nature of reality disclosed in *The Simulacra* and

The Penultimate Truth is closer to the second order of Baudrillard's typology: 'it masks

and perverts a basic reality'.[4] The distinction between real and image can still be made.

1. *The Simulacra*: Bearers of the Secret

The world outlined in *The Simulacra* is divided into economic and political blocs, derived

from the state of the Cold War 1960s: there is a still-extant communist bloc led by the

Soviet Union, and a Western bloc called USEA, the United States of Europe and America.

In *The Zap Gun*, written concurrently with *The Penultimate Truth*, and in other Dick texts,

this bloc is called Wes-Dem but the structure of muted conflict remains the same. In fact,

in *The Simulacra* superpower confrontation is never seen, and the narrative takes place

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[4] Baudrillard, p. 11.

entirely within the confines of USEA. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the structure of Cold

War conflict is displaced onto bureaucratic and control systems within the dystopian state.

The Zap Gun (1964) is far more overt in its Cold War satire, with two competing

superpowers whose military conflicts are sublimated into 'plowshared' objects (military

technological hardware turned into civilian commodities) and the 'game' of espionage.[5]

The Zap Gun is a satire of the Cold War arms race, where new weapons are never made

but their components turned into consumer commodities and hi-tech gadgets, and the arms

race is entirely fabricated as a spectacle to placate and control the masses. Conflict in *The*

Simulacra exists within the vast politico-economic bloc, particularly between corporate

entities and cartels, and between the structure of government and the cartels. One narrative

strand is the attempt by the government of the 'First Lady', Nicole Thibodeaux, and the

old President called '*der Alte*' to curtail the economic power of the Karp cartel by the

withdrawal of an important government contract (in fact the key contract, the manufacture

of the simulated *der Alte* Presidents). Other social structures are also dominated by the

cartels:

> The powerful German cartel [A.G Chemie] had sold the world on the notion of
> drug therapy for mental illness; there was a fortune to be made, there. And by
> corollary, psychoanalysts were quacks, on a par with the orgone box and health
> food healers'.[6]

One Germanic therapy-system (Freudianism) is overtaken by the economic (and therefore

political) hegemonic force of the pharmaceutical giant. Psychotherapy generally gets a

poor deal in Dick's texts (such as the quack Dr. Malparto in *The Man Who Japed*, or the

ambiguous and absurd psychiatric suitcase Dr. Smile in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer*

Eldritch), and here, it is simply seen as one form of deception, and more importantly,

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[5] Philip K. Dick, *The Zap Gun* (1967) (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1989).
[6] Philip K. Dick, *The Simulacra* (1964) (London: Methuen, 1983), chapter 1, p. 8. All further chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text.

making money, compared to another; one hegemon ousted by the interests of a rival, with little or no relevance given to either truth or healing properties. Dr. Egon Superb (Dick's psychiatrists also revel in absurd names) is in fact allowed to continue to practise by the state when all other analysts have been barred, in order to *fail* to heal a certain anonymous patient.

The economic domination of a reunified Germany is both prescient and a reflection of the (then) near past: the malign influence of Wilhelmian and then Nazi Germany on European and world political affairs. As I noted in my previous chapter, Germany provides a curious and double symbol in Dick's *oeuvre*, both the symbol of oppression, totalitarianism, bureaucracy, and the predations of big business (I.G. Farben, A.G. Chemie, Karp und Sohnen Werke); *and* entirely attractive (to Dick) cultural production, particularly of the Romantic period (which, curiously, fed into the ideology of the Nazi state), and even more particularly, of music. Angus Taylor describes this as 'a Janus-faced cultural symbol for the struggle between good and evil, organization and chaos'.[7] The domination of Germany is a narrative device used in *The Simulacra* but also in *The Unteleported Man*, where a German-dominated UN organization controls Earth.[8] Unlike the German invasion, annexation and domination of the United States in *The Man in the High Castle*, in *The Simulacra* we find *assimilation* and domination. Nat Flieger drives along the 'autobahn' rather than the freeway (*Simulacra* 1: 5), and the (generic) name of the president is '*der Alte*'. German language, then, has also permeated American life. The tail wags the dog: 'We in *Nord Amerika* are the dog; the Reich is the tail' (*Simulacra* 3:27). This is a throwaway but significant statement, for contained within it are references to the Reich

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[7] Angus Taylor, 'Can God Fly? Can He hold out his Arms and Fly? The fiction of Philip K. Dick', *Foundation* 4 (July 1973), 32 - 47 (p. 39).
[8] Philip K. Dick, *The Unteleported Man* (1964) (London: Methuen, 1976).

(the Third Reich) and also to 'Amerika'; this Germanised spelling became, in the 60s, a

shorthand for repressive and police-state tendencies in the US and a counter-culture

slogan.

Hazel Pierce characterises this, somewhat harshly, as a 'not-too-subtle evocation of the

Hitlerian era'.[9] The links to Nazism are more than referential: the 'First Lady', Nicole

Thibodeaux, attempts to bring Hermann Goering into the narrative present by the use of a

time machine, in order to persuade him to assassinate Hitler and forestall the Final

Solution. This policy attests to the 'moral emasculation' needed to operate in the *der Alte*

system, an ethical failure expressed in a strangely gendered metaphor. The use of the time-

travel novum rather complicates the narrative unnecessarily, and this sub-plot ends

unresolved as civil war ensues and Goering is himself shot. *The Penultimate Truth* also

incorporates the time-machine ('time-scoop') motif; in both texts, the ideas of

determinism and free will are brought into play, but neither deals with the possibilities as

fully as *The World Jones Made*. David Seed seems to prefer a more contemporary analysis

of the economic system; he writes that 'Dick here combines a recognition of the

commercial interdependence of Germany and America with a recognition of the political

power wielded by cartels'.[10] This attests to the dual focus of the satiric elements within the

dystopian text: Dick is extrapolating from the past of Nazi Germany, but both *The*

Simulacra and *The Penultimate Truth* are also metaphoric explorations of the structures of

political power in 1960s America. Dick's other dystopias of the 1950s, those patterned on

a totalized state, also maintain this dual focus, with *The World Jones Made* mapping Nazi

Germany onto 1950s America to suggest a recurring historical model of domination and

[9] Hazel Pierce, 'Philip K. Dick's Political Dreams' in *Philip K. Dick*, ed. by Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (New York: Taplinger, 1983), pp. 105-136 (p. 125).
[10] Seed, p. 208.

oppression. Where the 1950s dystopias imagine a power elite operating through police states and centralized telecommunications, by the 1960s the police are unnecessary as the 'real' itself is so thoroughly fabricated that the citizens are unaware of their deception and subjection.

Names in *The Simulacra* also follow the Germanic pattern: the leader of the rebellious 'Sons of Job' is Bernard Goltz; some *der Alte*'s named are 'Rudolph Kalbfleisch', and 'Fredrich Hempel'; we have already encountered Nat Flieger, and the Karps; and the rival simulacra manufacturer is called Maury Frauenzimmer. These have a more political significance, as all of those with Germanic names are, or become, part of the ruling *Geheimnistrager* elite (*geheim* means 'secret' in German), and those with more Anglo names tend to be among the *Bes*, those who carry out orders without understanding them. In *The Simulacra* the figure who exists as a point of indeterminacy in an otherwise predictable system is the pianist Richard Kongrosian, whose name has Armenian overtones.

The importance of secrecy as the determining element in the social and political hierarchy indicates the extent to which *The Simulacra*'s world is a fraudulent one, a fake or *ersatz* reality perpetrated on the mass of population. Those who are in possession of the secret, the *Ges*, engage in an explicit deception of those without knowledge. *The Simulacra*'s typical dystopian social and political structure is divided between a ruling elite class and the masses, a structure often found in Dick's dystopias and probably derived from Orwell's division of the Inner and Outer Party, and the proles. In *The Simulacra*, we could outline this tripartite structure thus: the *Bes* as the proles; the *Ges* as the Outer Party; and the shadowy 'ruling council' as the Inner Party. In *The Simulacra* all people are in fact

Party members, of the unified 'Democratic-Republican party' (2: 19). USEA is a one-party

state:

> Now there was just the one party, which ruled a stable and peaceful society, and
> everyone, by law, belonged to it. Everyone paid dues and attended meetings and
> voted, each for four years, for a new *der Alte* -- for the man they thought Nicole
> would like best (*Simulacra* 2: 19).

The American political process becomes a vast 'mating game', democracy merely the

decision on who would be the next consort; a vote which, in fact, is entirely manipulated

and fraudulent, because the *der Alte* is a mechanical simulacrum, replaced at will by the

ruling elite for political and propaganda ends. This is a comic twist on the scenario of a

withering of the democratic system, found often in other American dystopian texts, such

as in Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (see chapter 7), or Vonnegut's *Player*

Piano. In *The Space Merchants* the domination of economic interests leaves a kind of

simulated Senate, which has representatives not from States but from corporations, such as

the Senator from Nash-Kelvinator, and so on. More often in Dick such a remnant is

entirely absent, and a more or less brutal dictatorship has supervened.

The majority of the people in *The Simulacra* live in apartment blocs; the protagonists in

the text are from the Abraham Lincoln Apartments building (another, the Joe Louis, is also

mentioned, populated entirely and exclusively by black tenants, which hints at racial

segregation). This is reminiscent of the arrangements of *The Man Who Japed*, the

previously mentioned *The Space Merchants* and other dystopias of overcrowding of the

period. There are references to dorms and labour gangs for those who cannot maintain

their status as an apartment dweller, and importantly, this is determined by 'relpol' tests,

which measure both intelligence and the extent to which the examinee has internalized the

dominant ideology of the day. 'Belongingness' is a virtue in the world of the Abraham

Lincoln Apartments, just as it was in the American 1950s. Residents are 'required by their

charter to attend' community meetings (*Simulacra* 2: 15), and there operates an

'identification reader' to prevent outsiders from entering the meeting. The block system

then engenders a feeling of paranoia and distrust of outsiders, an anxiety marked in the

1950s. The discourse of both Cold War Hawks and Doves is appropriated in the text into a

debate about sending the block's children to an outside school; the liberal Edgar Stone

thinks:

> what a broadening experience it would be; their children would discover that
> people in other apartment buildings were no different from themselves. Barriers
> between people of all apartments would be torn down and a new understanding
> would come about (*Simulacra* 2: 19).

Stone views contact and understanding as a means of dissolving mutual distrust;

conservatives envision 'outbreaks of fights as children clashed over which building was

supreme' (*Simulacra* 2: 19). One sees hope that the status quo might be changed, the other

fears the continuation of block xenophobia. The language of the Cold War is reduced to a

microcosmic level, into absurdity: conflict and distrust are transformed into a children's

squabble.

The residents of the block are alienated from other block residents, but some are also

alienated from the system: Ian Duncan, a Dickian 'little man', has tried (and will try once

more) to be accepted by the embodiment of the system, Nicole Thibodeaux, but he really

dreams of escape. He is depressed to find that Edgar Stone has faked his relpol test results,

even though Stone had only good intentions. Not to have failed the test closes a window of

opportunity (and more importantly motivation) to 'light out for the territories': Mars.

Duncan is weak, and after his and Al Miller's ill-fated performance before Nicole, must be

saved by the rocket salesman, Loony Luke, *ex machina*. In 'Novelty Act', the short story

which provides this strand of *The Simulacra* and is in fact incorporated into it with minor

changes, Ian and Al have their memories erased for their misdemeanour. The psionic

device the 'papoola', a fake Martian creature which has enabled them to get to the White

House by fraudulent means, is controlled by Loony Luke and attacks Nicole, but Loony

Luke saves them both:

> for the first time in many years he [Ian] felt at peace.
> The ship shot upward into the night emptiness and the new planet which lay
> beyond.[11]

Escape is possible, both in the short story and the novel; but for Duncan, it cannot be of his

own devising. He, like other alienated dystopian characters, is in search of the authentic

experience, that which is unavailable in the *ersatz* reality of his world. In *Fahrenheit 451*,

as here, the desire for the authentic life is spatialized as the desire for physical escape from

the dystopian world itself. Montag escapes into the natural, a space antithetical to that of

the Firemen; here, as in *The World Jones Made*, the utopic space of the text is off-planet.

Duncan attempts to find the authentic in the figure of Nicole Thibodeaux and the White

House: 'They would see he really, not just the TV image; it would no longer be a fantasy -

- it would be true' (*Simulacra* 8: 92). Sadly, and inevitably, Duncan is deceived: the White

House is in fact the locus of simulation, and he performs before a young woman who is

actually 'Kate Rupert', the fourth actress to impersonate the long-dead 'real' Nicole. Al

Miller has an interesting description of his previous encounter with Nicole:

> 'But -- Ian, she was much more attractive [in actual life]. The TV can't catch the
> vitality, the glow, all the delicate colours of her skin. The luminosity of her hair.
> [...] You know what it did to me, seeing her actually? It made me discontented'
> (*Simulacra* 8: 93).

Nicole is more real than reality, and the experience of her makes the synthetic everyday alienating, itself unreal. This again emphasises the signification TV = falsity: it cannot capture her beauty truly. It is incapable of doing so, and, in fact, falsifies her. Once more we encounter the vertiginous layering of fake upon fake and falsity upon falsity. Nicole is more real *than* real, but in one sense, she is not real at all (though in a different way to the 'unreal' *der Alte* simulacrum).

Duncan and Miller come across the 'secret' of the *der Alte* system by accident. They are not killed for this forbidden knowledge by an act of mercy (or perhaps squeamishness) on Nicole's part, who opts for their memories of the event to be excised rather than eliminating them. This is entirely different from the usual method of imparting knowledge; Maury Frauenzimmer experiences a state of revelation upon the divesting of the secret to him: 'Then that's it, Maury realized. That's the piece of *Ge* knowledge; I'm now a *Ge*. It's happened in an instant. I'm on the inside' (*Simulacra* 9: 108). In *The Simulacra*, power quite literally is knowledge, and vice versa. The ruling elite is the *Geheimnistrager*, the 'bearers of the secret' (3: 36-7), a secret the *Befelhaltrager* ('carry-outer of instructions') are not allowed to know. This rather occult formulation does not obscure the hierarchies of power involved. The *Ges* know that the governmental operation is a vast fraud perpetrated upon the *Bes*, but the possession of that knowledge binds their loyalty rather than alienates them. It is a system of co-optation and secrecy, and once you are an 'insider' you feel grateful to those who allowed you into the inner circle. This system of restricted knowledge, of 'need to know', of security and secrecy, has its obvious provenance in the paranoia of the Cold War 1950s. In *The Penultimate Truth* this hierarchic system is figured as spatial domination: those above ground partake in the deception of those below.

This is achieved, as it is in *The Simulacra*, through the mass media, and particularly television.

Where Dick's 1950s dystopias imagined a series of police states which manipulated televisual spectacle for repressive ends, in *The Simulacra* and particularly *The Penultimate Truth* reality itself is seamlessly constructed by the medium of television. Television as a tool of a repressive state is a generic motif of dystopian texts, and we can see it the viewscreens of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the wall-sized telescreens of *Fahrenheit 451*, though in these reality is not quite so mediated (to use David Seed's term) as it is in both *The Simulacra* and *The Penultimate Truth*. In his story 'Sales Pitch', Dick imagines a society utterly invaded by advertising. *The Space Merchants* is again brought to mind; in fact, 'Sales Pitch' was submitted to the Meredith Agency on 19 November 1953, and Pohl & Kornbluth's novel was published that year; Gregg Rickman notes that Dick was influenced by *The Space Merchants*, something also remarked upon at the time by Damon Knight. The protagonist of 'Sales Pitch' is alienated by 'the ads. That was what really did it. He could have stood everything else -- but the ads, the whole long way from Ganymede to Earth. And on Earth, the swarms of sales robots: it was too much. And they were everywhere'.[12] The privacy of first Ed Morris's 'commute ship', and then his home, are invaded and eradicated by the mechanically-insistent ads. This motif of the physical penetration of private space by mass media is replicated in *The Simulacra* where tiny 'Nitz' commercial-constructs perform the same intrusion, into Maury Frauenzimmer's workshop and Chic Strikerock's car. There the victim is free to shoot and destroy the advertisement; unfortunately for Ed Morris in 'Sales Pitch', the implacable robot follows

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[12] Philip K. Dick, 'Sales Pitch', *Future* (June 1954), reprinted in *The Father-Thing: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume 3* (1990) (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 223-238 (p. 223).

him in his bid to escape the solar system and, when the ship is half-destroyed and Morris

trapped, the damaged robot performs its pitch again, presumably *ad infinitum.*

This motif of penetration of private space is a metaphor for the penetration of propaganda

into the minds of the masses. Figuratively, television penetrates into the mind of the

consumers of the spectacle, another version of the use of bodily metaphors to signify the

invasive control systems of the dystopian state. In *The Simulacra*, propaganda is

disseminated largely by the ubiquitous television, though it is interesting to note that Dr.

Superb complains that '[t]here should have been some way of keeping reporting machines

out of one's house' (*Simulacra* 1: 7-8). The purpose of this invasion is then not

indoctrination, propaganda or selling but exposure: Superb becomes an item of public

interest, 'in the news'. His private life ceases to exist. The ubiquity of the machines is

similar to that of the 'juveniles' in *The Man Who Japed*, but here their omnipresence

signifies spectacle rather than surveillance.

Television itself has become something rather different to the narcotizing force of

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Ian Duncan in *The Simulacra* 'recalled the old days when the

TV set had carried entertainment, good shows put on by professionals [....] [T]he TV had

become educational, not entertaining' (2: 17). While Duncan is not the most reliable of

narrative voices, it is clear from the system outlined in *The Simulacra* that television is not

simply an opiate of the masses. It constructs the very sense of reality of the mass, those

like Duncan. *The Man Who Japed* has an arcane rotation system of communal television

ownership; the 'entertainment' that the dwellers of the Lincoln Apartments are subjected

to is the soft-shoe shuffle of the 'Fettersmoller girls' and the other 'acts' thrown up within

the building. This is in fact a parade of the *un*talented, and Ian and Al only make it to the

White House through fakery.

Control of the television is not entirely that of the consumer: 'the television set said

taaaaanggg, indicating that it was about to come on' (*Simulacra* 2: 20). Again, this seems

to have *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as intertext, with the announcements of the telescreens; the

same motif recurs in *The Zap Gun*, though there Lars Powderdry is able to turn it off. The

phrase 'the carefully regulated window of our television set' also occurs (*Simulacra* 2: 21),

and this is echoed in *The Penultimate Truth*: the floor-to-ceiling screen is 'their sole

window on the above world' (*Penultimate Truth* 2: 17). The use of the word 'window' in

both phrases suggests an ideological misapprehension of the virtual and fraudulent space

of the television screen as a transparency, and an occlusion of the obvious control

mechanisms which surround the television's reception. The ideological construction of

reality, disseminated through the viewscreens, is so naturalized that the artificial is itself

thought of in terms of the natural or unmediated.

Nicole Thibodeaux appears on Duncan's TV screen and delivers what seems to be a kind

of Presidential 'Through the Keyhole', or perhaps 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous', a

televisual tour of the White House. Of course, this is entirely simulated, although Duncan

talks to Nicole as though he were actually there. Either his sense of the real and irreal is

impaired or he has been well indoctrinated to accept the simulation *as* real. Either way, he

is entirely at the mercy of those ideological constructions which perpetuate his subjection.

The fake intimacy of the set-up perhaps refers to the tradition of the 'fireside chat'

instituted by Franklin Roosevelt (on the radio); certainly, the figure of Talbot Yancy in

'The Mold of Yancy' and *The Penultimate Truth* was a satire on the televisual addresses

of Dwight Eisenhower.[13]

The difference between Nicole Thibodeaux and Talbot Yancy (other than the fact that one

is human and the other a simulacrum) is glamour. If Yancy is Ike, then Nicole is -- as

Lawrence Sutin notes in *Divine Invasions* -- Jacqueline Kennedy, whose maiden name

was also French in derivation: Bouvier. This passage from *The Simulacra* could easily

have referred to Jackie Kennedy:

> On the screen bloomed now the lovely tranquil features, the pale skin and dark,
> intelligent eyes, the wise and yet pert face of the woman who had come to
> monopolize their attention, on whom an entire nation, almost an entire planet,
> dwelt obsessively (*Simulacra* 2:21).

Daniel Fondaneche also asserts the cultural and historical resonance of the figure of Nicole

Thibodeaux. He writes:

> Dick must have been attracted by the charm of Jackie Kennedy. With the growing
> influence of television, a beautiful wife becomes an asset for a President or a
> candidate for the White House.[14]

Television falsifies but paradoxically also fabricates and authenticates the image of beauty,

the personification of glamour. Ian Duncan perceives her to be real. This more nearly

approximates the approach of 'bread and circuses' found in other dystopias: while the

nation dwells obsessively on Nicole's image, totalitarian measures are instituted in her

name.

