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Utopia and its Antinomies

But the debate over Utopia's representability or not, indeed over its imaginability and conceptualization, does not threaten to put an end to Utopian speculation altogether and to return us sagely to the here and now and our own empirical and historical limits. Rather such debates find themselves drawn inside the Utopian text, thereby becoming occasions for further Utopian productivity. And this seems to be the case for a wide variety of negations which are not reducible to a single logical form: thus the "unknowability thesis" whereby so radically different a society cannot even be imagined is a rather different proposition from the anti-Utopian one according to which attempts to realize Utopia necessarily end up in violence and totalitarianism. Meanwhile, the theory that Utopia is necessarily a negative and critical construction and can never generate any positive or substantive representation or vision is a global denial which has little enough in common with the fights within the Utopian tradition that oppose rural to urban visions, for example, let alone those which seek to replace the supreme Utopian value of happiness with that of freedom.

As a practical matter of Utopian studies, all these categories need to be dealt with separately. As a theoretical matter, on the other hand, it would be of interest to sort them into so many varieties of the negative and negation, which might well be accommodated into a Greimas square or semiotic rectangle, but which are all of them included in what we call the dialectic. Attacks on the latter, largely based on Kant's early essay on negative quantities, and most comprehensively staged in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*,[1] generally identify the dialectic with a single one of these negations, which it is accused of conflating with one or more of the other formal varieties. But the dialectic is in reality the study of all these types of negation together (along with

1 Kant's 1763 essay is entitled "Attempt to introduce the concept of negative magnitudes into philosophy"; Lucio Coletti's arguments (they are essentially attacks on Hegel's concept of negativity) are to be found in *From Rousseau to Lenin* (New York, 1972); Deleuze's classic work is, of course, *Différence et répétition* (Paris, 1968); and see also Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London, 1985), Chapter 3.

their contradictions with each other): thus, it includes both contrariety and contradiction (the two negative axes of the Greimas square), but also the logical difference between them (a difference which is at once both contrariety and contradiction, a sublation of both which is at one and the same time their synthesis and their differentiation). This is the place not to pursue such a theoretical argument further, but merely to observe that our four final chapters will try to sort out these types of negation insofar as they concern Utopia: the present one and its sequel dealing with characterizations of Utopia in opposition to each other (the city Utopia versus the country Utopia for example); the penultimate one addressing that seemingly absolute negation of Utopia which is the anti-Utopia; and the concluding chapter a discussion of Utopia as radical or absolute difference from the present as such.

As far as the oppositions within Utopia are concerned, it is worth recalling that one of the unique features of the Utopian tradition consists in the way in which the form itself seems to interiorize differences which generally remain implicit in literary history (thereby paradoxically remaining external to the literary works themselves). High-literary writers may therefore write against each other, or they may be interpreted as writing against each other by literary critics and historians; but the autonomy of (modernist) literary form tends to project each individual work as a kind of absolute in its own right, which can only be reduced to an opinion and a polemic stance in some ongoing Bakhtinian argument by a violent shift in perspective from the text to a historical construction and indeed to a literary-historical narrative substituted for it. To paraphrase Hegel, each work, each style, seeks the death of all the others: a proposition subsequently demonstrated in Malraux's *Voices of Silence* (1946) and philosophically affirmed as recently as Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970).

But what in literature or art remains an irreconcilable existence of so many absolutes, on the order of the various religions, becomes in the Utopian tradition a Bakhtinian dialogue or argument between positions which claim the status of the absolute but are willing to descend into the field of struggle of representability and desire in order to win their case and convert their readership. And, inasmuch as the practice of the genre necessarily includes a generic reference to More's foundational text, history and the succession of Utopian generations become themselves interiorized within the later Utopias and variously incorporated into the Utopian argument (much as philosophical texts are obliged to take positions on the entire history of philosophy that preceded and enabled them).[2]

Some of these Utopian arguments are explicit public debates, as in the eternal pair of Bellamy and Morris, the latter's *News from Nowhere* (1890) being

2 See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979), in which the very notion of a "history of philosophy" is demonstrated to be a construction (that is to say: it is a "constructed", and not a natural continuity).

an explicit response to the former's *Looking Backward* (1888).[3] Here the essential differences are twofold: Bellamy's industrial state (modeled on the army) is refuted by the anarchistic "withering away" of the state in Morris, while the account of labor in *Looking Backward* (something like Marx's "realm of necessity" opposed to the "realm of freedom" of non-work and leisure time)[4] is challenged by Morris' notion of a non-alienated labor which has become a form of aesthetic production.