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[13] Philip K. Dick, 'The Mold of Yancy', *If* (August 1955), reprinted in *The Days of Perky Pat: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume 4* (1991) (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 76-98.

[14] Daniel Fondaneche, 'Dick, the Libertarian Prophet', *Science Fiction Studies* 15:45 (July 1988),141-151, reprinted in *On Philip K. Dick: 40 Articles from Science Fiction Studies*, edited by R. D. Mullen *et al*, (Terre Haute: TH-SFS, 1992), 161-169 (p. 165).

The *der Alte* simulacrum has an altogether more symbiotic relationship to the televisual media; in fact, he only exists on it: 'The simulacrum said nothing and automatically the TV cameras also shut off, one by one' (*Simulacra* 3:35). This is a closed loop of simulation: the simulacrum only moves while the cameras are on, and they only film when the simulacrum is working. Again, this may be a satire on the idea of the television personality who only 'comes alive' when the camera is on them (one of Dick's oft-commented upon metaphors-made-real). This is repeated in *The Penultimate Truth*: 'when the sim became rigid [...] the cameras -- at the precise second -- shut down' (*Penultimate Truth* 8: 58). The *der Alte* simulacrum is the literal embodiment of the false or fake TV 'reality'. It is entirely unreal and is constructed for propaganda purposes: 'stiff and formal, full of moralizing speeches; a real leader type who can drum obedience into the Be masses' (*Simulacra* 11: 143). Where, in *The World Jones Made* or in *Solar Lottery* the rebellion of the protagonist unveils the control mechanisms of the totalized state, and reveals the power elite who benefit from tyranny, in *The Simulacra* and *The Penultimate Truth* the President, the literal embodiment of power, is himself a fake, a simulacrum. Instead of Reese Verrick or Floyd Jones, there is the *der Alte* and Talbot Yancy, an entirely fabricated entity. The system of control and power, instead of concentrating in the centre in the identifiable form of a dictator, is diffuse. The televisual spectacle, in constructing reality itself, disperses power and makes rebellion against the dominant structure more difficult, for there is no dictator or power elite to topple.

The masses gaze upon Nicole and the *der Alte*, and consume their images. This fixing of the gaze (or focus) allows other operations to continue away from that attention. However, the gaze is two-way: Ian Duncan craves entrance into the White House in order to be seen by Nicole and thereby made real. Duncan says: '"we're brought into being, validated

consensually, by Nicole's gaze'" (*Simulacra* 9: 114). Duncan is so alienated by the

structure of society that he has become not merely disenfranchised, but disembodied. The

locus of the physical real, the space of one's own body, has been taken away from him. He

no longer believes it exists, and laments "'the world of non-being, the world we've been in

all our lives, until now'" (*Simulacra* 9: 114). Invisibility, the erasure of the body, is

analogous to the mechanized or replaced body in other dystopias of the period. The

mechanization of the body in dystopia signifies the intrusion or invasion of the imperatives

of control or power of the totalized state, the body representing the body politic. The lack

of image or self-image is a manifestation of an extreme state of powerlessness, which is

mirrored in Richard Kongrosian's ongoing schizophrenia; he says "'just recently I've

become invisible'" (10:129). It is a kind of self-negation. Kongrosian, paradoxically, has

power, psychokinetic power. Ironically, his power is quite literally disembodied: he can

move things without using his physical body, and in an echo of *Player Piano*, can play the

piano without touching it, with 'ghost hands'. The metaphor of the pianola in Vonnegut's

text, however, exposes the unseen forces of power which play upon the dystopian

protagonist. Here, demateriality signifies an extreme alienation.

Visibility and invisibility is a major motif in *The Simulacra*. For Duncan, 'reality' *is*

visibility, and visibility is bound up with celebrity, with television, and above all with

Nicole. Reality *is* the televisual spectacle. Unless you have been seen by the 'real' (Nicole)

then you are invisible and therefore do not exist. However, power seems to be about

visibility, but in fact its essential component is *in*visibility. This reversal occurs at the end

of the text. Bernard Goltz has been the apparent dystopian rebel, leading the generic

movement of malcontents the 'Sons of Job'; it is revealed at the end of the text that Goltz

is in fact the leader of the shadowy (and until the end, entirely off-stage and invisible)

ruling council: 'They never appeared on TV' (Simulacra 14:193). Kim Stanley Robinson

criticises this reversal, writing:

> It doesn't work; with this revelation both character and plot coherence fall apart.
> We could argue that this reversal is Dick's way of indicating that the established
> powers will co-opt any organized resistance to it, but the problem here is that Goltz
> has been having great success as the underground leader, and has been seriously
> undermining the power structure he heads.[15]

In terms of plot logic Robinson is probably correct: this is one revelation too many.

However, it does make thematic sense in its completing of the visible/invisible movement.

Perhaps it would be more helpful to make a distinction between *obscurity* and invisibility.

The machinations of Goltz are obscured by many layers of deception and structures of

power: they can be revealed, ultimately, by the careful stripping away of these layers.

Where the protagonists of Dick's 1950s dystopias unmask the operations of an

ideologically-driven power elite, the texts of the 1960s conflate ideology with mediated

reality itself. Instead of revealing the figure who stands behind the machinery of control,

The Simulacra and *The Penultimate Truth* investigate how ideology is produced and

maintained: through television. Obscurity allows survival, or better, escape: 'It's good to

be small, Chic realized, in times like this. And the smaller the better. Right down to the

vanishing point' (*Simulacra* 15: 210). If one is too small to be noticed, one is able to

escape the determining power structures. Duncan and Miller are taken away to Mars by

Loony Luke because their very lack of power, their lack of significance to the powerful,

allows them to depart Earth.

This desire for escape is of course a major motif of dystopian texts, though not all manage

to do so (and some, like Allen Purcell in *The Man Who Japed*, choose to stay and fight).

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[15] Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Novels of Philip K. Dick* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press. 1984), p. 72.

This desire is a manifestation of the dystopian protagonist's realization that the ideologically constructed real is malign, and a desire for more 'authentic' or 'real' forms of life. Ideologically, the desire for escape also signifies the American *mythos* of the frontier. Duncan actually thinks 'I ought to be on Mars [...] on the *frontier*' (*Simulacra* 2: 22). Loony Luke's Heath-Robinsonesque 'jalopies' (a deliberately archaic name) represent the desire to 'light out for the territories', to board a wagon and find 'virgin' land. President Kennedy also tapped into this myth in his 'New Frontier' rhetoric, which, ironically, also referred to journeys into outer space (the Moon rather than Mars). This desire to escape the confines of Earth and its oppressive structures (and at the end of the text, its war) is inverted in the later *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* There, governmental pressure is to 'emigrate or degenerate'. The emphasis on Earth as *omphalos*, the Earth as the centre of the symbolic universe in *The Man Who Japed*, also signifies the inversion of this myth.

Hazel Pierce, in her discussion of *The Simulacra*, also notices the uses of invisibility and the desire for escape:

> How can one escape this mad, absurdist world? It might be possible to migrate to a virgin environment and attempt to reconstruct from the bottom up the very society you escaped, improving it through the hindsight of prior experience. Or one might retreat into social invisibility, living a life of psychological isolation and tainted freedom in the midst of the crowd. A third alternative is the complete destruction of civilization so that a more primitive social group have the chance to set the stage with new hopes and new directions.[16]

In fact, all three possibilities are in play as *The Simulacra* ends. The novels ends in suspension: Nat Flieger and his small group (now including Nicole) are stranded in the Pacific Northwest among the 'chuppers', prehistoric 'throwbacks' who await the self-destruction of *homo sapiens*. In the major population centres, a new civil war is raging.

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[16] Pierce, p. 128.

Nearly all of the dystopian texts I have studied end with a moment of suspended

possibility, avoiding narrative closure; only Roshwald's *Level 7* follows *Nineteen Eighty-*

Four in its destruction of hope, though *Player Piano*'s ending is highly ambiguous. For

the dystopian protagonist escape may be achievable but a revolutionary reconfiguration of

society rarely is; it is hinted at in *The Man Who Japed*, *Solar Lottery*, and even Bernard

Wolfe's *Limbo*, but never seen. Lack of closure is then perhaps the most that the dystopian

text can hold out in the age of technological domination: that there are chinks in the world

machine.

2. Simulated Being: from *The Simulacra* to *The Penultimate Truth*

Hazel Pierce describes the state of *The Simulacra* in these terms:

> Appearance versus reality -- the appearance of great benefits masks the underlying
> reality of exploitation. The Ges have thrust an ersatz reality upon the Bes. *The
> Simulacra*, true to the plural of its title, presents us with a simulacrum of an entire
> society, replete with multiple simulacra wherever one turns. This is a society in
> which the authenticity of human life is barely discernible.[17]

For Pierce, then, the society is itself a simulacrum, and it seems that the prevalence of

individual simulacra replicate the society's own artificiality on a different narrative level.

In Baudrillard's definition, 'it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure

simulacrum'.[18] The circularity (and spectre of regress) implied by the simulacra-within-

simulacra model offered by Pierce would fit a Baudrillardian reading, therefore. The

society of the simulacra (the society of *The Simulacra*) becomes free-floating, referring to

nothing but itself, an image for which there is no model.

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[17] Pierce, p. 126.
[18] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 11.

Rather hyperbolically Baudrillard seems to suggest that the Dickian text itself is a pure

simulacrum, in 'Simulacra and Science Fiction':

> Dick does not create an alternate cosmos nor a folklore or a cosmic exoticism, nor
> intergalactic heroic deeds; the reader is, from the outset, in a total simulation
> without origin, past, or future -- in a kind of flux of all coordinates (mental, spatio-
> -temporal, semiotic). [...] It is *hyperreal*. It is a universe of simulation.[19]

Does the text refer to nothing but itself, a zone of pure semiosis? Clearly the science

fiction text is operating on principles other than the purely mimetic (which seems to be the

first order of the image in Baudrillard's scale) but I think that it is clear that the dystopia is

sited in the cultural matrix of its production, and in Dick's texts one finds the intrusion of

the *bricolage* of everyday American life. *Paradoxically, and ironically, it is in Dick's* very

avoidance of 'exoticism' and 'galactic heroic deeds' that Baudrillard finds the irreality

(rather than unreality) of Dick's texts, his very groundedness in the quotidian.

Baudrillard's reading would tend to elide the historical markers which provide the dual

focus of Dick's, and the dystopian text's, satire.

The civil war in *The Simulacra* is precipitated by the attempt by the government to 'cut the

vast cartel out of participation in *the economic privileges which it now enjoyed [...] to the*

government's loss' (*Simulacra* 3:38). This is focused on the area of manufacture of the

simulacra. The typical Dickian scenario of the small business versus the large corporation

(analogous to the 'little people' against the power elite) is also engaged here. The Karp

und Sohnen Werke cartel have the contract to build the *der Alte* simulacrum, but this is

taken away and given to the small Frauenzimmer firm. Originally, however, the

Frauenzimmer firm had built a different kind of simulacrum: the 'famnexdo'. This is an

artificial family-next-door that emigrating colonists take with them to keep them company:

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[19] Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies* 18:55 (November 1991), 309-313 (p. 312).

'that was what emigrants wanted, in fact needed, out in the sparsely-populated colonial regions' (*Simulacra* 5: 58). The linking of simulacra (and then androids) with colonization is a repeated strategy in *The Simulacra*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Build You*. Domination as colonization is a motif found in Wolfe's *Limbo*, and later in Frederik Pohl's texts, particularly *Jem*. In *We Can Build You*, Sam Barrow, the head of a large corporation (who wants to take over manufacture of the simulacra) intends to use them as (fake) enticements for colonists, for the purposes of land speculation.[20] The fake family would live in a ranch-style home in a wasteland environment in order to create the illusion of 'the good life', and so others would join them. Once enough colonists had been induced to sign up, the simulated family would move on to the next arid moon and perform the same operation there. This kind of fraud repeats the codings of appearance and reality but on an economic level, and does not challenge the significations of 'reality' within the text. In *The Simulacra*, the 'famnexdo' are bought by colonists for:

> the simulated presence of life, the sound and motion of human activity -- or at least its mechanical near-substitute -- to bolster his morale in the new environment of unfamiliar stimuli and perhaps, god forbid, no stimuli at all. And in addition to this primary psychological gain there was a practical secondary advantage as well. The famnexdo group of simulacra developed the parcel of land, tilled it and planted it, irrigated it, made it fertile, highly productive (*Simulacra* 5: 58).

The 'famnexdo' (family-next-door) are chattels, mechanical slaves. Their status is that of the androids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, also used in the colonial project as indented labour.[21] The simulacra are simulated mirrors of the emigrant family, and pick up 'the covert hopes and dreams of the settler and detailed them back in an articulated fashion' (*Simulacra* 5: 59). They are means of culturally reinforcing certain ideological concepts, but they also constitute a closed loop, and presumably would 'feed back' any psychological problems the settlers encountered. The 'famnexdo' are an artificial

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[20] Philip K. Dick, *We Can Build You* (1972) (London: Severn House, 1988).

[21] Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) (London: Grafton, 1972).

community, another artificial society. The simulacra are yet another version of the motif of

the mechanized human body, as metaphor for alienation, but are entirely artificial and

constructed beings.

The key simulacrum in *The Penultimate Truth* is the artificial president, Talbot Yancy.

This is derived from Dick's own short story 'The Mold of Yancy', published in 1955. In

that text, the simulacrum is called John Edward Yancy, and is a simulated 'Gestalt' figure,

'a synthesis [...] A sort of composite person. No such individual actually exists. We drew

on basic prototypes from sociological records; we based the gestalt on various typical

persons'.[22] Yancy is not a part of the governmental structures of power but is constructed

and operated by big business, "'the trading syndicates that own this moon'"; for this story

takes place on the moon of Callisto, not on Earth. The story is an early prefiguring of the

construction of a media reality found in both *The Simulacra* and *The Penultimate Truth*, as

the "'homespun philosoph[y]'", '[p]ithy sayings on every subject. [...] [w]ise old saws'

have a totalitarian intent.[23] Callisto, however, is no police state. In contrast to the

totalitarian states of the 1950s dystopias, where those such as Floyd Jones rely on security

police to maintain their position, the constructed media reality itself is a technology of

control. This is explicitly stated in the following passage:

> A police state, rule by terror, came about when the totalitarian societies began to
> break down. The earlier totalitarian societies had been incomplete; the authorities
> hadn't really gotten into every sphere of life. But techniques of communication
> had improved.[24]

There is little indication as to why this impulse to totality is being created: perhaps in order

to construct a more ordered and perfect consumer society. The narrative of the story

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[22] Dick, 'The Mold of Yancy', p. 89.
[23] Dick, 'The Mold of Yancy', p. 90; p. 83.
[24] Dick, 'The Mold of Yancy', p. 88.

describes the arrival on the moon of a Terran agent, Peter Taverner, who explores the society of Callisto quite freely. Perhaps we can detect the influence of the utopian tradition here, with the pattern of Guest or Visitor (Taverner) and the Guide (here, the rebellious 'yance-man' Leon Sipling). The short story ends not with the overthrow of the Yancy gestalt-system but its use for a different purpose, to spin parables of difference rather than conformity. This rather ambiguous ending echoes that of other dystopias, where the means of oppression are used by the 'rebels' to attempt to liberate the population.

The figure of Yancy is, by Dick's own confession, a satire on Eisenhower. He writes: 'Obviously, Yancy is based on President Eisenhower. During his reign we were all worrying about the man-in-the-gray-flannel-suit problem; we feared that the entire country was turning into one person and a whole lot of clones'.[25] The 'Man in the Gray Flannel Suit', a phrase signifying corporate uniformity, was widely used in the 1950s and also by Sloan Wilson for his 1957 novel. Yancy is a devotee of croquet: '"So everybody fools around with a mallet"'.[26] This is a satire on the soaring popularity of golf during Ike's terms of office, attributed to the President's fondness for (and widely disseminated photo opportunities on) the golf course. Yancy is determinedly middle-of-the-road in all things, and middlebrow; no extremes in any direction. Anxieties about conformity and a stultifying culture in the 1950s clearly feed into this story. However, the situation is more malign than that. Again we find the appearance/reality dyad:

> On specific -- and trivial -- items there were absolute opinions. [...] But on big topics [...] an empty vacuum, filled with high-sounding phrases. A public that agreed with Yancy on war and taxes and God and planet agreed with absolutely nothing. And everything.[27]

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[25] Dick, notes to 'The Mold of Yancy', *The Days of Perky Pat*, p. 488.
[26] Dick, 'The Mold of Yancy', p. 94.
[27] Dick, 'The Mold of Yancy', p. 87.

A lack of discrimination equates with the erasure of the critical faculty, and in this

scenario, anything may be done. Gregg Rickman calls 'The Mold of Yancy' 'an overt

satire of President Eisenhower and the conformist complacency of the times'.[28] The

complacency is that of the uncritical public; but how much is that constructed? Do the

citizenry consent to be controlled, explicitly or implicitly? This signifies the aporia of the

dystopian text: in an ideologically constructed environment, how does the protagonist

acquire the critical distance to achieve the trajectory of alienation? In 'The Mold of

Yancy', this remains unresolved.

Another *ur*-text for *The Penultimate Truth* is the 1953 short story 'The Defenders', where

again the common people are deceived into believing their reality is something other than

what it 'really' is. This deception is furthered by television, which provides the humans'

only access to the world. The narrative problem of the derivation of alienation is solved

here by having a piece of the constructed environment come apart, so the seamless *ersatz*

reality is revealed for what it is. The scenario of the short story is that humanity now lives

underground, as a terrible war has devastated the surface. Robots manufactured and

repaired underground ('leadies') continue the war up above, where no human can survive.

The humans receive televisual evidence of the vast destruction still taking place.

The break in the constructed reality occurs when a surface leady descends subsurface and

is discovered not to be radioactive, 'hot', as it should be. This might have been explained

away as an anomaly had not a previous leady also been 'cold'. Therefore, three men

ascend the Tube to the surface to attempt to uncover the 'truth'. It is possible to see how

[28] Gregg Rickman, *To the High Castle: Philip K. Dick, A Life, 1928-1962* (Long Beach, CA: Fragments West/ The Valentine Press, 1989), p. 274.

this short text also prefigures many of the concerns of *The Simulacra* and *The Penultimate Truth*, particularly in the latter's use of spatial metaphors to represent levels of appearance and reality, artificial and natural, human and mechanical, or televisual mediation and 'truth'. The revelation occurs when, after a fight, the three men experience the sunrise: 'Trees, trees and forests. A valley of plants and trees, with a few roads winding among them. Farmhouses. A windmill. A barn, far down below them'.[29] The men emerge into a pastoral idyll, an idealised American landscape. Instead of destruction and clouds of ash (a recurring image in Dick's 1950s short stories) there are green fields and birdsong. "'Yes", an A-class leady admitted. "As soon as you left, the war ceased. You're right, it was a hoax"'.[30] The deception is benign, to save humanity and the Earth. It is entirely concocted by the mechanical leady themselves: there is no ruling human cabal to benefit, as in *The Penultimate Truth*. The leady are 'The Defenders' of the title, only 'caretakers' of the planet while humanity becomes "'united into one final culture -- a world culture'".[31] The utopic zone of the story is again figured as a Green World, a natural or pastoral realm which opposes the artificial and mechanical world below. 'The Defenders' ends with a confrontation between Americans and Russians, who rehearse their Cold War rhetoric one final time, and then agree to co-operate until humanity is released from its underground deception (in a matter of months). Soon there will be no more 'Americans' and no more 'Russians', an end to categories and an end to conflict.

This optimistic ending looks ahead to the hope of Edgar Stone in *The Simulacra* that the children of the Abraham Lincoln Apartment block could meet others from outside and see

[29] Philip K. Dick, 'The Defenders', *Galaxy* (Jan. 1953), reprinted in *Beyond Lies the Wub: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume 1* (1990) (London: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 95-119 (p. 111).
[30] Dick, 'The Defenders', p. 111.
[31] Dick, 'The Defenders', p. 112.

that there was little difference between them. This belief -- that if only people could get together without leaders, then we would all get along -- is naïve but attests to a recoverable authentic humanity which exists beyond the contending ideologies and superficial conflicts. It is a liberal hope, which finds its analogue in Dick's interest in the necessity of human empathy in his later works.

3. *The Penultimate Truth*: The Universe of Authentic Fakes

Patricia Warrick states that the narrative trope of the division of the world into 'above ground' and 'below ground' 'is often found in [Dick's] [...] fiction -- that of the upper and under worlds, and our shifting perspective as we move from one to the other'.[32] David Seed also notes this 'Wellsian spatial opposition', an opposition familiar from Roshwald's *Level 7*.[33] The text by H. G. Wells referred to is of course *The Time Machine*, with its division of the future world into underground Morlocks, and their prey, the surface-dwelling Eloi. The situation is inverted in *The Penultimate Truth*: the surface demesne-dwellers, the ruling elite, keep the mass 'ant-tankers' below the surface to maintain their lifestyle. There is another early Dick text which uses this spatializing metaphor, a story published in July 1955, 'A Surface Raid'. Here, the 'technos' live underground:

> the first mutants appeared among the technocratic classes and gradually spread all other educated classes. They appeared among scientists, scholars, field workers, trained groups, all the specialized classes. [...] It was during the Final War that we fully emerged as fully and profoundly different [...] a superior species supplanting *homo sapiens* in the same way that *homo sapiens* had supplanted Neanderthal man.[34]

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[32] Patricia Warrick, 'The Labyrinthian Process of the Artificial: Philip K. Dick's Androids and Mechanical Contructs' in *Philip K. Dick*, ed. by Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander (New York: Taplinger, 1983), pp. 189-238 (p. 193).
[33] Seed, p. 209.
[34] Philip K. Dick, 'A Surface Raid', *Fantastic Universe* (July 1955), reprinted in *Second Variety: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume 2* (1990) (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 203-223 (p. 208).

The story narrates the journey of a party of these technos to the surface. One young techno

reveals himself to a surface dweller ('sap', for *homo sapien*, but perhaps also suggesting

the derogatory meaning implied by 'Pursap' in *The Zap Gun*) and terrifies her; he is

described as having "'white skin [...] pasty [...] like dough [...] And huge hands and feet

[....] It was *blind*".[35] The intertextual relation to *The Time Machine* seems clear. 'A

Surface Raid' suggests that both cultures find the other entirely alien, and that both have

constructed ideological systems to maintain this belief. The saps describe the technos as

'Goblins', reduce them to an item of folklore: the monster. This touch introduces an

element of fantasy into the text which tends to adulterate any satiric effect the story might

have had, or that the text is a metaphor for Cold War mistrust and fear of alienness.

Kim Stanley Robinson argues, reductively if correctly, that *The Penultimate Truth*'s

strength is in its 'primary metaphor of *levels*', and that:

> we realize just how basic this metaphor is to our understanding of the social
> structure we live within. We are usually content to exist in this system of levels,
> but reading about those trapped underground in *The Penultimate Truth* may cause
> us to think again; it can become an uncomfortable experience, for the metaphor is
> real.[36]

The metaphor of levels has multiple significations: space; politics and information; reality;

and truth. The dystopian text's spatialization of ideology informs the world of *The*

Penultimate Truth, which is similar to that of 'The Defenders'. On the surface, the Earth

has become a vast park, with a scattered population living in luxurious villas in large

estates, called 'demesnes', the word signifying an aristocratic power-structure. Below the

surface are buried shelters or 'tanks' for the dispossessed majority. To own a demesne is a

sign of power and status, although a 'yance-man' (one who is part of the Yancy system

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[35] Dick, 'A Surface Raid', p. 222.
[36] Robinson, p. 68.

of control) can obtain one through speculation: David Lantano's demesne near Cheyenne is still bordering on the 'hot' (radioactive), and Joseph Adams gained his estate through some slight subterfuge. Demesnes signify not patronage, as might be expected in the neo-aristocratic division of the world, but ongoing competition.

The world is devoid of cities or even roads, as the surface-dwellers use aerial 'flapples' which leave the countryside intact. Yet, it emerges that this pastoral realm is not natural, that it too has been constructed. The world did suffer the depredations of war, and places like Cheyenne still have ruins and 'hot spots'. Joseph Adams muses that '[t]he original world did not need to be recreated, reconned, because it had never departed' (*Penultimate Truth* 4: 36); but in fact, large parts of it had been destroyed and had to be reclaimed. The significantly named Adams has a myth of the Edenic landscape which is entirely fraudulent. And it *is* idyllic: 'green countryside, the fields, the meadows, the open world of North American forests with occasional clusters of buildings, demesnes at odd, unexpected locations' (*Penultimate Truth* 4: 34). This is placed in contradistinction to the utterly artificial world of the tankers. In 'The Defenders', this artificiality of the underground world is emphasised:

> You couldn't expect to have everything perfect, living under-surface, with an artificial sun and artificial food. Naturally it was a strain, not seeing the sky or being able to go anyplace or see anything other than metal walls, great roaring factories, the plant-yards, barracks.[37]

This emphasis on the artificial is analogous to Roshwald's *Level 7*, and X-127's descent to a hermetically-sealed bunker. As in *Level 7*, the artificiality of the world of the tankers represents the deceiving ideology which constructs their world-view. The spatial constraints of the tanks, like the refuge in *The World Jones Made*, also signify ideological

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[37] Dick, 'The Defenders', p. 97.

constraints. The physical space of *The Penultimate Truth* is a map of power, a symbolic expression of domination and dispossession. This ideology is promoted by propagandistic broadcasts, through the medium of television.

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Early in *The Penultimate Truth* the tankers of the Tom Mix watch a broadcast which shows the destruction of 'Detroit', a spectacle of annihilation in clouds of radioactive dust and melted leadies (the same name is used as in 'The Defenders'). In the next chapter, above ground, this is revealed to be a fabrication: "'they just ran that Detroit sequence last night'" (*Penultimate Truth* 4: 28). In 'The Defenders', the city whose destruction is simulated is San Francisco, where Dick lived; in the novel, it is Detroit, the centre of the automobile manufacturing industry, a significant site of mechanized industry and mechanized human life. The models which they destroy for the TV sequences are models with a referent, the 'real' Detroit, yet there is also a fake destroyed world which bears no relation to the 'real', which is entirely fabricated and simulated. Here, then, the act of destruction is the line between the real and the irreal, the mirror between the world and its shadow. In *The Penultimate Truth* as in 'The Defenders', the construction of simulated destroyed cities is designed to convince those below that the war still continues. 'Two leadies were carefully photographing something, an elaborate model on a table top. [...] It was a model of a ruined city'.[38] Ironically, the leadies provide the spectacle of destruction while in fact reconstructing the Earth. The idea of a 'table-top reality' is one taken up by Frederick Pohl in 'The Tunnel Under the World', published in 1955, which I shall discuss further in chapter 7.

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[38] Dick, 'The Defenders', p. 113.

Like Roshwald's *Level 7*, life underground is entirely artificial and automated. The

tankers' imprisonment within a fake reality, one which preserves the systems of privilege

and power of the 'yance-men', is represented in terms of a physical incarceration in an

entirely fabricated world. The world of the tanks is barely delineated but the experience of

Nicholas St James is typical: 'after all these years underground [...] the metabolism of his

body [...] told him nothing' (*Penultimate Truth* 2: 11). Nicholas awakes but cannot trust

the electrical clock (the power has given out at a recent time, rendering clocks unreliable:

how does time get maintained without reference to the diurnal cycle?). In fact, he cannot

even trust his own body. While everyone is going to bed, he is wide awake. There is no

reference, no sites of mapping, other than those of the artificial, which can be fabricated all

too easily. Ian Duncan's and Richard Kongrosian's bodies in *The Simulacra* seem to them

to disappear, signifying a state of alienation and extreme powerlessness; for Nicholas St

James, even the body, the one point of the 'real' that could be relied upon, can deceive.

For the protagonists of Dick's dystopias of the 1960s, experience *mediated through the*

artificial leads to the inauthentic. This point is made at the beginning of *The Penultimate*

Truth, where Joseph Adams attempts to use the mechanical 'rhetorizor' to compose a

speech for Talbot Yancy. The results appall him, and he decides to go "'all the way back

to trying it direct, on my own'" (*Penultimate Truth* 1: 10). Adams's alienation from the

artefacts of high technology is a revulsion against mediated experience. It is ironic that in

no way can Adams resort to the 'natural', attempting to find authenticity through an earlier

form of technology, the pen and paper. This reversion to a less 'evolved' state of

technology to find the authentic life is a common trope in Dick's short stories and novels.

For instance, in 'Pay for the Printer', published in 1956, a post-nuclear war American

culture relies upon an alien creature -- the Biltong -- to 'print' technological artefacts; that

is to say, to produce copies of objects from undifferentiated matter.[39] Unfortunately, the

'white noise' element in any feedback system occurs, and printing copies from copies

results in degeneration and entropy. Eventually the Biltong dies, and the remaining

humans have to begin building again from a lower level. This is seen as beneficial,

however; the previous state was a kind of stasis which retarded human development.

The space of the body is also compromised in *The Penultimate Truth* by the existence of

'artiforgs', artificial organs (with a possible pun on 'forgery'); but these are pre-war

artefacts, and the technology to build more has been lost. The malign power-figure in the

text, Stanton Brose, hoards these organs for himself. To keep his elderly and failing body

alive he 'greedily ingested artiforg after artiforg of the world's small and dwindling

supply' (*Penultimate Truth* 4: 39). The use of the word 'ingested' suggests consumption,

figured as cannibalism or vampirism, rather than medical usage. Brose is a locus of the

authentic/ fake dyad in the text:

> the authentic Brose remained. Because the brain was not artiforg; there was no
> such thing; to manufacture an artiforg brain -- to have done so, when that firm,
> Arti-Gan Corporation of Phoenix, existed, back before the war -- would have been
> to go into what Adams liked to think of as the 'genuine simulated silver' business
> [...] his term for what he considered a novel and yet major entity in the panorama
> of nature with its multiform spawned offspring: the universe of authentic fakes
> (*Penultimate Truth* 4: 38).

So, Brose remains 'authentic' because his brain is organic, yet this is the organ which is

failing and sending him into senility. The concept of 'authentic fake', however, completely

compromises the true/ false opposition, and links to the ongoing sequence of 'penultimate

truths': the 'truth' always recedes.

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[39] Philip K. Dick, 'Pay for the Printer', *Satellite Science Fiction* (October 1956), reprinted in *The Father-Thing: The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick Volume 3* (1990) (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 301-309.

As in Wolfe's *Limbo* or, metaphorically, in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, the human body

becomes mechanized, penetrated by the artificial. Here, this is represented by the artiforgs,

automated internal organs. An artificial spleen is the object that Nicholas St James seeks in

his journey from the tank to the surface, but this is for the chief mechanic, whose skill with

his hands has kept the tank going for the last 15 years. Here, then, we find the conjunction

of high technology and 'make-do' that we saw above, but the significations are

complicated because it is the body of the handyman which will contain the artificial organ.

To work with one's hands is the site of authentic human activity in many of Dick's texts,

as it is in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, but here this is ironized by the repairman becoming

partly artificial. The repairman is a kind of healer in an entropic world of broken

machines: "'Any time of night, a leaking pipe, a break in power, clogged protine chute --

he always came and hammered and patched and stitched and rewrapped it back into

operation'" (*Penultimate Truth* 2: 15). Hierarchies of status and power are often inverted

in Dick's texts, particularly in those which imagine a post-catastrophic world; there, the

repairman is king and the politician is nought. In *The Penultimate Truth*, both hierarchies

exist, but in the different worlds, surface and subsurface. It is clear that although the

subsurface world is harsh, overcrowded, and artificial, it contains an element unavailable

on the surface: community. Merritt Abrash makes interesting use of the works of Jean-

Jacques Rousseau as a framework for analysing *The Penultimate Truth*, suggesting that in

The Penultimate Truth, as in Rousseau's formulation, 'man is born free but everywhere in

chains'. These chains are not simply the physical handicaps of enslavement but in

ideological constructions, ones which naturalize and rationalize domination. Abrash

emphasises the necessity of community (and communitarian spirit) in Dick: 'what the

elite lack, in every case where we observe them, is community -- exactly what Rousseau

posits as the necessary condition for the fulfilment of an individual's humanity'.[40] This is partly derived from the spatial configuration of the two worlds: the tanks are small and crowded, whereas the demesnes are large and spaced very far apart. The Yancemen are physically alone, and this is mirrored in their mental or spiritual state. For Adams, the physical fog of the Northern California coast replicates 'that other fog, the one inside [...] called loneliness' (*Penultimate Truth* 1: 5). At the end of the text, Adams descends into the ant-tank with St James, in part to escape the vengeance of Lantano and Brose, but also to find the very community he had been lacking. Ironically, he descends into the nether-world to escape the 'hell' of his loneliness and alienation.

As in *The Simulacra*, then, we find a scenario where the masses are kept in overcrowded blocks, but the ones in *The Penultimate Truth* are underground. The same paranoia and fear of otherness exists. The Tom Mix had refused to loan out their chief repairman to another tank (presumably in fear that he would not be allowed to return: a clear indication of the absence of trust, another anti-empathic sign). The outside world is also perceived to be both 'hot' (radioactive) and 'dirty' (contaminated by germ warfare). This, of course, is a product of indoctrination, the media reality that they exist within. However, the discourse of virus invasion signified by their terror at the 'Bag Plague' -- 'where those viruses get in and cause your head to expand until it pops like a blown-up paper bag' (*Penultimate Truth* 2: 11) -- and the 'Stink of Shrink' -- where 'your head diminish[es] in size, features included, to the circumference of a marble' (2: 11-12) -- indicates that the imperatives of security have penetrated so far as to create the conditions of a paranoid regime of hygiene. The head is the site of attack (the two viruses are mirrored): the head, one recalls, is the

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[40] Merritt Abrash, "'Man Everywhere in Chains": Dick, Rousseau, and *The Penultimate Truth*' in *Philip K. Dick: Contemporary Critical Interpretations*, ed. by Samuel J. Umland (Westport CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 157-168 (p. 162).

site of Brose's last remaining organic organ. The spectacle of destruction is described as

'the decapitation of one more of the few-remaining heads of Western Civilization'

(*Penultimate Truth* 2: 19), which signifies the analogy of body and body-politic, a feature

of the satirical representations of the body in Wolfe's *Limbo*. Yancy is, like Nicole

Thibodeaux, a figurehead, and the image of Yancy on the tankers' screen is described as

'the I-am-larger-than-you image of Talbot Yancy's leather and iron face' (*Penultimate*

Truth 3: 20). Similarly, Allen Purcell's first (subconscious) jape in *The Man Who Japed* is

to decapitate the statue of the dictator Major Streiter, a symbolic confrontation of that

world's power elite. Paradoxically, *The Simulacra* and *the Penultimate Truth* have no

political 'head' but only a simulacrum. The site of power once again recedes from the

dystopian protagonist, or is diffuse.

Just as the space of the body, and its mechanization, signifies the penetration of control

systems into the lives of the dystopian subjects, the spatialization of the physical world is

mapped onto the political. Those above ground constitute an elite who exploit and

disinherit those below. '[T]he lines carried data only one way: down. From above to

below' (*The Penultimate Truth* 2: 18). Again, as with *The Simulacra*, we can find the

generic dystopian divide between the power elite and the masses. The spatial divide also

represents a gulf in knowledge about the world. This finds its analogue in *The Simulacra*,

in the division of the people into '*Ge*' and the '*Be*'. Information and power are inextricably

linked in both texts. The people of Tom Mix tank are controlled by the telescreens and by

a political officer, sent down from the surface to supervise their indoctrination. Their

world is entirely fabricated, both in terms of their physical environment and their

ideological system. Ideology and the spectacle are explicitly and inextricably linked. This

officer, Dale Nunes, is trained by 'the Berlin Psychiatric Waffen-Institute, by Mrs

Morgen's own clinicians' (*Penultimate Truth* 3: 23), an odd and rather telling conflation

of psychiatry and Nazi nomenclature. Those tankers who escape from the subterranean

realm fare little better; they are placed in what amount to camps, albeit comfortable ones:

> 'we all know it, we all face it -- the tankers living in Louis Runcible's conapts are
> prisoners and the conapts constitute reservations -- or as the modern word has it,
> concentration camps. Preferable to the ant-tanks underground, but still camps from
> which they cannot, even briefly, leave -- legally' (*Penultimate Truth* 6: 48-9).

They are treated well but still remain disenfranchised. On the surface or below it, the

tankers remain prisoners, physically as well as mentally. Again, as in *The World Jones*

Made, spatial constraints themselves signify an ideological confinement.

The metaphor of robbery becomes increasingly pervasive as the text continues. The

tankers 'were entitled to something they did not have; they were the victims of robbers'

(*Penultimate Truth* 8: 65). In this relationship between the rulers and the ruled, which

equates with the robbers and the victims, both groups lose: the tankers the world above,

and the Yance-men their peace of mind. Neither group has an unalienated existence. The

rulers exist in a state of angst and guilt, and the ruled are oppressed, exploited for their

labour, and incarcerated.

> the Yance-men [...] were selfish; they had made the world into their deer-park at
> the expense of millions of tankers below; it was wrong and they knew it and they
> felt guilt -- not quite enough guilt to cause them to knock off Brose and let the
> tankers up, but enough guilt to make their late evenings a thrashing agony of
> loneliness, emptiness, and their nights unbearable (*Penultimate Truth* 7: 54--5).

Knowledge of this robbery and the subsequent guilt is not enough to spur the alienated

Yance-men into active rebellion. Joseph Adams is not able to do it -- he is weak and opts

to run and hide at the end of the text, while lamenting his loss -- and it rests upon an alien

entity, the 15th century Cherokee David Lantano, to try to break the system. The system

therefore locks in, imprisons, both tankers and Yance-men within ideological straightjackets.

Dick suggests that the path of American history is that of the systematic exploitation, dispossession and deceiving of less powerful social groups, a suggestion that is consistent with his political background. It is perhaps analogous to Ray Bradbury's interest in Mexican culture, and the neo-colonialist relationship between the United States and its Latin neighbours. The advent of David Lantano and the references to the Native Americans tend to suggest a model of their dispossession in the relationship between the Yance-men and the tankers. The word 'reservation' was used in the above description of the Runcible conapts, and the fake, planted alien weapons sent back through time by Brose are supposed evidence of an alien expedition defeated by a Native American war party. Surely, as Merritt Abrash suggests, the 'ultimate truth' of the text is that 'the novel is a metaphor for the way *our* world actually works',[41] that the history of United States is one of dispossession, domination and disenfranchisement.

I have already written on the figures of John Edward, and Talbot Yancy and their satiric relation to the figure of President Eisenhower. As I noted, John Edward Yancy in 'The Mold of Yancy' is not a simulacrum in the sense that Rudolph Kalbfleisch, the *Der Alte* in *The Simulacra*, is. He/It seems to be an entirely synthetic or perhaps virtual construct, rather than a mechanical device; and more importantly, it does not (fraudulently) hold a position of power in governmental structures. J. E. Yancy is intended to deceive, but its totalizing power is directed towards the furtherance of the (obscure) ends of big business. Talbot Yancy is more akin to *der Alte* of *The Simulacra*, a mechanical simulacrum of a

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[41] Abrash, p. 165.

President (called, ironically, 'The Protector'), whose presence conceals the actions of a ruling elite. Both simulacra declaim propaganda speeches: however, it is one of those speeches which provides the first gap in the all-encompassing official construction of reality in *The Penultimate Truth*.

The nurse, Carol, notices that the phrase *'coup de grace'* has been pronounced differently by Yancy at different times: that is, she has recognized that the broadcasts contain a plurality of voices. This has obvious ramifications for the illusion that one man is speaking; it also marks, on a symbolic level, the explosion of totality. This realization is followed by the insight that

> 'something [...] is wrong. There can't be military hospitals because there aren't civilians or soldiers who've been maimed in the fighting and need artiforgs. Yet -- they won't release the artiforgs to us' (*The Penultimate Truth* 3: 27).

The imperatives of the ruling elite -- Stanton Brose's need to requisition the artiforgs -- ensure logical holes through which the beginnings of alienation can form. The illusion cannot cover contradictory political impulses in the surface world. Insight leads to alienation, which leads to action: Carol's doubts, her perception of the anomalies in the system and reaction against its closed ideological structures, are the motive force behind Nicholas St James's journey to the surface and the revelation that his 'reality' is not all he thought it was.