Meanwhile, the "ambiguous Utopia" of Ursula Le Guin's *Dispossessed* (1974) was famously challenged by the "ambiguous heterotopia" of Samuel Delany's *Trouble on Triton* (1976), presumably on the grounds that Le Guin's Marxist view of the modes of production did not, despite its allusions to a revised position on homosexuality in the communist world, sufficiently address the countercultural issues that arose in the "new social movements" of the 1960s and 1970s. But where Morris answered one Utopia with another, Delany's subtitle seems to propose a wholesale refusal of the form itself, in favor of a Foucauldian alternative of Utopian spaces and enclaves within the reigning dystopia of the system: thus, *Triton* includes just such a space in its picture of the "unlicensed sector" in which, as in Rabelais or Sade, anything and everything is permitted (see below); just as the galactic war in which his Utopian planet is embroiled could stand as a comment on the violence implicit in Utopian closure as such. But the novel has nonetheless generally been read as a Utopian answer to another Utopia, rather than as an anti-Utopia of the more

3 The seismic effect of Bellamy's virtual reinvention of Utopia cannot be underestimated: it electrified a variety of cultures in ways comparable only to Chernyshevsky's impact on the more local area of Russia (there were at least six different Chinese translations, for example). Meanwhile, the productive reactions go well beyond Morris' socialist/anarchist reply; *Looking Backward* may also be said to have generated the first genuine totalitarian dystopia – Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), which preceded Jack London's *Iron Heel* by seventeen years. The ferment aroused in feminist Utopias is documented in Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1981). One may, to be sure, credit the age rather than the Utopian visionaries it produced: for behind the bourgeois progressivism of the period whose monument was the pragmatist movement in philosophy there lay the immense forces of populism itself: see Lawrence Goodwin, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976).

4 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III (London, 1981), pp. 958–959: "The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite."

familiar Cold War type (something Le Guin's novel approaches more closely in its view of the repressive conformism of Anarresti society than anything in Delany) or even the explicitly anti-Utopian denunciations of Chernyshevsky and of Paxton's Utopian Crystal Palace in Dostoyevsky (not normally considered a writer in the Utopian tradition at all, but see Chapter 11).

Whether this increasingly reflexive development of the Utopian form as such portends its imminent mutation or transformation will be considered in a concluding chapter. Its history, at any rate, has certainly been characterized by substantive oppositions of the kind just touched on; and it is time to take a brief inventory of the latter, an exercise which requires at least one preliminary philosophical warning. It would be tempting, and probably even possible, to fold such a list of oppositions into each other, thereby producing a single primordial antithesis of which each is only a local embodiment or specification. The result would be to ontologize solutions to specific historical situations in the form of some timeless metaphysical dualism such as that between materialism and idealism. It is, for example, enough to reflect on the status of the body in the various textual Utopias from Thomas More all the way to Le Guin and Delany to become aware of the feasibility of such a project, and also, I hope, of the way in which it would relentlessly psychologize the various Utopian options as a matter of ascetic or hedonistic temperament. To be sure, all the Utopian options in question must involve existential commitment and visceral participation, even where – especially where – one particular vision is rejected with passion or revulsion. At the same time, on both existential and social levels, there is bound to be a thematic interrelationship between the various options, which involve topics such as work and leisure, laws and behavior, uniformity and individual difference, sexuality and the family – topics which any Utopian proposal would necessarily have to address in one way or another. Yet as we have suggested in an earlier chapter, the grand Utopian idea or wish – the abolition of property, the complementarity of desires, non-alienated labor, the equality of the sexes – is always conceived as a situation-specific resolution of a concrete historical dilemma. The viability of the Utopian fantasy assuredly finds its test and its verification in the way in which it promises to solve all the other concomitant problems as well. But each of these will reshuffle its primary and secondary terms, its dominants and its subordinates, its combined practice of Imagination and Fancy, in structurally original ways. It is best to hold to the specific historical focus, to the central thematic of the new social proposal, which makes its own unique trajectory of the links between the problems to be solved, rather than to reduce the texts to this or that world-view, let alone to assimilate them all to the mentality detected and diagnosed by a far more homogeneous anti-Utopian ideology: we thus now shift from a focus on Utopian form and the structure of wish-fulfillment to an examination of Utopian content.

We may begin our inventory in a relatively random way, by citing the excellent summaries of Goodwin and Taylor:

> Among the supposedly disjunctive categories of analysis which commentators have found fruitful are the ascetic/abundant (indulgent), aesthetic/functional, scientific/primitivist, sensual/spiritual and religious/secular. Most recently the introduction of the term "sexist" to academic circles has given rise to analysis of the role of women and the function of the family in utopias. From the standpoint of political thought today, the following dichotomies are the most important: egalitarian/inegalitarian (or elitist), "open"/totalitarian, libertarian/coercive, democratic/undemocratic and optimistic (with regard to human nature)/pessimistic ...[5]