Contained in their tanks, the underground masses are reliant on information fed from above to maintain their orientation of reality. Their information is derived from telescreens placed in communal halls: 'the floor-to-ceiling vidscreen [...] was their window -- their sole window -- on the above world, and they took rather seriously what was received on its giant surface' (*Penultimate Truth* 2: 17). The emphasis on the large scale, perhaps even

monumentality, of the screen, and the 'serious' import of its transmissions, signifies the

propagandistic nature of the medium. The television screen is in fact a fake window, an

access not to the world of the 'natural' or the 'real' but an entirely mediated and fabricated

world. It is revealed during the novel that the tankers are not the only ones who have been

fed disinformation and an ersatz media reality. The narrative of history has been fabricated

to make it seem that 'the British had brought about Buchenwald [...] The Germans were

the victims, in 1943 as much as in 1919', and that the Americans had made a secret deal

with Stalin (for American consumption) and with Hitler (for Russian consumption) to

prolong the war (Penultimate Truth 10: 72). These stories recapitulate paranoid and

extreme 'revisionist' histories of the post-war years (mainly from the far Right), but there

is no doubt here of their abhorrence or that they are fake. This false history is the product

of one man: 'For sheer "the big lie" crust, Gottlieb Fischer had long ago out-classed them

all' (Penultimate Truth 10: 69). The notion of 'the big lie' has been attributed to Dr

Goebbels, Nazi Minister for Propaganda: that if you are going to lie, tell the biggest lie you

can think of, for this is paradoxically more credible. This itself complicates the truth/

falsehood dyad; and as in Nineteen Eighty-Four, the ability of the masses to remember the

'truth' of history is unreliable and no bulwark against manipulation. The fake becomes

history when no-one has any reference other than to the fake. There is no ultimate access

to the 'real' or the 'authentic' for the mediated reality has so blurred and compromised the

line between the 'real' and the fake that one may not be disentangled from the other.

Gottlieb Fischer (note again the conjunction of Germany, falsehood and domination)

creates a film which mixes historical film clips with entirely fabricated 'reconstructions' of

unreal events: true simulation, an image without a model. A clip of Hitler taken during

WWII 'was -- crazily enough, considering its fantastic nature -- authentic' (Penultimate

Truth 10: 71). Here, then, the 'authentic' loses its significations of 'the real' and becomes

instead that which is believable, and as the text shows, people can be led to believe a great

deal. In a parallel scene to that in which Carol reveals the discrepancies in the Yancy

speeches, Joseph Adams discovers anomalies in the Fischer film: Roosevelt 'meets' Stalin

and talks to him in English. This is quite impossible, as Stalin spoke no English. However,

it is taken for the truth. The film is held up by the Yance-men as an icon, a thing to be

emulated. Ironic, then, that few see that their own reality is fabricated by it.

Kim Stanley Robinson's emphasis on the metaphor of *levels* is important, and provides the

model for the stripping away of layers of reality (or what appears to be reality) which

occurs through the text. The second half of the novel introduces the character of Webster

Foote, a detective of sorts, and implants elements from Dick's short story 'The

Unreconstructed M', published in 1957. This short story is the narrative of the gradual

revealing of an enigma, an object which proves to be a mechanical assassination-device

which mimics a human, and in fact lays down false clues for the detective to reconstruct.

The story's focus is on the detective's discovery of the nature of the device and its

purpose; in *The Penultimate Truth*, Webster Foote immediately knows what the device is

(even though it is disguised as a television) and seeks to find who sent it on its

assassination mission. There is no enigma, but the successive unveiling of plot, motive, lie

and dissimulation. The narrative becomes one of detection after his employees have been

assassinated. Levels of reality becomes layers of intrigue and deception. The metaphor of

levels becomes the text's mode of operation, a detective narrative which attempts to find

the 'truth'.

The 'unreconstructed M' of the short story is the name of the assassination machine, because it "'can't be educated, morally corrected'".[42] It signifies something different in *The Penultimate Truth*: the *M* is the Man that David Lantano attempts to frame, Stanton Brose. It is 'unreconstructed' because Webster Foote recognises the 'macher' (German for 'maker') for what it is, and refuses to reconstruct the whole identity from the available clues. In an intricate web of bluff and falsehoods, it emerges that Lantano has programmed the machine to simulate Stanton Brose's presence, so that Foote will come to the conclusion that this fakery is too obvious: that Brose has cast suspicion upon himself in order to deflect that suspicion. It then emerges that Lantano *had* programmed the machine in a kind of triple bluff. Lantano says: "'in this case the false clues are authentic. We have here, Adams, *the ultimate in fakery*'" (*Penultimate Truth* 24: 167). Not quite: the *penultimate* in fakery. The refusal by Foote to reconstruct the clues paradoxically becomes the sign of the knowledgeable detective.

The 'unreconstructed M' becomes yet another simulation behind which power lies. Lantano in *The Penultimate Truth* is also a locus of simulation: he is a 15th century Cherokee chief who has (somehow, through use of the time-scoop) lived to the 'present', who played Eisenhower in the Fischer film, and who is the 'model' for the 'real' simulation Talbot Yancy, and will take the simulacra's place as a 'real' President. Lantano is then a simulated simulacrum whose model is himself. Such bizarre and puzzling plot intricacies and levels of metaphor make *The Penultimate Truth* an extremely dense text, but adulterate its impact.

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[42] Philip K. Dick, 'The Unreconstructed M', *Science Fiction Stories* (Jan 1957), reprinted in *The Days of Perky Pat*, pp. 159-197 (p. 184).

The title of *The Penultimate Truth* seems to suggest the spectre of infinite regress, that behind any supposed global explanation there is always another layer of 'truth' or 'reality'. These two terms become opposites rather than signifying the same thing. Reality can be fabricated: in fact, truth always lies behind reality. The truth then recedes to a point irrecoverable by one person; human truth is always partial or subjective. It is always contingent on information and on power. Nicholas St James's assertion "'*I'm going to tell them the truth*'" (*Penultimate Truth* 29: 205) is bold yet mistaken: he is going to tell them what he knows to be true, which is not quite so absolute. He is going to expose the deception, the faked reality, and this in itself may be a step on the road to the 'truth'. There is no revolution at the end of *The Penultimate Truth*, but like *The Simulacra*, a civil war between opposing institutional powers (a kind of attempted coup) and the unresolved, suspended possibility of change. Lantano wins, and the probability of the ascent of the tankers is held out, but the 'biggest lie' may still be to come: the explanation of systematic and chronic dispossession.

Dick's focus on the simulacra in his 1960s dystopias emphasises a move away from historical models of oppression to inform his dystopian worlds, towards an investigation of a world so penetrated by the mass media, by the artificial and by commodities, that there is barely any access to verifiable fact or to authentic life. The political structures and systems of control become an immanence of power and a mediated reality constructed along ideological lines, which itself serves to hide its own construction from those it oppresses. The protagonists of the 1960s dystopias reveal not the human power elite who use televisual spectacle to further their domination, but how ideology is produced an maintained by a mediated and constructed form of 'reality'. In the texts of Frederik Pohl,

which I will analyze in the next chapter, the ideological construction of reality becomes

the deceiving and deforming pressures of commodity capitalism itself.

CHAPTER 7:

EATING MACHINES: RESISTING CONSUMPTION IN THE DYSTOPIAS OF

FREDERIK POHL AND CYRIL KORNBLUTH

Introduction

utopias and dystopias allow for reflection on our own nature and on the nature of our collective concerns. They constitute 'ordering visions' by which we can assess and assign meaning to the physical and social worlds in which we live.

Frederik Pohl[1]

Frederik Pohl was born in 1919, and has had a long and celebrated career as a science fiction writer, agent and editor. Like many of the writers of dystopia in this thesis, Pohl grew up during the Depression years, and in his autobiography, *The Way the Future Was*, Pohl is explicit in detailing his time in the Young Communist League. Pohl admits that he 'believed what [he] was doing' during this Popular Front and anti-Fascist period,[2] and even volunteered to fight in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, but broke with the YCL after the non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union. For many American communists and 'fellow travellers' this event precipitated a move away from the Communist party line towards a more left-liberal consensus, a move I outlined in my Introduction. Pohl exemplifies this trajectory, for in the 1950s he remained critical of tendencies towards corporate bureaucracy, consumerism and the domination of advertising, but as I shall attempt to show in this chapter, his texts reveal an unexamined complicity with the system he was attempting to critique. Pohl's editorializing propensities have often drawn him into offering critical comments on SF and

[1] Frederik Pohl, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander, 'Utopias and Dystopias' in *Science Fiction: Contemporary Mythology, The SFWA- SFRA Anthology*, ed. by Patricia Warrick, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph Olander (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco and London: Harpers and Row, 1978), pp. 393-400 (p. 398-9).
[2] Frederik Pohl, *The Way the Future Was* (1978) (London: Granada, 1983), p. 72.

his own practice. While not wishing to fall back into the trap of authorial intention, I will begin with an overview of some of Pohl's pronouncements in order to site his textual production.

In this study I have been careful to locate a textual analysis of the texts under discussion in their political and cultural matrix. This forms not only a working methodology but also an engagement with what I believe to be the practice of dystopian SF: a textual space of critique. Pohl has himself explicitly claimed this position for himself and other SF writers of the 50s:

> I am talking about science fiction as political cryptogram, about the use of science fiction to say things in hint and metaphor that the writer dare not say in clear. [...] I don't know how many of you remember the chill on free speech that was imposed by the Joseph McCarthy period in the early 1950s. Tail-Gunner Joe terrified the media, the schools, the Pentagon, and even the White House, and few dared to speak freely [...] but science fiction writers went on saying just about whatever they chose.[3]

Pohl's use of the word 'cryptogram' is illuminating. It is defined in the OED as a 'thing written in cipher'; here, Pohl certainly implies that that the text is a screen beneath which an ideological message can be transmitted. Another of his pronouncements is even more explicit: '[s]cience fiction makes good propaganda literature, and there have been times when the freedom to think and say unorthodox sentiments was severely repressed outside of science fiction'.[4] In fact, some of Pohl's pronouncements suggest that the political 'message' of the SF text is primary: he has written that 'the content of the [SF] story is as valid a criterion as the style';[5] and, in a speech published in The Alien Critic, that 'style is the least part of the story', and that '[i]t is what they [Doc Smith, Heinlein] say is

[3] Frederik Pohl, 'Political Science Fiction', Locus 384 (January 1993), 32-33; 63; 65 (p. 32; p. 33).

[4] Frederik Pohl, 'SF: The Game-Playing Literature', In the Problem Pit (London: Corgi, 1976), pp. 190-193 (p. 191).

[5] Frederik Pohl, 'Prefatory Comments' in Science Fiction: Contemporary Mythology, The SFWA- SFRA Anthology, ed. by Patricia Warrick, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph Olander (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco and London: Harpers and Row, 1978), pp. ix-xi (p. x).

important, and not at all the way in which they say it'.[6] This leads to the rather naïve

pronouncement that 'the great stories that have made SF worth reading in the first place

were pretty nearly style-free', and what would appear to be a reliance upon a problematic

conception of realist 'transparency' of language and discourse.[7] This kind of rhetoric is

also belied by Pohl's own fiction, which, while not achieving or even aiming for the kind

of linguistic and symbolic density of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* or Wolfe's *Limbo*, is

certainly not naïvely unaware of its own status as text. As I shall attempt to show,

particularly with reference to 'The Tunnel Under the World', Pohl's texts often break the

codes of realist diegesis and adopt structures or strategies which create estrangement. Pohl

is aware of the estranging function of SF textual practice; he has written:

> 'the science fiction method' [...] is a way of looking at any subject, taking it apart
> into its components and putting it back together with some of the existing parts
> replaced by new inventions. It is particularly when science fiction deals with social
> institutions that it does the trick well. It gives us what Harlow Shapely calls 'the
> view from a distant star': the chance to view our world from outside, objectively.[8]

SF, and particularly dystopias, then provide an estranging lens through which to

comprehend the political and cultural present. This is not to say that there is an

unawareness in Pohl's texts of the forms and traditions of the utopia/dystopia paradigm: a

recurrent theme in Pohl's work is the colonizing impulse implicit in science fiction's ideas

of space exploration, and its ramifications for the utopian project. I will also focus on the

political structures of Pohl's texts that he himself privileges, and their critique of

commodity capitalism, corporations, and particularly the mass media and the advertising

industry, as systems of dystopian control.

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[6] Frederik Pohl, 'The Shape of Science Fiction to Come, a speech by Frederik Pohl', *The Alien Critic* 7. (January 1 1974), 7-14 (p. 8).

[7] 'The Shape of Science Fiction to Come', p. 8.

[8] Frederik Pohl, 'Cities and Cultures' in *The Visual Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, ed. by Brian Ash (London and Sydney: Pan, 1977), p. 164.

1. Advertising, Manipulation and Resistance

Ironically, an acuteness about political discourse -- Pohl writes '[e]verything Bob Heinlein

ever wrote is laced with overt political subtexts' -- is not matched by an awareness of

linguistic, stylistic, and textual complexity of production and reception.[9] Pohl is himself

prey to the language and thought-patterns of advertising while attempting to satirize and

critique them. The Editor in Pohl -- one who must have an eye to marketing and to money

-- is apparent in his conception of the literary (particularly SF) text: he divides it into 'The

Letter to the Editor' (the 'thesis' of the story); the characters; the 'travelogue' or setting;

and the 'Package', 'the shape of word-use, coinage, idiosyncratic inflexion, or whatever

else decorates the surface of the work'.[10] His use of a depth/surface binarism brings with it

an inevitable denigration of one of the terms, that of the surface or 'style'. That a term

from advertising is also used compounds the problem, considering that Pohl has stated that

'[a]dvertising itself was pernicious. It makes people do things they shouldn't do.'[11] The

text becomes reified, commodified, in Pohl's conception, an object to be rendered into

constituent parts, its surface sheen an insignificant component at best, or an obfuscatory

one at worst. David N. Samuelson, in his article 'Critical Mass', suggests that Pohl has

been trapped by his proximity to mainstream SF publishing over many years:

> Even the best of his fiction is sometimes marred by the intrusion of melodrama,
> sentimentality, unrationalized fantasy, and other features more or less calculated
> to appeal to an addicted audience.[12]

This may also be the case in terms of Pohl's thinking about SF and dystopian fiction.

Ironically, for a writer known best for his satire of the advertising industry in his and Cyril

[9] Frederik Pohl, 'The Politics of Prophecy', *Extrapolation* 34:3 (1993), 199-208 (p. 200).
[10] 'The Shape of Science Fiction to Come', p. 7.
[11] David Wingrove, 'An Interview with Frederik Pohl', *Vector* 90 (Nov-Dec 1978), 5-20 (p. 8).
[12] David N. Samuelson, 'Critical Mass: The Science Fiction of Frederik Pohl' in *Voices for the Future, Volume Three*, ed. by Thomas D. Clareson and Thomas L. Wymer (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1984), pp. 106-126 (p.106).

Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*, the practice of writing and the practice of advertising come uncomfortably close to resembling each other.

John P. Brennan, in an illuminating article on *The Space Merchants* and its 'lack of realistic depth, of its psychologically shallow characterizations and plot resolutions', suggests that, rather than being a fault in Pohl and Kornbluth's writing, this exposes a hostility towards psychological models. Brennan goes on to argue that:

> [*The Space Merchants*] does indeed have considerable psychological sophistication (though a sophistication that is destructive of the idea of psychological depth), [and] that its treatment of psychology is an example of the comic-inferno rhetorical method.[13]

The 'comic-inferno' is a term Brennan derives from Kingsley Amis, a term which implies that Pohl and Kornbluth are indebted to the 'Menippean satire' form of fiction, one that is alternate to the codes of psychological realism. Brennan uses the image of the 'mechanical chicken', a vast genetically engineered globe of chicken tissue called Chicken Little, to characterize human psychology in *The Space Merchants*. He suggests that '[i]n the world of the novel, the human subject is controlled either by brute force or by simple, if hidden, devices on the order of Galton's whistle or chemical conditioning'.[14] Brennan takes this insight to suggest that psychological depth-models are, in some senses, ideological alibis for the system of manipulation. The carefully constructed advertising campaigns are, in fact, redundant. The society of *The Space Merchants*, Brennan suggests, turns its citizens into metaphorical machines in order to control them more easily. Such an argument clearly tallies with my own suggestions about the ways in which human beings are depicted in the dystopias of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in *Player Piano*, *Limbo* and *Level 7*.

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[13] John P. Brennan, 'The Mechanical Chicken: Psyche and Society in The Space Merchants', *Extrapolation* 25:2 (Summer 1984), 101-114 (p. 104).
[14] Brennan, p. 110.

However, if Pohl and Kornbluth understand human psychology to have no depth, this

undermines the rebellion of the dystopian protagonist. Brennan makes this point when he

argues that Mitchell Courtenay's 'conversion' from the dictates of the dominant ideology

to those of the 'Consie' resistance is a coldly intellectual one, unconvincing in terms of

psychological depth. Like Paul Proteus in *Player Piano*, this resistance would simply mark

the transfer of the protagonist from one organization, one ideological construct, to another.

Pohl and Kornbluth's satires of advertising then reveal their own ideological assumptions

about the manipulability of human beings. This becomes, in Kornbluth's 'The Marching

Morons', a depiction of the 'mass' as stupid, brutal and dangerous (see below).

Kornbluth's own dystopian novel, *The Syndic*, also betrays an ambiguity about the uses of

psychology.[15] In it, one Charles Orsino, an agent for the hedonistic, anti-corporate, carefree

Syndic state, is brainwashed into a malcontent identity and sent on a mission to penetrate

its enemy's elite. The typical tripartite spatial division of the world is made up of the

Syndic (on the East coast of the United States), Mob Territory (a Mafia-controlled region

based in Chicago), and the exile North American government which occupy southern

Ireland and dominate a degenerated Europe. The Syndic, while inefficient and corrupt at

lower levels, treats its citizens humanely and fairly and gives them liberty; the other two

states are totalized states based on gangsterism and the military respectively. Orsino's

female companion, and brainwasher, the psychologist Lee Falcaro, recovers a

psychological discipline previously discredited by one 'Lieberman'. The *eminence grise* of

the novel, Orsino's uncle, explains at the end of the text how this recovery of psychology,

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[15] Cyril M. Kornbluth, *The Syndic* (1953) (London: Sphere, 1968).

and the rise of Orsino and Falcaro themselves, represent a (possibly fatal) challenge to the

Syndic:

> 'before Lieberman there were plenty of neurotics and psychotics to study, [...] in
> Lieberman's time there were so few that earlier generalizations were invalidated,
> and [...] now -- in our time, Lee -- neurotics and psychotics are among us again in
> increasingly ample numbers'.[16]

Psychology is only necessary, the text suggests, when society is itself 'sick', producing

psychologically malformed and discontented citizens. The ending seems to project an end

to the happy reign of the Syndic, because the conditions that need to be created to defeat

the Syndic's enemies will inevitably result in the Syndic becoming a mirror-image of their

repressiveness.

Psychology, in *The Space Merchants*, remains an ideological plank in the domination of

the ad-men. In the scene of the first board meeting, near the beginning of *The Space*

Merchants, the processes of manipulation by the immensely powerful advertising

corporations are made explicit. The head of the Point-of-Sale department talks of advances

in advertising techniques:

> 'They outlawed compulsive subsonics in our aural advertising -- but we've
> bounced back with a list of semantic words that tie in with every basic trauma and
> neurosis in American life today. They listened to the safety cranks and stopped us
> from projecting our messages on car windows -- but we bounced back. Lab tells
> me,' he nodded to our Director of Research across the table, 'that soon we'll be
> testing a system that projects directly on the retina of the eye'.[17]

The idea of human freedom has been erased by the processes of consumption and

production mediated by advertising; ordinary humans become 'consumers' or 'crumbs', a

manipulated mass which readily consumes all that is fed them. The advertising agencies

exist in an analogy of the arms race, where one side competes for advantage over both the

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[16] *The Syndic*, p. 157.

[17] Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (1953) (London: Digit, n.d), chapter 1,
pages 7-8. All chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text under the term *Space*.

'enemy' and the rules of competition, to manipulate consumers and create profit. As in

Dick's *The Simulacra*, the structure of superpower conflict in the American 1950s and

1960s becomes, in the dystopian novel, internal structures of conflict and competition

within the projected United States. One can see in the above quotation that the head of the

Point-of-Sale department outlines a shift from the *aural* to the visual, and when Mitchell

Courtenay watches the advertisement film about the Venus project, it is the image of

domesticity which is the selling point. The *image* of the commodity is all important.

In *The Image*, Daniel Boorstin argued that 'reality' in the United States, in the post-war

period, consisted of 'pseudo-events', completely fabricated and artificial.[18] Along with

David Riesman, William H. Whyte and Erich Fromm, Boorstin argued that the everyday

life of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s was inauthentic, allowing its citizens no

access to the 'real' or the 'true'. Advertising and the mass media, he felt, were the

constructors of this 'pseudo-reality'. The image represents what the consumer

ideologically buys into when he or she buys a commodity. Vance Packard, who wrote

several books exploring the techniques of the advertising agencies, in his *The Hidden

Persuaders* quotes a New York ad agency director: "'People have a terrific loyalty to their

brand of cigarette and yet in tests cannot tell it from other brands. They are smoking an

image completely'".[19] Aldous Huxley, in *Brave New World Revisited*, highlighted

advertising as one of the means by which his dystopia was being made real, and the

emphasis on the image as the producer of a 'pseudo-reality' again suggests the

spatialization of ideology in the dystopian text, the fabrication of the world representing its

ideological construction.

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[18] Daniel Boorstin, *The Image, or, What Happened to the American Dream* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1963).

[19] Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p.45.

The ideology of the ad men in *The Space Merchants* and in *The Hidden Persuaders* is that

humanity is there to be manipulated, so the agency must make as much money as it can (or

other agencies will). The same belief in the malleability of humanity pervades these texts

as it does B.F. Skinner's 1948 utopia, *Walden Two*. Human rationality is *not* a given, and

in fact the advertising agencies of *The Space Merchants* avoid it: 'You can't trust reason.

We threw it out of the ad profession long ago and have never missed it', boasts Courtenay

(*Space* 8: 77). Vance Packard again writes: 'the marketers decided that it is dangerous to

assume that people can be trusted to behave in a rational way'.[20] If human beings are

rational, then they should be free; if not, they should be controlled for good, or will be

controlled for ill. If *The Space Merchants* is to be taken as, in some sense, a 'cautionary

satire', then it too is attempting to intervene in the ideologically constructed 'real' of the

1950s, or perhaps, less charitably, manipulate its readers. I noted in chapter 1 that Kurt

Vonnegut's background in marketing, and his praise of Orwell, suggested that there was,

in *Player Piano*, an intention towards persuasion of the reader. This was echoed in

Bradbury's statement, cited in chapter 2, that it was *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself which

prevented the institution of totalized states in the West in the post-war years. How credible

one finds this statement is, in a sense, immaterial: it is their privileging of the dystopian

text's intervention into the everyday world of the 1950s and 1960s which is important.

Pohl, rather strangely, has written of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'It was the last book he wrote.

And, I think, very close to being his worst'.[21] Pohl notes the history of criticism of Orwell

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[20] Packard, p. 19.

[21] Frederik Pohl, 'Coming Up on 1984', in *Storm Warnings: Science Fiction confronts the future*, ed. by George E. Slusser, Colin Greenland and Eric S. Rabkin (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 97-113 (p. 97).

which, like Bradbury, assigns to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a kind of prophylactic power. He

continues:

> What destroys *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that it is riddled with self-contradictions
> and failures of logic; it does not fulfil Orwell's purpose, as he discribes [*sic*] his
> purpose himself; it betrays a failure to understand what is really going on in the
> world, devastating in what is meant to be a revelatory and pointed cautionary
> satire; and (although this is less important) it is a thoroughly unoriginal work, in
> that almost everything he says has been said before -- often by Orwell himself.[22]

Strange, then, for a failure of a book to exercise such control over the dystopian

imagination since it was written, particularly in the American 1950s. As I suggested in my

Introduction, perhaps Pohl was always closer to Huxley's imagination of a hedonistic

dystopian state, wherein control is structured and maintained by indirection and

distraction. In the worlds of Pohl and Kornbluth, this becomes the invasive and deforming

pressures of commodity capitalism, manifested in advertising, corporate business, and

consumption. As Huxley himself wrote in *Brave New World Revisited*:

> it has become clear that control through the punishment of undesirable behaviour
> is less effective, in the long run, than control through the reinforcement of
> desirable behaviour by rewards, and that government through terror works on the
> whole less well than government through the non-violent manipulation of the
> environment and of the thoughts and feelings of the individual men, women and
> children.[23]

In the works of Pohl and Kornbluth which emphasise the deforming character of material

abundance, the imperatives of control operate through reward or plenty rather than terror.

The rapacity of big business, and the constraining cycle of production and consumption in

The Space Merchants is masked by an ideology which emphasises the well-being of its

citizens in terms of the consumer durables they possess.

[22] 'Coming Up to 1984', p.104.
[23] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) (London: Flamingo, 1994), p. 3.

In fact, the cycle of production and consumption is the basic narrative engine in many of Pohl's texts, but particularly *The Space Merchants* and the short stories 'The Midas Plague' and 'The Tunnel Under the World'. The cyclical time-frames of 'The Tunnel' particularly emphasise the ongoing and mutually supporting imperatives of production and consumption, an economic succession which continually reimposes the need for the next part of the cycle. Products are manufactured and systems of advertising are constructed in order to create the demand for them to be sold; this consumption then promotes another round of production. The denizens of the various worlds Pohl imagines are locked in to this productive cycle, either by a system of brain-wiping ('The Tunnel Under the World'), an inverted class hierarchy where to be poor is to consume more ('The Midas Plague') or consumption is itself figured as an addiction ('The Man Who Ate the World'). Throughout, the economic system has at its core the necessity to produce in order to maintain itself, for once a part of the cycle fails, the whole system fails.

How, then, do we resist consumption? Pohl's short story, 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', attempts to find an answer. It imagines a small town in middle America, cut off from the rest of the country first through the devastation of a nuclear conflict and then through armed resistance. The narrative charts the arrival of one Coglan, the representative of 'Yust and Ruminant', an advertising agency so much part of institutional power that it takes up one side of the Pentagon. This image also suggests that advertising is analogous to a weapon of war, as in the later *The Merchants' War*, and advertising discourse uses the language of warfare -- 'targeting', 'campaigns' and so on. Pung's Corners is deliberately cut off from the New World, the accidental isolation of wartime becoming a deliberate and political one. Coglan's aim is to restore the writ of advertising and commodity consumption to this zone of tranquillity.

The narrative itself encodes a reading which privileges a myth of 'Old America' and its

putative values over a capitalist system of advertising and commodification, just as Ray

Bradbury had engaged mythic and nostalgic images in opposition to the Fireman-state in

Fahrenheit 451. The story begins: 'This is the way it happened in the old days. Pay

attention now, I'm not going to repeat myself'.[24] Pohl uses folk narrative as intertext to

suggest that the events occurred in an undefined (and perhaps somewhat distant) past to

that of the narrator, and also to place the protagonists who resist (and ultimately defeat)

the encroachment of the Army (read Modern world) in a heroic *mythos*. The defeat of

the institutional forces is effected by an elder or mage-figure, Jack Tighe, who was once

part of the 'system', and therefore possesses inside knowledge. This figure recurs in

Gladiator-at-Law. They are, so to speak, Grand Inquisitors in retirement, who turn

against the system.

David Seed writes that the story 'expresses the tension between local communitarian

values and government centralism in terms of military combat'.[25] Indeed, 'The Wizard's

of Pung's Corners' adapts a *mythos* of the American local militia, where a heroic male

self-sufficiency overcomes larger hostile forces. The conflict depicted is fighting (and

defeating) an alien and invading military power, typed on the War of Independence.

Once again, the invasiveness of advertising is represented as a colonizing force. Of

course, this myth of heroic self-sufficiency is opposed to the contemporaneous

American military structures, and provides the focus for Pohl's satire. A kind of

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[24] Frederik Pohl, 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners' (1959), reprinted in *The Man Who Ate the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1960), pp. 37-68 (p. 38).
[25] David Seed, 'Take-Over Bids: The Power Fantasies of Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth', *Foundation* 59 (Autumn 1993), 42-58 (p. 47).

military-industrial complex is suggested by the over-technologized and ultimately

chaotic state of the Army that descends on Pung's Corners: production of military

hardware by automated American factories is mirrored by a system of consumption (or

here, *procurement*). The metaphor of the 'military machine' is literalized in its

infatuation with hardware, a physical manifestation of the mechanization of the military

mind. The tanks and branded, high-technology weapons signify an inflexibility which is

all too easily exploited by Tighe and the militiamen. The status of the Army is actually

ambiguous: they are a colonizing force, and one which is used against the United States'

own citizens; yet, they have been made redundant by a world recovering from war.

A 'smalltown' entrepreneurial, or perhaps co-operative, ethos is posited in

contradistinction to the rapacious and exploitative nature of consumerist capitalism.

Despite his involvement in organized left politics before World War II, and the evident

critique of advertising, consumerism and commodity capitalism in the short stories, Pohl

(like Philip Dick) seems to privilege a variant on the capitalist economic organization;

he is opposed to Big Business but not against capitalism *per se*. Where the system of

advertising in 'The Tunnel Under the World' (see below) is all-pervasive and all-

powerful (actually *constructing* reality), here it is weak: Jack Tighe has to do nothing

but watch the Army defeat itself. With nothing more than a 'shotgun and a .22', the

emblems of a less technologized era and therefore of extended human agency, he and

the other 'Wizards' are able to march on Washington and take over the government.

In the sequel to this story, 'The Waging of the Peace', again cast in a folk-narrative

idiom, Jack Tighe is now in office, but facing the challenge of automated factories

racing beyond the capacity of people to consume. Ironically, the dystopian rebel is in

fact the President of the United States. Again, a military effort forms the narrative focus,

but here it is the forces of 'right' who infiltrate an underground factory-system, and

attempt (successfully) to sabotage its ability to gather raw materials to construct into

commodities. It is not a human-controlled system of advertising which must be battled

in 'The Waging of the Peace', but an autonomous and mechanical productive force. The

economy is also figured in terms of the machine, in both its technological products, its

system of production and the ideology which created it. The 'military-industrial

complex', the engine of technology and consumerism, transforms 'peace' into warfare.

It too must be 'waged'. Human freedom becomes aligned with an anti-technological

impulse, analogous to the opposition of smalltown entrepreneurship with corporate

business. Where 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners' was figured as the War of

Independence, against a colonizing and invading power, 'The Waging of the Peace'

echoes World War II in its depiction of an attack on concrete bunkers and secret

installations. The victory of the humans, however, is temporary: *without raw materials,*

the factory fabricates things of 'force fields [and] magnetic flux'.[26] These are

commodities without materiality, utter simulacra. The triumph of an autonomous system

of productive forces over human beings is again figured, at odds with the satirical tone

of the stories and the depiction of the 'unlickable' Jack Tighe. Perhaps what is

suggested is a race between adaptive productive forces and ongoing human attempts to

stop it.

Control rests with vast, impersonal forces, which have their own logic, their own

momentum. This momentum is generated by a military economy: autonomous

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[26] Frederik Pohl, 'The Waging of the Peace' (1959), reprinted in *The Man Who Ate the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1960), pp. 69-98 (p. 98).

subsurface factories are built to withstand war, and their production accelerates to replace lost material. They are meant to turn off at the war's cessation; but 'who could have known beforehand that the machines might not know war from peace?'.[27] (57). The machines keep up their pace. As David Seed has suggested, this satirises the post-war American economy: geared for war production in WWII, this continued in the immediate post-war period, some production being turned over to consumer commodities, and some maintaining military production, creating the 'military-industrial complex', and what Fred Cooke was to call 'the warfare state'. The continuity between wartime production of military hardware, and the post-war boom in consumer commodities is emphasized by the militarization of advertising discourse I noted earlier, in which 'campaigns' are fought and consumers 'targetted'. Pohl satirizes this tendency by making the US Army and advertising agencies synonymous ('Yust and Ruminant' occupying one side of the Pentagon, and the US Army enforcing the operations of consumption by military occupation).

The system of advertising is ruthlessly satirised in both stories. Coglan dumps scopalamine in the reservoir to make the people of Pung's Corners more suggestible, and also uses subliminal advertising: '"A product, and a key to the basic drives, and all flashed so quickly that the brain can't organise defences"'.[28] This kind of advertising technique had been outlawed in *The Space Merchants* by the rump of constitutional government: here, the two are identical. Coglan's uses subliminal prompting to stimulate sexual desire in the service of consumption: 'Subliminal compulsion, eh? The basic sex drive; you don't know you're seeing it, but the submerged mind doesn't miss

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[27] 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', p. 57.
[28] 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', p. 54.

it. No. And notice the box of Prune-Bran Whippets in her hand'.[29] This is analogous to

Courtenay's exposition of the techniques of advertising:

> the basic drive of the human race is sex. And what is, essentially, more
> important to life than to mould and channel the deepest torrential flow of human
> emotion into its proper directions? (I am not apologising for those renegades
> who talk fancifully about some imagined 'Death Wish' to hook their sales
> appeals to. I leave that sort of thing to the Tauntons of our profession: it's dirty,
> it's immoral, I want nothing to do with it. Besides, it leads to fewer consumers in
> the long run, if they'd only think the thing through) (*Space* 8: 71).

While John P. Brennan argued persuasively about the hostility of Pohl and Kornbluth to

psychological depth models, it is clear from the above quotation that there is some

engagement with Freud. The sublimation of the sexual instinct, and its use by

advertising agencies to sell commodities, has an obvious derivation from the later

Freud's insistence that the path of civilization was the path of repression. The reference

to the 'Death Wish', the instinctual drive of Thanatos which Bernard Wolfe, in *Limbo*,

represented as underlying Cold War conflict, here signifies the unacknowledged

contradictions in Courtenay's (and the ad-men's) ideology. The rapacious and

destructive exploitation of resources is also an impulse towards death, for the Earth is

being used up, which itself propels the Conservationist infiltration of the plan to

colonize Venus.

2. The Domination of Consumption: the Fabricated World and the Mechanical Consumer

Daniel Boorstin, in *The Image*, wrote of post-war America: 'This is the age of the

contrivance. The artificial has become so commonplace that the natural begins to seem

contrived'.[30] This overlaying of the natural and artificial is analogous to the replacement

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[29] 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', p. 54.
[30] Boorstin, *The Image*, p. 255.

of the human by the machine in Vonnegut's *Player Piano* and by the fabricated 'reals'

of Philip K. Dick's 1960s dystopias. In Pohl's short stories, reality is fabricated at all

levels by the system of advertising and the mass media, and the 'natural' is no longer in

view. In texts such as *The Space Merchants*, the artificial is prized over the natural;

discomfort is made to seem comfortable by the erasure of any alternative reference points.

Nasal plugs filter out the soot and pollutants of the atmosphere, signifying that the sign of

the natural, the 'outside world', has been inverted: nature has been so defiled in the

process of exploitation that it constitutes a threat. Chicken Little, the artificially created

and fed source of 'meat' which Courtenay discovers when he is abducted and sent to work

in a processing plant, is a monstrous symbol of the perversion of the natural which occurs

under the process of exploitative capitalism. The plant is depicted in advertising copy as in

'the sun-drenched plantations of Costa Rica' (*Space* 7:65), emphasising that the ideology

of the natural -- promoted through advertising -- operates as a screen, behind which the

depredations of capitalism operate. Nearly all of the narrative of *The Space Merchants*

exists in interior space: exterior space, the world of the natural, is dangerous. The 'natural'

exists within the dystopian 'real' as a trace of the natural/ artificial binarism which

structures the dystopian text (as in the Green world of Zamiatin's *We*), and which the

media system of *The Space Merchants* attempts to obscure.

In *The Space Merchants* the system of exploitation and production does not change when

the environment changes: one changes the system of *consumption* to adjust to new

productive needs. As Vance Packard wrote in *The Hidden Persuaders*, 'One ad executive

exclaimed with fervour: "What makes this country great is the creation of wants and

desires, the creation of dissatisfaction with the old and outmoded"'.[31] In Pohl's 'The

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[31] Packard, pp. 24-25.

Midas Plague'(1954), a system of mass consumption operates in an inverted manner to

that of 50s America: the 'poorer' one is, the more one has to consume; the 'wealthier'

one is, the more spartan life can be. David N. Samuelson writes of the story: 'the point

was to expose and skewer the naïveté (or duplicity) of the attitude (not limited to the

1950s) that affluence is a never-ending spiral, meanwhile softening the blow with comic

exaggeration'.[32] This scenario's dystopian ironies are then dependent on the imagination

of an economic system which undergoes endless (and accelerating) growth:

> Limitless discovery, infinite power in the atom, tireless labor of humanity and
> robots, mechanization that drove jungle and swamp and ice off the earth, and put
> up office buildings and manufacturing centers and rocket ports in their place.[33]

These are the images of a technological utopia, but the economic system finds no steady

state. Production without limit becomes not a utopia of material plenty (or even a

technological Cockaygne) but a *dystopia* of superabundance.

Automated factories disburse a vast amount of commodities which must be consumed,

and a global system of consumption is set in place to deal with the output. The goods

may not be simply destroyed: they must be used and 'worn out' by the lower classes.

The system of consumption is buttressed by a social code which abhors waste, and the

lower classes are caught in the resulting double-bind. Ironically, the system is dependent

upon the *wasting* of resources and the commodities themselves: they are constructed

only to be destroyed, and replaced. Morey Fry is the protagonist of the story, a lower-

caste *apparatchik* who attempts (with little success) to successfully consume all he is

'rationed' (a bloated portion of goods, food, and drink). In this world, '"the most

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[32] Samuelson, 'Critical Mass', p. 108.

[33] Frederik Pohl, 'The Midas Plague', (1954), reprinted in *The Best of Frederik Pohl*, ed. by Lester del
Rey (New York: Taplinger, 1977), pp. 112-161 (p. 116).

important anti-social phenomenon [...] [is] failure to consume'".[34] Consumption then

becomes an index of conformity. A failed consumer is positioned in opposition to the

dominant ideological structures of the dystopian state.

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The technology of production has become so streamlined and efficient that it can only

produce at an accelerating rate; yet it may not be turned off, because humans have

grown so accustomed to this automated system that they could no longer provide for

themselves, if it were shut down. Therefore, a system of ever-accelerating consumption

must be maintained in order to keep pace with production. Ironically, at the end of the

story, a product (robot) will itself consume other products. The human beings are

transformed into robots, into metaphorical machines. They are programmed to consume,

but the contradictions inherent in the system means that the conditioning is invariably

insufficient. The repeating metaphor of the human becoming a machine, which I have

emphasised throughout this thesis, is made concrete at the end of the story, when it is

revealed that each consumer will be replaced (in part) by robot doubles of themselves.

Paradoxically, then, in a system where consumption is paramount, the human consumer

is no longer efficient enough to consume. Consumption becomes yet another sphere to

be mechanized, a part of an extended process which displaces or eliminates human

beings from their place in society. In the later 'The Tunnel Under the World', as in

Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, the brain-waves of human operators of machines are

themselves copied, and used in perpetuity to control fully-automated factories; in 'The

Midas Plague', the satiric effect is doubled: not only is there an autonomous and

automated system of production, there is set in place a mirrored system of consumption.

[34] 'The Midas Plague', p. 142.

Morey Fry, the protagonist of 'The Midas Plague', does not suffer a systematic alienation from the system, as do other dystopian characters. He does encounter an 'underground' group of malcontents, but these are ineffective and lack the will to put their discontent into any political action. Inadvertently, Fry becomes their hero when he turns the technology of consumption against itself, and makes his robot servants use his ration of consumer goods in order to wear them out. This *detournement* is less an act of political conviction, or a thought-out subversion of the system and ideology of consumption, than a pragmatic and extempore decision made when drunk. Fry does not even remember doing so until some of his alcohol ration is used up too rapidly. The ambiguity of this gesture of resistance is analogous to that of Paul Proteus in *Player Piano* and his fellow conspirators, whose acts of rebellion reflect the machine-oriented culture which produced them.

This subversion, it is revealed, is discovered by the system at the very beginning; centralized control of the domestic robot servants, under the aegis of a shadowy 'Ration Board' (another example of Pohl's receding centres of power and authority), has monitored Fry all along. Fry, unable to live with his rebellion -- which makes him a success for the first time -- confesses to his actions, first to a powerful authority-figure (father or Big Brother), then to the system itself. Ultimately, this rebellion, and its seemingly revolutionary or emanicipatory implications, makes little difference. The Ration Board will shut itself down, but a class system will remain in place. People will be still forced to consume, though less as the robots will take over the bulk of the physical process of consumption. The societal system of *need to consume*, and the status and sense of worth dependent upon it, remains, even though his actions have brought change. A 'utopia' will not ensue, where humans live in luxury while the robots work.

The system evolves, rather than being destroyed or reformed. In Fry's case, resistance only perpetuates the system: he causes it to change, to mutate, but it remains in operation. Capital, it would seem, is endlessly adaptive, co-opting revolution and closing off alternatives. As in other of the short stories, and in *Player Piano*, the rebellion of the dystopian protagonist is ultimately reassimilated by the system.

Recurring throughout the story is the word 'plenty'. In the system of overproduction and necessitated overconsumption, the worth of material goods becomes inverted: less is certainly more. This is undoubtedly satirizing an economy of display of luxury in the America of the 1950s, the most obvious sign of which was the vogue for streamlining of cars and even refrigerators, and the abundance of fins and excess styling, which regulated the style of the American commodity of the 50s. The 'poor' areas of the city parody this excessive style:

> He was in the Old Town, miles from home, jostled by crowds of lower-class people. The block he was on was as atrocious a slum as Morey had ever seen -- Chinese pagodas stood next to rococo imitations of chapels around Versailles; gingerbread marred every facade; no building was without its brilliant signs and flarelights.[35] (130).

The cityscape is entirely imitation, and there is no 'authentic' style. The city itself becomes a vast commodity, an artificial simulacrum. Once again, the ideology of the state finds its spatial representation. To Fry, there is something repulsive and corrupt about the display: ostentation is the correlative of overproduction. The ostentation is also entirely ersatz:

> Uncle Piggoty's was a third-rate dive designed to look, in parts of it at least, like one of the exclusive upper-class country clubs. The bar, for instance, was treated to resemble the clean lines of nailed wood; but underneath the surface treatment, Morey could detect the intricate laminations of plastic.[36]

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[35] 'The Midas Plague', p. 130.
[36] 'The Midas Plague', p. 133.

There is none of Philip K. Dick's complication of the ontological status of authentic and fake: here, the upper classes retain the authentic ('clean lines of nailed wood'), and the lower classes have to make do with a fraudulent plastic approximation. It *resembles* the authentic, but this very resemblance paradoxically signifies its inauthenticity.

The mixture of styles seems to be a kind of Las Vegas-ization of societal space. In *Learning From Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi and others examined the spatial and architectural ordering of the Las Vegas of the 1950s and 1960s; they wrote that 'the order of the Strip includes: it includes at all levels, from the mixture of seemingly incongruous land uses to the mixture of seemingly incongruous advertising media'.[37] The commercial architecture of the Las Vegas Strip, which features extreme and parodic stylings and the ubiquity and dominance of the neon advertising sign, is a fabricated and simulated cityscape, a place with neither the accretions of history nor 'authenticity'. In 'The Midas Plague' this 'Las Vegas-ization' of space becomes an ironic explosion of colour and exuberance, an *equally oppressive* riot of life. It is not an expression of the lives of those who live there, and nor is it a kind of anti-ordering, a free social space; it dominates the people, forces them into patterns of consumption which are themselves repressive.

There is also a rather uncomfortable stereotyping of working class taste as vulgarity in this section, one that finds its echo in Kornbluth's 'The Marching Morons'. In this short story, whose relationship to the Wellsian technotopia is foregrounded by the device of a man from the past awakening into a streamlined 'utopian' future, the sharp-eyed visitor

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[37] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steve Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: the forgotten symbolism of architectural form* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 52-3.

Search the Sky's protagonist, Ross, travels from a decaying world called 'Halsey's Planet', to discover the lost secret of Faster-Than-Light travel, which has been retained amongst a secret elite of traders, in order to reverse the entropic decline of a human colonization scattered throughout the galaxy. The first is gerontocratic, the second a matriarchy. The last world is Earth, a reductive technologized 'utopia' made the playground of the 'brainless'. Ross and his travelling companions discover that the technologized environment is controlled by a physically weak but intellectually advanced elite hidden in Australia.

The Earth of *Search the Sky* is a gentler and more paternalistic one than in 'The Marching Morons'. Parallels can also be drawn with *The Time Machine* and its spatialization of power, but where the Morlocks use the Eloi as cattle, the elite here treat them as 'children', protecting them from harm. The relationship still results in stasis, the horror of *Search the Sky*. Another intertext is *Brave New World*: the proletarian classes amuse themselves in hedonistic pursuits, while the elite manipulate them. Again, the depiction of the stupid, hedonistic people who embody the 'prole' class is problematic: exhibited here is a fear of the mass, of 'mass man', as defined by the OED as ' a hypothetical average man; one typical of mass society, characterized by a lack of individuality and a tendency to be manipulated by sterotyped ideas from the mass media'. The first usage is given as Aldous Huxley, who uses it in conjunction with 'the mob' (*Point Counter Point*, 1928). In *Search the Sky*, the fear of the mass is more urgent and more visible than in other of Pohl's texts or the dystopian paradigm itself.

'The Tunnel Under the World', published in 1954, focuses on advertising as the engine of consumption. It depicts the main protagonist, Guy Burckhardt (with Guy Montag as

intertext, perhaps), waking up on the morning of June 15th, screaming from a bad dream. As the narrative progresses it becomes apparent that in Tylerton, not only is every day *like* every other, but every day *is* June 15th. The inhabitants of the city have their brains wiped at the end of each day; it is only Burckhardt's accidental escaping of this procedure which precipitates his knowledge that something is wrong, and his dystopian trajectory of alienation.

'The Tunnel Under the World' posits an enigma: what is the 'truth' behind the reality of Tylerton? Once he becomes aware of the level of manipulation occurring in his town, Burckhardt sets out to discover this 'truth'. There are then two narrative structures: the repeating (and recursive) daily cycle, and the linear narrative of discovery. The discovery is, of course, that 'reality' is not everything that Burckhardt thought it to be, mapping the epistemelogical problem of the protagonist's search for answers onto the ontological problem of 'reality', and the structures of ideology onto the physical and spatial forms of Tylerton itself. The text focalizes through the perceptions of Burckhardt, and his discoveries become the readers'.

The protagonist, Burckhardt, first becomes uncomfortable (if not at this stage completely alienated) when he becomes aware of a series of advertisements nested in a program of elevator *muzak*. His discomfort is exacerbated by the fact that he hears unfamiliar advertisements: it is not their penetration into everyday life which alienates him but the fact that he has never heard of the products being advertised. What is wrong is the absence of comforting and familiar signs of commodities. The system of advertising *is* the constructed 'reality' of Tylerton. As David Seed notes, "The Tunnel'

then dramatises the power of commercial forces to construct reality at all levels'.[43] It is only Burckhardt's prior and restricted knowledge which allow him to see the gaps in the system.

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Tylerton is, it emerges, a place where advertising agencies experiment with different selling techniques to test which are the most effective. Burckhardt's neighbourhood is bombarded with a high-pressure, almost hysterical voice: '"Fairies own Ajax Freezers! [...] Commies own Triplecold freezers!"'.[44] The hate-targets of the Cold War era are used to reinforce a paranoid sense of belongingness, and to motivate consumption. What the people of Tylerton are buying is an image of conformity, an image of shared values. There are no 'needs' other than those created by the system of advertising itself. In 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', the invading ad-man Coglan exclaims:

> 'I remind you of what a great man once said: "Our chief job in research is to keep the customer reasonably dissatisfied with what he has." [...] That was Charles F. Kettering of General Motors' he said, 'and the beauty of it, Miss Groshawk, is that he said this in the Twenties!'[45]

Dissatisfaction is then inbuilt into the system of consumption to ensure its perpetuation. As in 'The Man Who Ate the World' (see below), alienated consumers seek satisfaction in commodities which invariably, and inevitably, leave them unsatisfied, reinforcing alienation and perpetuating the need to consume. Consumption is itself entirely mediated: there is no direct interface between consumer and commodity. Erich Fromm, who attempted to locate and analyse the 'neuroses' of post-war life in *The Sane Society*, also makes this point: 'Consuming is essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated

[43] Seed, 'Take-Over Bids', p. 47.

[44] Frederik Pohl, 'The Tunnel Under the World', (1954), reprinted in *The Best of Frederik Pohl*, ed. by Lester del Rey (New York: Taplinger, 1977), pp. 8-35 (p. 14).

[45] 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', p. 49.

phantasies, a phantasy performance alienated from our concrete, real selves'.[46]

Consumption *is* alienation, in this formula. Needs are artificially created to stimulate

outlets for production, and consumption provides the ideological rationalization for

continued (or accelerating) production.

The society of 'The Tunnel Under the World', set in a putative mid-1970s, is

characterised by an always-extant level of anxiety, a pervasive Cold War *anomie*.

Burckhardt and his wife emerge each day from a nightmare of explosive death (revealed

to be their own), but the text offers this explanation: 'In the past thirty years of H-bomb

jitters who had not dreamed of explosions?'[47] A Cold War anxiety, then, combines with

the dissatisfaction and alienation caused by consumerism to create the dystopian world

of 'The Tunnel Under the World'. In this narrative, the manipulation of the mass *is its*

own end; in other dystopian texts, such as *Fahrenheit 451*, consumerism becomes a

distraction from the operation of geopolitics. While Millie Montag watches wall-sized

screens, jet bombers fly overhead. Hidden from view, obscured by advertising and

commodities, *power elites control the world* and manipulate its citizens.

The title of 'The Tunnel Under the World' reveals its spatial mapping of power, that

there is something which underlies everyday life, a secret or 'underground' reality. This

again is the dystopian text's spatialization of ideology, its representation of the

constructed and ideological forms of life as a fabrication of reality. His pervasive

anxiety leads to paranoia when Burckhardt discovers that the cellar of his house had

been 'replaced [...]with a clever mock-up of the real thing'.[48] This is amplified by his

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[46] Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 134.
[47] 'The Tunnel Under the World', p. 8.
[48] 'The Tunnel Under the World', p. 18.

meeting with fellow 'escapee', the utterly alienated Swanson, who has been constructing

paranoid narratives to explain the irreality of their experience. Swanson imagines the

take-over of Tylerton by either the Martians or those other 'Reds', the Soviets. What he

and Burckhardt discover is that the city has not been *taken over* at all (in the paranoid

paradigm of 50s SF): it has been entirely fabricated at table-top scale, because the 'real'

Tylerton no longer exists, and neither do they. This discovery of diminution is a

metaphor for the atomization and powerlessness caused by the operations of big

business and the technology which furthers domination. Like the 'invisible' characters

in Dick's *The Simulacra*, or the 'ghost hands' of Rudy Hertz in *Player Piano*, a physical

or bodily absence signifies the damage done to the individual in the systems of

consumption, production and conformity.

The pair travel to the 'Contro Chemicals' plant to try to discover the 'truth' of the

mystery, but only find yet more mystery. The plant is standing idle. As in Vonnegut's

Player Piano, automation comes with the correlative elimination of the human: 'each

machine was controlled by a sort of computer which reproduced, in its electronic snarl,

the actual memory and mind of a human being'.[49] Once the patterns have been

replicated, there is no longer any need for human operators. Burckhardt is

uncomfortable with this complication and blurring of the human/machine divide; it is

ironic, then, that we discover that he, and everyone else in Tylerton, is also a robot, with

the brain-patterns of their organic bodies translated after death. Here, then, as in 'The

Midas Plague', we find that the dictates of a system of commodity consumption

transform human beings into robots: in fact, human beings are *replaced* by robots. Erich

Fromm identifies the same process in *The Sane Society*:

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[49] 'The Tunnel Under the World', p. 11.

> Both [capitalist and communist] systems are developing into managerial societies, their inhabitants well fed, well clad, having their wishes satisfied, and not having wishes which cannot be satisfied; automatons, who follow without force, who are guided without leaders, who make machines which act like men and produce men who act like machines.[50]

Fromm uses the metaphor of the mechanization of the human to argue that human agency and autonomy has been lost in a technological and bureaucratic society. In these two short stories, as in others of the period (such as Dick's famous 'Imposter'), and in novels such as Wolfe's *Limbo,* the cyborgized human becomes the image of alienation, from self and from society.

Burckhardt and Swanson discover that the factory is not making anything. We find that consumption is itself divorced from production, and in fact precedes it: the ad-men sell commodities which are irreal, which do not, in fact, exist. The entire cycle of production and consumption is entirely simulated. Consumers never buy any commodities at all, but only sign for the promise of their delivery, a satire on credit payment. With the end of each day, this promise is erased, and the same 'commodity' can be sold in a different manner. The system of advertising is also completely autonomous, divorced from the consumption of commodities.

Burckhardt finally discovers the truth of his situation after he contacts Dorchin, who controls the advertising experiments. A scene where Burckhardt and Swanson discover a room full of tv monitors -- everyone is under surveillance, another dystopian trope -- is mirrored when he approaches the edge of the 'table-top' Tylerton. As in Dick's *Eye in the Sky,* an image of macrocosmic surveillance -- the eye of God -- is figured, but here, it is only the God of Madison Avenue. Ironically, this 'God' is only the 'real' life-size

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[50] Fromm, pp. 359-360.

Dorchin, who appears to Burckhardt as a mountainous and incomprehensibly powerful

figure, signified by a 'thunderous' voice and 'blinding light'. Indeed, Dorchin *is*

Burckhardt's maker. Like Mond or O'Brien, Dorchin explains the dystopian system to

the alienated protagonist, as a prelude to the latter's re-assimilation or destruction.

Dorchin's status complicates that of the dystopian Grand Inquisitor figures: Mond and

O'Brien are both within *and* without the system of restricted information and control of

the State, having access to the 'truth', yet complicit in its systems of control. Dorchin is

physically both within and outside the 'table-top' Tylerton. Unlike Burckhardt, his 'real'

human body still exists, discrete from the miniature robot in the fabricated town, and

this is the 'God' Burckhardt encounters. Ironically, the system of consumption produces

alienated, literally mechanized human beings. The economic system in 'The Tunnel

Under the World' operates as an Althusserian Ideology: it *deformatively produces* the

reality in which Burckhardt, and all of Tylerton, live. The town of Tylerton, a 'table-top

reality', becomes a dystopian microcosm of the invasive pressures of advertising and

consumption in post-war America.

Like Bernard Marx and Helmholtz, Burckhardt fails in his attempt to rebel against or

bring down the system: he is only allowed to regain the grace of anaesthetic ignorance,

to return to the cycle of June 15th, analogous to the contained islands of malcontents in

Brave New World. David Seed argues: 'Whether they attempt to trace out the

manoeuvrings of huge corporations or transpose military combat on to the domestic

scene the result is always to depict power as located elsewhere, beyond the protagonists'

reach'.[51] I would concur, and suggest that power recedes from the majority of

protagonists in Pohl's texts, as it does in Philip K. Dick's 1960s dystopias; Burckhardt

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[51] Seed, 'Take-Over Bids', p. 50.

is unusual in orchestrating a terminal encounter with the figure of authority. He is,

however, typical in his inability to fundamentally change the system.

3. Consumption as Addiction: Eating the World

This system of mass consumption figured in 'The Midas Plague' results in endemic

neurosis, psychosis, and worse in the population. As in many of Philip K. Dick's

narratives, psychiatrists are on hand to dispense therapy, which becomes yet another

commodity, another 'ration' to be consumed and ticked off the list. The accelerating

pace of economic growth, and the constant production of yet more goods, means that

consumers are conditioned to consume more and more -- "Consuming is everybody's

duty", Fry's boss tells him[52] -- yet they find that the possibility of 'success' (consuming

one's portion) constantly recedes before them. Morey Fry is not the only one who fails

in his unwinnable race to consume: his workmates also cannot keep up. This results in

neurosis, because goals set by society are impossible to fulfil.

'The Midas Plague' states: 'Plenty is a habit-forming drug'.[53] A similar equation appears

to be at the core of 'The Man Who Ate the World', published in 1956. The imagined

world is continuous with that of 'The Midas Plague'; the 'Man' of the title is Anderson

Trumie, who grew up during the 'bad old days of the Age of Plenty, when the world was

smothering under the endless, pounding flow of goods from the robot factories and the

desperate race between consumption and production strained the human fabric'.[54] The

world of 'The Midas Plague' is the past of this story: Anderson Trumie is a

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[52] 'The Midas Plague', p. 124.
[53] 'The Midas Plague', p. 123.
[54] Frederik Pohl, 'The Man Who Ate the World' (1956), reprinted in *The Man Who Ate the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1960), pp. 7-37 (p. 25).

representative of that world (a *product* of that world) adrift in a new one, which cannot cope with his need to consume. The imagined world of 'The Man Who Ate The World' is stable, a kind of technological near-utopia of the end of material want. Trumie is a dystopian abroad in utopia, unable to adapt.

Trumie restlessly attempts to gather all power, all material things unto himself: in fact, as the title of the story suggests, into himself. Trumie suffers from a disease, an all-consuming need to consume. This is an arresting image of totalization, with the whole world being ingested into the body of one man. This consumption is torture for Trumie. The need to consume consists of an emptiness within, figured as physical hunger, which he seeks desperately and unsuccessfully to fill. The conflict between Trumie's order of consumption, and the post- 'Age of Plenty' societal order of the protagonists, is figured as a competition for *space*, competing ideologies again figured in physical terms. Trumie's robots construct an artificial -- in fact entirely mechanized -- world which begins to encroach upon, and threaten to absorb, or consume, the space and order of the stable post-consumption world. *Like Morey Fry, Trumie hates robots, but is trapped* within a system where they are his only companions, where he is maintained by them, and protected by them. Like Fry, this is traceable to childhood trauma, and a too-early placing of the burden of consumption upon a child's shoulders. Trumie's trauma, however, can be cured by his regression. For Trumie, consumption is both an addiction and an illness, but one that can be escaped from, recovered from. The identity forged in his childhood is laid to sleep at the end of the story: even the razor-sharp mind-Trumie that lived in the sad, obedient hulk; it slept; and it had never slept before'.[55]

Consumption is a form of self-punishment which corresponds to his lack of self-worth;

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[55] 'The Man Who Ate the World', p. 37.

a failure to fulfil his parents' expectations is internalized as a dominating superego, and

a rage to consume. The words of a female operative, Kathryn Pender, disguised in a

teddy bear suit, soothe him, offer a surrogate parenthood and a therapeutic replaying of

childhood scenes, opposed to his obsessive compulsion to consume exposed in earlier

scenes in the narrative. Consumption then becomes a disease from which Anderson

Trumie -- and hence the human race --can recover.

In *The Space Merchants* and its sequel, *The Merchants' War*, the metaphorical

relationship between consumption and addiction is made even more explicit. The same

equation is made in Pohl's short story 'What to Do Until the Analyst Comes', where the

ubiquity of a stimulating chewing gum results in a population achieving something like a

narcotic nirvana.[56] The structures of advertising in *The Space Merchants* are bolstered by

the systematic use of an addictive 'harmless alkaloid' in the product Coffiest, a brand

name which (fraudulently) suggests a superlative, one which also narcotizes the user. The

populace of consumers is therefore kept in a drugged and pacified state, which doubtless

makes them more receptive to the advertising 'message'. In *The Merchants' War*,

addiction becomes the metaphor of consumption itself. *The Merchants' War* has a similar

structure to *The Space Merchants*, in that a Star-Class Copysmith undergoes an

'education' in the malignities of the system, generated by his love for a woman (who turns

out to be an imposter), and comes to rebel. *The Merchants' War* seems an overt re-writing

of the 1953 text, in that Tennison Tarb, the protagonist of the later text, refuses the

example of Mitchell Courenay and decides to stay on Earth and fight the system, rather

than flee it. Tarb falls prey to 'Mokie-Coke', "'a refreshing, taste-tingling blend of the

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[56] Frederik Pohl, 'What to Do Until the Analyst Comes', *Alternating Currents* (1956) (Harmondsworth: Penguin , 1965), pp. 177-190.

finest chocolate-type flavoring, synthetic coffee extract and selected cocaine analogues'".[57]

Like Coffiest's 'harmless alkaloids', consumption is guaranteed by physical addiction.

Tarb's status as addict provides on going irony to his manipulation of others, and his

attendance of 'ConsumAnon' meetings suggests that sections of the population are

becoming psychologically damaged by the system of consumption. In *The Space*

Merchants and *The Merchants' War*, addiction moves from being a metaphor for the

invasive pressures of advertising and consumption to the mode of the dystopian world's

control. As John P. Brennan suggested, advertising itself may simply be an ideological

device to mask the reality of physical addiction and control.

4. Space: The Topography of Exploitation

The world of *The Space Merchants* is one dominated by corporations and advertising

agencies, polluted and overcrowded. The text focuses on the 'fall' of a member of the

power elite, one Mitchell Courtenay, from his position in one of the advertising agencies,

and narrates his exposure to the exploitative and dominating structures of the dystopian

world, and finally his movement into rebellion. The text constructs a series of spatial

displacements for Courtenay, in which he is constantly resituated in different economic

and social environments. His spatial journey becomes one in which he traverses the class

structure of the world of *The Space Merchants*. The novel was first serialised as 'Gravy

Planet' in *Galaxy*, the title of which suggests 'gravy train' where *The Space Merchants*

suggests commodification and commerce. The gravy train is one on which Courtenay, at

first, comfortably sits.[58]

[57] Frederik Pohl, *The Merchants' War* (1984) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 'Tarb's Homecoming', chapter 1, p. 68.
[58] Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, 'Gravy Planet', *Galaxy Science Fiction* (June 1952), 5-61; (July 1952), 108-159; (August 1952), 104-159.

The class structure adheres to the typical dystopian tripartite structure, mirroring that of

Nineteen Eighty-Four. The factory workers are the proles; the office workers and

secretaries are the Outer Party members; and the 'Star Class' and political elites are

analogous to the Inner Party. Kingsley Amis, in *New Maps of Hell*, identifies the society as

'rigidly stratified into producers, executives, and consumers.'[59] Courtenay, like O'Brien,

understands the structures and mechanics of manipulation and power, but in an act of

doublethink has pragmatically aligned himself with the prevailing ideology. In some ways

then, Courtenay is already his own 'Expositor' figure, and simply has to come to

consciousness of the destructiveness of the system. He does not need the structures of

exploitation to be explained to him, and is already half-in, and half-out of the system. He

is, like Paul Proteus of *Player Piano* and other dystopian protagonists, an ambivalent

figure, produced by yet resisting the system. The Star Class are nominally most free,

because of their position of power within the hierarchy; however, there is an

institutionalized mode of industrial assassination which, presumably, serves to control this

class. This motif is repeated in *The Age of the Pussyfoot*, where it becomes a game of the

super-rich, who can be cryogenically stored and then surgically restored to life.[60] This

system of 'Notification' collapses in the text, when Courtenay's antagonist Taunton tries

to have him killed outside of the codes of society, particularly when utilizing the psychotic

female Hedy. The economy of competition and exploitation begins to implode under the

weight of its own pressures.

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[59] Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961), p. 125.

[60] Frederik Pohl, *The Age of the Pussyfoot* (1969) (London, Corgi, 1971).

The Space Merchants provides the most explicit analogies between spatial and ideological

structures of all the texts in this thesis. The title of the novel suggests that space is a

commodity, and that space and merchandizing are intertwined. The phrase 'the space

merchants' ('merchants of space') has a threefold significance in the text: selling

advertising space in a magazine or on a hoarding; selling space, meaning the erasure of

certain concepts of 'space' (e.g. those aligned with notions of privacy), under the pressures

of overpopulation and commercial exploitation; and the selling *of* space, Outer space, in

the shape of Venus, another New World. Courtenay's friend, Jack O'Shea, says: "'We

need Venus, Mitch, we need the space...'"(*Space* 2: 24). On an overexploited, polluted,

overcrowded Earth, space is at a premium. Private space has collapsed; at the beginning of

the text Mitchell Courtenay watches an advertisement for the mission to Venus, which has

an idealized family unit at home: 'On the screen the picture dissolved to a spacious

suburban roomette in the early morning. On the screen the husband folding the bed into

the wall and taking down the partition to the children's nook; the wife dialling breakfast

and erecting the table' (I: 9). The repetition of the words 'On the screen' signifies the

recursive and insistent operation of the advertising message. The word 'spacious' (another

play on the key term) is the ironic cue here; the image of having to rearrange the contents

of the room (shared by all the family) shows how little space there really is. Space is also

an indicator of wealth and status, here magnified: "'I don't think there's a person in this

room who has less than a two-room apartment'", the boss of one of the advertising

agencies, Fowler Schocken, says to his department heads, with apparent pride (*Space* 1:

6).

The collapse of private space results in the mapping of it onto the public and commercial

realm; twice in the novel Courtenay finds himself among those 'consumers' who are

forced to rent the stairwells of commercial buildings at night, presumably because they have, or can afford, nowhere else. Space, the world, is there to be exploited, packaged, sold. Fowler Schocken expounds this philosophy: "'There's an old saying, men. 'The world is our oyster.' We've made it come true. But we've eaten that oyster. [...]We've actually and literally conquered the world. Like Alexander, we weep for new worlds to conquer'" (*Space* 1: 10). The military metaphors here are repeated in Pohl's 1979 novel *Jem* as a military expedition to an unmapped planet, and both expose the rapacity of the ideology of domination and exploitation, and the mapping of power onto spatial domination.

New frontiers are necessary because the old ones have been destroyed. David Riesman wrote, in 1950; 'It is, in fact, widely accepted that the American economy depends on opening up internal frontiers of consumption as the frontiers of production and land use begin to close down'.[61] In *The Space Merchants*, the Old Frontier, the West, has been radically transformed by what would be come to be called the 'military-industrial complex'. California is physically unstable: 'H-bomb tests' have so disturbed the San Andreas fault that California is perpetually teetering on the brink of an apocalyptic earthquake which will drop the state into the Pacific. The solution to this in the text is to build collapsible houses out of poles and cellophane, a triumph of short-term gadgetry over long-term destruction. The physical space of the West -- the dominant myth of the American imagination up to the twentieth century -- has become unavailable, and the desire for expansion into colonization of another planet. *The Space Merchants* politicizes the SF paradigm of 'space exploration', of the universe as a space 'out there' and

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[61] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 149.

unclaimed, available to humanity for colonization or exploitation. The utopic space of the text, which in *Limbo* was the island 'not on the map', becomes the contest between advertising agencies over the 'colonization' of Venus. The fact of colonization is not disputed, even by the malcontent Consie group. The word 'Consie' has a more benign aspect than its counterpart in 'Gravy Planet': there, the dissidents are called 'Connies', with definite overtones of the abusive 'Commies'. The competition between the superpowers then becomes a race to colonize Venus, one whose ends are shared by the two groups, the divergence being in the ethos of the mission: exploitation or inhabitation. Venus is (ironically) the Virgin Land for these ideologies, and another mythic America.

One other 'planet' has already been colonized in *The Space Merchants*: the Moon. This is no new frontier, however: 'The Moon was strictly business -- mining business -- and some sight-seeing' for the rich (*Space* 12: 107-8). It is strictly controlled. Fowler Schocken says to Mitch, "'It's frontier stuff'" (12: 121), when there is a stand-off between two competing groups of armed security guards, but this rhetoric in fact obscures the use of the moon as a site of commercial exploitation. The control of physical space then confers power. Space as land, as property, as community; the imposition of zones of security or exclusion replicate control, and perpetuate power. An early passage in the novel ironically exposes the colonizing discourse of advertising: "'Gentlemen,'" he said with a passion, "this is truly the work of genius. Not just India. Not just a commodity. But a whole planet to *sell*. I salute you, Fowler Schocken -- the Clive, the Bolivar, the John Jacob Astor of a new world!'" (*Space* 1:10). The domination and colonization of physical spaces, embodied in these three figures, signifies the ideological and psychological invasiveness and control which characterizes the world of advertising.

Colonization of space has also erased geopolitical independence. Nations no longer have

power, and all is controlled by the structures of multinational corporations. Even within

the United States, the structures of power no longer match those of a democratic, civic

society. At the beginning of the text Courtenay, as narrator, refers to the remnants of

central government derisively: 'it's odd how we still think and talk of that clearing-house

for pressures as though it were still an entity with a will of its own' (*Space* 1: 11). Senators

are no longer elected by popular mandate and represent States (themselves physical spaces

as political power blocs): they represent the interests of corporations. Therefore, we find

the Senator from Du Pont Chemicals, and the Senator from Nash-Kelvinator. In Kingsley

Amis's phrase, 'the economic system has swallowed the political'.[62] This political satire

exposes the realities of governmental power in an age of 'the military-industrial complex';

Courtenay himself states that the 'government now is perhaps more representative than it

ever has been before in history. It is not necessarily representative *per capita*, but it most

surely is *ad valorem*' (*Space* 2: 15). Voting is not a matter of individual responsibility:

'should each human being's vote register alike, as the law-books pretend and some say the

founders of our nation desired? Or should a vote be weighed according to the wisdom, the

power, and the influence -- that is, the money -- of the voter?' (2: 15). Power, wisdom and

influence are constituted by one thing: wealth. Courtenay absolves himself of

responsibility for this question by calling himself a pragmatist, which is code for one who

aligns himself with those in power. The power structure still preserves the spectacle of

democratic power, in the institutions of central government, Senators, and so forth, as an

ideological alibi for the workings of business. In reality, power lies elsewhere; yet the

obsolete forms of democratic government are retained as a legitimator. The ending of the

text, when the President uses the archaic mechanisms of government to enable Courtenay

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[62] Amis, p. 125.

to escape, to expose holes in the system and also to replay (mythic) images of American political life: the little man winning out over the power of vested interests, corruption, and big business. The forces of institutional repression are defeated when all seemed lost.

As in Vonnegut's *Player Piano* and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and in the twinned stories 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners' and 'The Waging of the Peace', the dystopian state of America in the text is oppositionally placed against a kind of mythic America of the imagination. In *Player Piano*, this is represented by Edison's workshop, the legend of the Ghost Shirt Society, and the ideas of play, space, and history. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the utopian space which Montag escapes to is defined by memory and books, and most significantly are mediated through nostalgic images of a smalltown or pastoral childhood. In *The Space Merchants*, certain mythic scenes and images, which are archetypically American, are brought into play as an oppositional discourse to that of institutional power, exploitation, and manipulation. In the short stories, a small town entrepreneurial spirit is raised to oppose, and defeat, military and corporate forces. The departure of the rocket ship for Venus at the end of *The Space Merchants* is the broaching of another Frontier, the journey of a new Adam and new Eve into another (inverted) Garden: paradoxically, the replaying of the colonizing of the 'blank' spaces of the North American continent.

Pohl's *Jem* (1979) is, it seems to me, a largely self-conscious re-writing of Pohl's own former dystopian texts with an eye to latter-day textual and political developments. Subtitled 'The Making of a Utopia', it narrates the making of *two* 'Utopias': the first a colonialist, exploitative, militarist expedition to a new planet; the second, the construction of an eco-friendly, communitarian society, once the conflicts and competitions exported from Earth replicate the Old World's patterns of warfare and

eventually precipitate nuclear destruction. The Earth in *Jem* is controlled by a number of

monolithic economic blocs which control the production of certain commodities: there

are the Food bloc, People bloc, and Fuel bloc, each of which competes with the other for

resources and advantage, a spatial division which establishes an economic motivation

for the ongoing competition and colonization. As intertext again we find *Nineteen*

Eighty-Four and its tripartite division into Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. The

'discovery' of an inhabitable planet, called variously 'Jem' or 'Klong', precipitates a

new Space Race, and the United States (in the guise of the Food bloc) again gets there

first.

The central colonialist figure is Marge Menninger, the high-powered daughter of a Fuel

bloc grandee. She is the driving force behind the expedition, and though she insists that

she wants to 'trade' with the indigenous Krinpit (thus drawing them into the capitalist

matrix), and creates commodities to fulfil constructed 'needs', her discourse is revealed

to be explicitly colonizing:

> 'I guess you don't really understand what it means to have a whole planet to play
> with. For us, poppa, all for *us*. To start from scratch with, to develop in a
> systematic manner. Find all the fossil fuels, develop them in a rational way.
> Locate the cities where they don't destroy arable land. Plant crops where they
> won't damage the soil. Develop industry where it's most convenient. Plan the
> population. Let it grow as it is needed, but not to where you have a surplus:
> good, strong, self-reliant people. American people, poppa'.[63]

This is a 'utopia' of planning and 'development' (i.e. systematic exploitation of natural

resources), based on principles of control and exclusion. The planet is to be treated as a

tabula rasa upon which an experiment in a systematized, instrumental capitalism can be

run. Control of people is allied with control of space (in the utopian and anti-utopian

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[63] Frederik Pohl, *Jem* (1979) (New York: Bantam, 1980), chapter 7, page 89. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

paradigm) to form the New World. There are dissenters to this conception. Menninger's

lover and ultimate antagonist, Danny Dalehouse, dreams of:

> Planning. Thought. Preparation. Control of growth so that scarce resources
> would not be pissed away irrevocably on foolishness. A fair division of Klong's
> treasures so that no nation and no individual could profit by starving others. An
> attempt to insure equity to all -- (*Jem* 8: 106).

This is no less 'planned' or systematic but at least is based on principles of equality and

communitarianism. Menninger's exclusionary discourse becomes concretized when she

arrives as a Major on Jem, when the 'scientific' expedition becomes one of military

conquest. The base camp is fortified and ringed with guards and machine-guns; space

made into military space, a pale of safety and a dangerous 'outside'. Whether or not this

was a part of Menninger's plan all along, the reimposition of Cold War conflict in the

new realm of Jem emphasises how ideology reproduces itself, and how the discourses of

domination constantly reimpose the conditions of domination. *Jem* was published in

1979; overtones of the United States' involvement in Vietnam are inescapable. In fact, it

is mentioned in the text:

> They had devised an enzyme, or possibly it was a hormone -- the information
> had been unclear -- which took Krinpit out of action as effectively as 2,4-D had
> dried up the jungles Vietnam, by causing them to molt. (*Jem* 18: 247).

Agent Orange then becomes a weapon in the control of space, and defoliation the

attempt to remove the danger from those areas outside the controlled (U.S. Army

firebases). The same military imperatives are transported to the world of Jem.

This ideology, of competition, confrontation, and exploitation, leads the Earth to nuclear

conflict and destruction, and eventually Jem travels along the same trajectory. But in

this act of apocalyptic self-destruction a new world is born:

> what can be said [of those who died] [...]is what can be said of all persons,
> human and otherwise, at the end: they died. Some survived the fighting. Some
> survived the flare. But in the long run there are no survivors.

> There are only replacements. And time passes, and generations come and go. (*Jem* 24: 304).

The nuclear explosion combines with a solar flare to produce a series of mutations which blur the boundaries between species, and provide the conditions for the creation of a new 'utopian' world free from the colonizing, Cold War discourse of Marge Menninger. This is also precipitated by Dalehouse's ultimate refusal to continue the military game: he walks into the decimated enemy camp, hands aloft, to surrender. This refusal is the beginning of transformation, unlike the similar gesture in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. A comparable circularity here insures rebirth rather than recapitulation.

Jem ends several decades later, the utopian realm (communitarian, ecologically conscious, matriarchal) instituted and stable. A young malcontent (who sees the utopia as dystopia) undergoes a trajectory of alienation from the society -- and is attracted to machines, science, technology -- then undergoes a moment of reconciliation.

> Why fight Utopia? he thinks to himself. And so in that moment he completes the process of growing up. And begins the process of dying. Which is much the same thing. (*Jem* 24: 312).

These are the last sentences of the text. The ambiguity of the accession to utopia -- as maturity yet death (of youth) -- holds a balance between movement and stability, between vigour and vitiated life, between individuality and community, inherent in the Utopian tradition. *Jem* clearly draws on the feminist utopias of the 1970s, in its awareness of gender issues and its depiction of a communitarian matriarchy; yet there is also a sense of loss, almost of nostalgia, for the young malcontent. The longing for the excitements of technology (albeit destructive) complicates this admission of the youth into Utopian society. It is not entirely positive.

5. The Recovery of Autonomy: *Gladiator-at-Law*

Pohl and Kornbluth's *Gladiator-at-Law* (1955) imagines a dystopian world of corporate

business: the usual tripartite social division this time depicts a 'Captain of Industry'

class; a middle bureaucratic level based on the corporations and a system of tied

housing; and an underclass who live in a ghetto called 'Belly Rave', a corruption of

'Belle Rêve', French for 'beautiful dream'. The narrative, as in *Search the Sky*, consists

of the gathering of a disparate group of malcontents who pursue the 'truth' of the

malignant and stultifying system. Again, these are drawn from separate parts of the class

structure: the main protagonist, Charles Mundin, is a low-level lawyer subsisting on the

crumbs that fall from the high table of office (in the first chapter, he is shown

floundering as a lowly public defender); Norvie Bligh is a middle-ranking bureaucrat

who falls into Belly Rave penury; Norma and Don Lavin, dispossessed scions of a major

corporation, fight to reclaim what is theirs (and thereby change society); Harry Ryan,

once a 'Big Bar' lawyer, fallen into poverty and addiction; and Bliss Hubble, a young

member of the 'Captain of Industry' class who decides that the system needs changing.

Each symbolize different social and class positions in the text. Alienation from the

system in *Gladiator-at-Law* differs from the archetypal trajectory of alienation of the

dystopian *apparatchik*; the group dynamics of these dissidents complicates the

structures of power and knowledge which create the conditions of the protagonists'

alienation. Most of these central characters suffer alienation from their position in

society, but their opposition to it is largely driven by circumstance rather than

conviction. (Norma Lavin is an exception to this: she is an idealist from the beginning,

whereas the other protagonists discover their ethics as the narrative progresses). All are

displaced; the narrative changes from one of restoration (which would leave the society intact and unchanged) to that of revolution, the overthrow of the system itself.

The title suggests that the legal system itself is combative, an arena in which young attorneys can prove themselves. This is undermined by the first scene, in which Mundin attempts (unsuccessfully) to defend a miscreant. There exists a technologized system of detection -- his client is convicted by 'pore pattern' evidence --which is mirrored by a mechanical system of justice for the lower classes. Instead of judge and jury, there is a 'jury box' which sifts the evidence and pronounces sentence, a literalization of the mechanization of the justice system, and an echo of the 'juveniles' of Dick's *The Man Who Japed*, surveillance machines which collect the evidence to convict subversive citizens. As in *Player Piano*, the machine signifies 'absence of error' in the society of the text, as the jury box simply processes information. It is suggested, however, that those with more money can afford to have human representatives of justice.

There is a corresponding system of class and privilege among the lawyers: Mundin (from the 'John Marshall Law School') has little chance against the institutionalized power and status of the 'Harvard grandee' he faces.

> Not for them the golden showers that fell when you pleaded before human judges and human juries, human surrogates and human commissions. For them -- the jury box and the trivia of the criminal law.[64]

The principle of trial by a jury of one's peers has been set aside, presumably in the names of speed and efficiency; not only is Justice blind, it is now a machine. Mundin must struggle to survive on clients from his low-level political connections. Norvie

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[64] Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth, *Gladiator-at-Law* (1955) (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), chapter 1, page 7. All further chapter and page references will be given in the body of the text under the abbreviation *Law*.

Bligh is one such client. Bligh is an 'artist' (and therefore low-ranking in the utilitarian society of the text); he works on scenarios for the 'Field Days' until he is betrayed by an underling and dismissed. These Field Days are vast gladiatorial contests staged in huge arenas, spectacles of death created to occupy and divert the mass. They satirize both the rhetoric of combat in American sports and the pageantry which accompanies them. Explicitly, the text states:

> There was plenty of food.
> And plenty of circuses. (*Law* 13: 82).

The spectacles of carnage, like those of the White Clowns in *Fahrenheit 451*, expose to the reader the malign and destructive operation of the dystopian state which, paradoxically, hides behind the spectacle. In Bligh's job, death was merely a simulation, a simulation which seems more 'real' to him than the actual spectacle:

> the visualising apparatus showed forty sprites of light jabbing at each other with lances of fire. [...] Somehow, inside Norvell's mind, it was here and not in the big arena that the real Field days took place. He had heard the cries of the wounded and seen the tears of the next of kin waiting hopelessly in the pits, but they were not real: it was as mannikins that he thought of them always (*Law* 8: 49).

The unreality of the spectacle is of course Bligh's way of dealing with his complicity. Bligh is himself deaf, a psychosomatic and metaphorical impairment which allows him to ignore his own complicity in a spectacular system of death. Similarly, Millie in *Fahrenheit 451* immerses herself in the sound of the 'shell radio' or the viewscreens to anaesthetise and distract herself from her own pain. This deafness is removed when Bligh and the group of protagonists become physically involved in one of the Field Days, as Bligh prepares to sacrifice himself to save Don Lavin: the proximity of death (not mediated, as in his involvement in the creation of the spectacles) *reveals* rather than obscures the truth of the malignity of the Field Days, and the system they buttress.

The dystopian world is predicated on a system of housing which is linked to employment: the middle classes live in 'G.M.L. Homes' or 'bubble-houses', automated and highly technologized homes which cease to function once the power is turned off (through loss of job or withdrawal of privilege). This is the *novum* upon which the text is based. The metaphor of the 'bubble' signifies spatial enclosure as it did in the environmental 'bubble' of the Refuge in Dick's *The World Jones Made*. The dystopian text again represents the ideologically constraining forms of the everyday 'real' in terms of a physical restriction. The houses were invented by the father of Don and Norma Lavin as a mode of cheap housing for everyone: 'They had designed a home that was cheaper than the cheapest and better than the best' (*Law* 7: 42), but in the hands of an entrepreneurial exploiter, Moffat (the 'M' in 'G.M.L.'), these homes 'had become a weapon' against the people (7: 43), used to keep them in a system of serfdom, not unlike that of Dick's *Solar Lottery*. Another possible meaning of the word 'bubble' has a historical connotation: the 'South Sea Bubble', the symbol of an overinflated and unsustainable speculation. The middle classes have 'contract jobs' which they may not break, but which may be broken by an employer at no notice: this is what happens to Bligh. The 'security' implied in the phrase 'contract job' is then insecurity, a constant anxiety.

The narrative becomes not simply a proto-cyberpunk narrative of the 'big score' or corporate war, but the attempt to liberate this 'bubble home' *novum* from the control of those who are using it to perpetuate their own power, and the societal structures of oppression. The group become morally alienated from the society they live in: their victory must end in destruction for the status quo. Justice then becomes 'Justice For All': the restoration of ideal American democratic principles, perhaps, rather than a

communitarian utopia. Justice is also 'social justice', a liberal and holistic conception of society which opposes the exploitation and stratification of the text's corporate dystopia.

In Pohl's short story, 'The Midas Plague', Morey Fry's reassimilation into the system of consumption is precipitated by his invention of a gambling machine, which encourages the player to continue (by gifting a tiny piece of gum) even though they will lose -- inevitably -- in the long run. This is paradigmatic of capitalist society as a whole. The system of consumption encourages the consumer by the benefits of material commodities, but at the cost of dependence and continued 'playing of the game'. In *Gladiator-at-Law*, the capitalist economic system is figured as a vast lottery, and consumers as obsessive gamblers. The dissident group finally manage to break G.M.L. and the power of Green and Charlesworth through 'playing' the shares on the New York Stock Exchange. This resembles a Las Vegas gambling hall rather than the centre of economic power in the United States: 'gladiator' also signifies 'game', and the workings of the stock market appear to be a gigantic game (as in 'gaming'). This conception suggests a more fluid (and therefore fragile) economic system than the monolithic and hermetically-sealed machine of Pohl's short stories. Paradoxically, the system in *Gladiator-at*-Law is characterized not by an accelerating momentum (productive or consumptive) but by inertia.

As in 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners' and 'The Waging of the Peace', there seems to be a structured opposition between the corporate world, which fosters dependency in its subjects in order to perpetuate its power, and an ideological representation of America which extols the virtues of self-sufficiency and 'can-do'. Norvell Bligh is only able to find this self-sufficiency once he has been cast out of the technological Eden and

ideological straightjacket of his 'bubble-home'; once in the ghetto of Belly Rave, he becomes able to take care of himself physically and mentally. He also refuses to leave Belly Rave, seeing it as a zone of freedom from the falsity and malignity of the bubble-house class. Life there is harsh, but appearance corresponds to reality. This is a rather problematic depiction of the salutary nature of poverty: presumably most who have lived in ghettos do not find them so improving. For it is there that Bligh is politicized, discovers an ethical identity: 'something has to be done for these millions of outcasts. From the inside, Charles!', he declares (*Law* 19: 139). This could also be read, perhaps, as a laudable declaration of sovereignty by a previously disenfranchised underclass. The reader notes, however, that it is only upon the allying of the Belly Rave physical forces (the child gangs, Bligh) with the alienated institutional group (Mundin, Ryan, the Lavins, Hubble) that change can come about. Revolution from below is not possible: it has to come from *inside* all classes.

Belly Rave itself resembles an urban slum modelled on Victorian (or Dickensian) London, the dystopian city as Hell. The word 'Belly' itself signifies materiality, the physicality of abject poverty, and perhaps empty bellies, the inverted sign of consumption: hunger. Children are sold into slavery or prostitution, or become gang members; gin joints and opium form the main entertainments; groups of violent men (and corresponding vigilantes) roam the streets. Richard Erlich, in an article that is otherwise problematic in its reliance on mythic archetypes, writes that '[t]he people from the slums see themselves as slaves and live in a kind of hell'.[65] The physical space of the textual world is an index of an oppressive societal structure. The slums are zones

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[65] Richard D. Erlich, 'A Womb with a View: Domesticating the Fantastic in Pohl and Kornbluth's Gladiator-at-Law', *Foundation* 23 (October 1981), 31-39 (p. 32).

of exclusion, containing those who are alienated from the centres of power and more

particularly money. The world of corporate finance, with its houses which change

decoration according to daily dictates of fashion, is then opposed to, and is vampiric

upon, the oppression and misery of the ghetto, and are personified in the twin figures of

Green and Charlesworth, ancient forces of corruption and stasis. Their tentacular reach

extends even into the physical space of the offices that Mundin rents: they pervade

everything because they *are* the system. The ideological forms of the 'real' which

construct the world of *Gladiator-at-Law* are expressions of the oppressive and

exploitative ideology of Green and Charlesworth.

Once again, we find a matrix of forces seemingly beyond the reach of the citizen: they

are shadowy even to the 'Titans of Industry' and hint at being behind the assassination

of a President. However, at the end of the text, Green and Charlesworth commit an

explosive suicide once they realise that the base of their power has been removed, an

all-too-easy victory. This narrative closure represents a victory for the rebellious

protagonists unavailable in other dystopian narratives (though many end with a

suspended moment of change, as does *The Space Merchants*), and also in the ambiguous

ending of 'The Waging of the Peace'. Pohl's novel-length narratives are characterized

by this kind of closure, one perhaps dictated by the audience for which he was writing

(or anticipated), or editorial pressures.

6. The Ends of Dystopia

In an otherwise unremarkable article on Pohl's dystopias, R. Jeff Banks suggests that

Pohl's method 'is usually to take some science fictional cliché as a departure point, view it

with unaccustomed lightness -- often with humour -- and present his satirical message

with telling emphasis at or near the end of his story'.[66] This reliance on standard SF tropes,

or as Banks would have it, on cliché, is analogous to David Samuelson's argument I noted

earlier, that Pohl's work has suffered through his proximity to mainstream SF publishing.

This also took the form of editorial interference. Pohl had many battles with the then editor

of *Galaxy*, Horace Gold, to publish his texts in unedited and unchanged form. 'Gravy

Planet', a version of *The Space Merchants* which was serialized in *Galaxy* in 1952, is

typical. It has numerous textual variations that one would expect between magazine and

book editions, but more importantly three entire chapters at the end of the narrative which

do not appear in the novel at all. In his autobiography, Pohl writes that 'at Horace's special

request, we [...] added a couple of chapters to the serial version of *Gravy Planet*, carrying

the action of the story on to the surface of the planet Venus, an ending which was 'dropped

out' of the book version.[67] Gold later went behind Pohl's back to persuade Kornbluth to

add extra scenes. The changed ending of *The Space Merchants*, however, creates divergent

readings of the text.

At the end of *The Space Merchants*, Courtenay is Huck Finn, 'lighting out for the

Territories', escaping into a utopian space where the writ of power and injustice does not

run. The trajectory of *Mitchell Courtenay, the* protagonist, differs from others of the

period, such as Paul Proteus of *Player Piano* and Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*. He does not

become alienated of his own account: rather, he is kidnapped by his wife and the Consie

movement, and his subsequent career maps physical journey onto psychological

transformation. For Mitchell, however, shedding this ideological commitment takes some

time. As I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, Courtenay's transformation has often

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[66] R. Jeff Banks, 'The Dystopian American Futures of Frederik Pohl', *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* vol. 4 (1973), 55-64 (p. 55).

[67] *How the Future Was*, pp. 231-2.

been criticised for its lack of psychological realism, an argument which John P. Brennan

has ingeniously inverted. Somewhat precipitately, Courtenay and his wife blast off for the

utopic space of Venus. At the end of the book version, Mitchell and his wife Kathy are

aboard the rocket ship to Venus, unaware of what might await them. In 'Gravy Planet',

however, the colonists land, only to find the planet wracked by howling gales, a hostile

and uninhabitable wilderness. However, Courtenay is exposed to the elements, and

ultimately discovers that the Venusian atmosphere is full of 'sea-urchin-shaped'

microrganisms.[68] When fed energy by the humans, these organisms help transform Venus

from a barren wasteland to a Conservationist Eden.

The ending of *The Space Merchants*, eschewing such a positive closure, is ambiguous. If

the technical culture of the West can produce one rocket ship to Venus, why may it not

produce another? And if this is so, there will be no new Eden, but merely a mapping of the

contestations of capitalism onto the New World of Outer Space, as in *Jem*. The forces of

exploitation are massing even as the ship blasts off; only the stewardship of Matt Runstead

(left behind on Earth), who must use the structures of control for the *Consies* instead of

against them, can prevent it. *The Merchants' War* exposes the precariousness of the

victory at the end of *The Space Merchants*: the sequel is set long after Mitchell Courtenay

is dead, and Venus partly colonized, but Tennison Tarb has to undergo a similar alienation

from a still-exploitative society. The escape of Earth and the structures of domination is,

ultimately, no victory at all. Like Martine of Wolfe's *Limbo* or Allen Purcell of Dick's *The*

Man Who Japed, flight must be refused in favour of dissidence and rebellion. The

fracturing of the system is foregrounded by Tarb's discovery that it is in fact the Heads of

the top Advertising agencies who constitute this dystopian text's social malcontents.

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[68] 'Gravy Planet', (August 1952), p. 157.

Despite their planning, an invasion of Venus is ordered (by another of Pohl's hidden power elites, perhaps), and Tarb gathers his friends about him to use the advertising techniques to broadcast straight to the public and overthrow the system itself. The text ends with Tarb using the techniques of advertising to destroy the system itself, despite his qualms:

> I now believed Earth was wrong in trying to sabotage and overpower Venus, and it was right to join forces with Mitzi, the false Mitzi, that was, and put a stop to that wickedness. But what degree of wickedness was appropriate to achieve that nonwicked end?[69]

The novel ends with people in the streets, domination and control finally and fatally undermined. Ironically, however, the resources and techniques of the system are used to defeat, and finally overthrow, the system. The last sentence of *The Merchants' War* is: 'the monolith has begun to crack'.[70] The system is terminally ruptured, and unlike the conclusion of *The Space Merchants* and the majority of the dystopias in this thesis, change is actively under way, rather than held in a suspension of possibility.

In the dystopian worlds of Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth, then, the typical dystopian imagination of human beings replaced by, or metaphorically or physically transformed into, machines by the control systems of the state becomes the processes of human conformity to the dictates of the 'economic machine'. These deforming pressures either result in psychological trauma, as in 'The Man Who Ate the World'; or in an alienation from the system which ends in a realization of the world's ideological or physical fabrication (or both). The people who must become eating machines, in order to deal with an economic system of superabundance, are unaware that the system is in

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[69] Pohl, *The Merchants' War*, 'The False Mitzi Ku', ch. 1, p. 229.
[70] *The Merchants' War*, 'The True Tennison Tarb', ch. 3, p. 296.

fact in the process of consuming them. This is literalized in the vampiric figures of

Green and Charlesworth in *Gladiator-at-Law*.

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Resisting this consumption exposes Pohl and Kornbluth's own ideological reliance on a

heroic and individualistic *mythos*, as in 'The Wizards of Pung's Corners', 'The Waging

of the Peace' and *Gladiator-at-Law*. While remaining critical of developments towards

conformity, bureaucracy, consumerism and the mechanization of life, the dystopias of

Pohl and Kornbluth are exemplary in their reliance on unexamined forms of opposition

to the control systems of the their totalizing dystopian states. While providing a

marginal textual space of critique, the texts I have analyzed in this chapter, like many in

this thesis, ultimately 'fail to imagine the other of what is', in the words of Fredric

Jameson. While exposing the ideology of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, they

reproduce the ideological structures of both the utopian and dystopian form, and of

American dissidence itself.

CONCLUSION

As the American 1960s progressed, the concerns of the social theorists in the 1950s

began to slip from view. The bureaucratization and conformism of everyday life, the

'man-in-the-gray-flannel-suit' problem and the pressures of a consumerist suburbia gave

way to the social mobilization and reaction of the Civil Rights movement and the impact

of the war in Vietnam. Eisenhower, who left office in 1960 with warnings about the

'military-industrial complex', was replaced by John F. Kennedy, a politician whose

rhetoric of the New Frontier was the harbinger of a new political generation and a

different set of problems and anxieties.

The totalized systems of the 1950s' dystopias reflected their era of cultural production:

the alienation of the dystopian *apparatchik* from a bureaucratic and oppressive system of

control, or state tyranny modelled on Nazi Germany or Stalinist Soviet Union, has a

clear provenance in the decade of 50s America and its culturally reinforced

homogeneity. As I suggested in my Introduction, the turn away from the organized

politics of the Left which marked the later 1940s, one which produced both the liberal

consensus of the 1950s and the McCarthyite demonization of communism, suppressed

any tendencies towards social and cultural heterogeneity and forms of dissidence,

particularly those which offered a leftist or radical oppositional critique. Frederik Pohl

and others have suggested that science fiction in the 50s represented forms of satire and

political critique driven to the cultural margins. It would be wrong to characterize the

United States in the 1950s as completely uniform, however; the sf texts in this thesis

suggest that some kind of critical position, however marginal, was available.

As the conformism of the 1950s began to break down in the 1960s, and political

activism in the Civil Rights movement, anti-Vietnam protests and counter-culture

radicalism, and the rise of feminism began to have a dislocating effect on American

society, so the dominance of the totalized dystopia began to wane. Philip K. Dick's

changing concerns, which I outlined in chapters 5 and 6, characterize the shift away

from the imagination of police states towards mediated and fabricated worlds, so that

access to the 'real', and opposition to the dominant, becomes problematic. Orwell's

model of power and domination -- physical force and psychological terror -- is displaced

by one in which power and authority is much more diffuse, and the operations of the

state much more secret and oblique.

The image of the Bomb, so important to the retreat of utopia and the prevalence of

dystopia in the 1950s, is defused by a thawing in superpower relations as the 1960s

progresses and particularly by the place Vietnam, and the United States' prolonged and

debilitating involvement there, comes to hold. Frederik Pohl, writing throughout this

period, moves from the dystopian and anti-consumerist satire of *The Space Merchants*

(1953) to the comic utopia of *The Age of the Pussyfoot* (1969) and the post-colonial

reinterpretation of utopia in *Jem* (1979). As I argued in my chapter on Pohl, *Jem*

assumes a curious place in Pohl's works, as a conscious assimilation of feminist and

post-colonial theorising, an influence which is born out in the depiction of the central

female characters, the institution of a matriarchal utopia at the end of the novel, and by

sections narrated from the point of view of alien Others. This deliberate formal

inclusivity reflects the practice of the writers of feminist utopias which were produced in

the early 1970s: texts such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) and Marge

Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible*

focuses on this resurgence of utopian writing in the 1970s. Moylan's text is informed by

a New Left and feminist theoretical basis, and as I noted in my Introduction, privileges a

utopian form which he terms the 'critical utopia', one that avoids the perceived static

and technophilic inclinations of the utopia characterized as 'Wellsian', and also its

dystopian inheritors. The four utopias which Moylan analyzes at length (Russ's *The*

Female Man, Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* and

Delany's *Triton*) express both a rediscovery of the possibilities of utopia and a revision

of its political and textual emphases. The 'critical utopia' foregrounds textual

dislocation, lack of closure, plurality, and dynamism in its depicted social relations. The

stress on difference, rather than the utopian and dystopian emphasis on uniformity,

reflects a more fragmented social and political world, and a change in textual practice.

This is not to say, however, that the technological utopia ceased to be written in this

period. Mack Reynolds was another product of the leftist politics of the 1930s (his father

was a Wobbly, and Reynolds himself was a national organizer for the Socialist Labor

Party from 1946 to 1949), but unlike Pohl, Reynolds never lost his Marxist affiliations.

Reynolds was a prolific writer whose work often appeared in Pohl's *Galaxy* and whose

texts generally had a socio-economic or political focus. Reynolds, argues Patricia

Warrick, 'particularly attacks what he calls State Capitalism -- a system where the state

owns and controls the means of production', a scenario not unlike the one outlined by

James Burnham in *The Managerial Revolution*.[1] As in many other dystopian texts, this

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[1] Patricia Warrick, 'The Future as Socio-Economic Possibility', in *Voices for the Future: Essays on Major Science Fiction Writers, Volume 2*, ed. by Thomas D. Clareson (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979), pp. 136 - 153 (p. 138).

takes the form of the depredations of Big Business or the domination of individuals by a

technocratic state. His 1969 dystopia, *The Cosmic Eye*, describes 'Technate' society,

developed from the engineering and managerial principles of Technocracy in the 1930s,

and narrates the trajectory of the protagonist from his place in the hierarchy towards

secret assassination of the power elite as a means of rebellion.[2] *The Cosmic Eye*

suggests, as do the dystopias of Philip K. Dick, that technological advances increase

rather than alleviate human suffering, and impinge upon human freedom. However,

Warrick suggests that Reynolds is not 'anti-technology. He believes that present social

problems are caused not by technology itself but by the economic systems which utilize

technology'.[3] This assertion is sustained by Reynolds's own rewritings of Edward

Bellamy's technotopian vision, as *Looking Backward from the Year 2000.*[4] Bellamy's

year 2000 is a mechanized utopia with a centralized infrastructure, 'Industrial Army' of

workers, the elimination of labour for increased leisure, creativity and education, and an

equality of status and material provision. Bellamy's utopia, in reaction to which William

Morris wrote his vision of a green and communitarian London in *News from Nowhere*,

is confident in the benefits of 'progress' and the instrumental solution of human social

and economic problems, and was used by the Socialist Labor Party as a socialist tract,

albeit one which needed qualification.[5] Where Kurt Vonnegut, in *Player Piano*, used

Bellamy's system of aptitude testing to expose the 'meritocratic' ideology of the

corporate state, Reynolds's appropriation is much less ironic. Reynolds's Julian West,

awakening from cryogenic stasis rather than mesmeric coma, becomes progressively

more alienated from the utopia he finds himself in, as economic and cultural

[2] Mack Reynolds, *The Cosmic Eye* (1969) (London: Ace/ Stoneshire, 1983).
[3] Warrick, pp. 137-8.
[4] Mack Reynolds, *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* (New York: Ace, 1973).
[5] Curtis C. Smith, *Welcome to the Revolution: The Literary Legacy of Mack Reynolds* (San Bernadino CA: Borgo Press, 1995), p. 58.

development has been exponential. Where Paul Proteus muses about the 'Third

Industrial Revolution' -- 'thinking machines'[6] -- in Reynolds's *Looking Backward* the

information revolution has occurred, and human knowledge (aided by a computer

network) doubles every eight years.

Julian West's alienation is precipitated by this massive expansion in information: he

realizes that his Guide to utopia, Dr. Leete, speaks to him in an English whose inability

to convey scientific data with exactitude has rendered it obsolete. Reynolds represents

this alienation structurally by alternating between the year 2000 and the 1968 in which

West was frozen. The dystopian features of the historical 1968 are thrown into relief by

the utopian 'future': as Curtis Smith suggests, 'Reynolds critique of 1968 is clear,

focusing on capitalism as a source of war, waste and poor quality'.[7] The structural form

of *Looking Backward from the Year 2000* places it alongside, if not strictly amongst, the

'open' variants of the feminist utopias of the same period. However, its reliance on

Bellamy and technological and instrumental visions mark it out as a somewhat

anachronistic text. Patricia Warrick, more charitably, suggested that 'Reynolds may [...]

be the first of a new wave of utopian thinkers to use science fiction',[8] though the

emphasis on socio-economic structures which marks his career more properly reasserts

his Marxist ideological position, 1930s upbringing and, ironically, the concerns of the

dystopian narratives of the 1950s.

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[6] Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (1952) (London: Flamingo, 1992), p. 22.
[7] Smith, p. 61.
[8] Warrick, p. 149.

Throughout this thesis I have stressed the importance of the cultural and historical moment in understanding the worlds of dystopian texts and their production. The 'exhaustion of political ideas' that Daniel Bell understood to have characterized the 1950s was transformed into the turbulent political and ideological contestations of the 1960s; writing in 1965, Bell qualified his earlier comments by suggesting that utopia should not be thrown away with ideology, but it must be emphasised that the activism which informed the resurgence of the utopian form (feminism, post-colonial theory and geopolitics, the New Left, environmentalism) was explicitly ideological, and so were the utopias they produced. But then utopias and dystopias, as cultural products, are always ideological and to some extent Ideological, the ambivalence of their protagonists reflecting their own ambiguous orientation towards the society they critique. Utopias and dystopias are always inside yet outside the cultural and economic matrix of their production. They find an oppositional and imaginary space, yet, in representing the 'real' in an estranged manner, reproduce the ideologies they critique. As Louis Marin has suggested, utopias (and dystopias) are 'ideological critiques of ideology'; in all senses, like Althusser's Ideology, dystopias are 'imaginary representations of real conditions of existence'.

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