And in another chapter, they thematize the strategic dilemmas of modern Utopias in the following terms: industrialism versus anti-industrialism; private property versus common ownership; religion versus secularization; revolution versus gradualism; statism versus communitarianism; and democratic versus authoritarian organization.[6] The disparity between these lists, not entirely attributable to the laudable aim of transcending the opposition between humanist and social-scientific approaches to Utopia, would probably open up interesting new problems, but also lead us back to current events (and, as we shall see later on, to ideologies). Thus, the at first surprising presence of religion in these oppositions – after More's religious tolerance, it does not seem to play much of a role in the principal written Utopias, even down through the 1960s – can be validated today in terms of something like an opposition between fundamentalism and Western political tolerance (or, in other words, between Rawls and Islam). The open/totalitarian opposition is surely a Cold War reflex; while the double opposition between asceticism and sensuality, somewhat moot in the 1960s, has taken a new lease on life with AIDS and contemporary neo-Confucianism; yet this timely reminder warns that it also needs to be reformulated in feminist terms (themselves enfeebled since the 1960s and 1970s). Such oppositions have certainly not gone away; but the historical movement from the 1960s to the moralizing of the free-market era dramatizes the ways in which they find themselves rethematized by historical modifications in our own "context".

I wish to approach the issue of Utopian antinomies from a rather different, and more purely philosophical standpoint, while at the same time acknowledging the significance of just such historical or contextual analyses of individual or textual Utopian expressions. It would be a pity, indeed, if such analysis led us to believe that the now more purely historical perspective

5 Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia* (New York, 1983), p. 59.

6 Ibid., pp. 129–137.

on such debates has made a whole range of Utopian issues, and perhaps even Utopia itself, a purely antiquarian matter. Yet (as has already been said) it would be equally unsatisfactory to frame the debates in purely philosophical or metaphysical fashion. But before addressing this question more directly, let's look at a series of oppositions, which will in part overlap with Taylor and Goodwin's.

I

We may begin with the question of work or labor, a significant absence from their lists, but an inevitable issue in our current world, menaced both within the nation-state and on a global scale with both alienated, oppressive labor, and massive and permanent structural unemployment. At once, then, we can observe this seemingly simple theme separate into two kinds of questions, one on the nature of work or labor and the status of leisure, the other on full employment as such. At length, however, these issues will meet and become a single topic once again.

Few Utopian fantasies are quite so practical and potentially revolutionary in their effects as the demand for full employment, for if there is any program that could not be realized without transforming the system beyond recognition and which would at once usher in a society structurally distinct from this one in every conceivable way, from the psychological to the sociological, from the cultural to the political, it would be the demand for universal full employment in all the countries of the globe, full employment at a living wage. As all the economic apologists for the system today have tirelessly instructed us, capitalism cannot flourish under full employment; it requires a reserve army of the unemployed in order to function. This first monkey wrench would be compounded by the universality of the requirement, inasmuch as capitalism also requires a frontier and the possibility of perpetual expansion in order to go on existing and to sustain its inner dynamic. But at this point the Utopianism of the demand becomes circular, for it is also clear, not only that the establishment of full employment would transform the system, but also that the system would already have to have been transformed, in advance, in order for full employment to be established. I would not call this a vicious circle, exactly; but it certainly reveals the space of a Utopian leap, between our empirical present and the Utopian arrangements of this imaginary future.

Yet about such a future, imaginary or not, I would also wish to note that it returns upon our present to play a diagnostic and a critical-substantive role: to foreground full employment in this way, as the fundamental Utopian requirement, then allows us to return to concrete circumstances and situations and to read their dark spots and pathological dimensions as so many symptoms and effects of unemployment. Crime, war, degraded mass culture, drugs, violence, boredom, the lust for power, the lust for distraction, the lust for

nirvana, sexism, racism – all can be diagnosed as so many results of a society unable to accommodate the productiveness of all of its citizens. At this point, then, Utopian circularity becomes both a political vision and program, and a critical and diagnostic instrument.

This particular theme also strikes a mortal blow at a system which, by virtue of the elective affinity between developing automation and a market ideology intent on profits rather than on production and rapidly evolving into the stage of finance capital, has produced a universal imperative of downsizing and a notion of efficiency based on the requirement of the least possible number of employees. The new imperative is then enforced by the banks (and internationally by their supranational projection in the IMF), who are able to refuse investment and loans to corporations which do not "balance their budgets", that is to say, do not show the will to dismiss as many workers (from all classes, white-collar fully as much as blue-collar) as possible. The mechanism therefore effectively generates its own crisis in a historic reversal of Henry Ford's strategy of creating enough lower-class consumers to buy up his products. Here a population is generated who are no longer able to afford the products of the system. Meanwhile, however, the living standard of the advanced countries is too high for their industries to compete with cheap labor elsewhere in the world, and so these remnants of industrial production move, first to Mexico, and then to China, while waiting for wages in the adopted environment to rise and our own living standards to drop, so that we can begin the production cycle here all over again from rock bottom.

The Utopia of full employment cuts across these dilemmas without solving them; in effect, it presupposes that the system has already been transformed in such a way as once more to permit full employment. At the same time, as a resolution, it mobilizes deep-seated existential anxieties: for, despite the likelihood that most of the readers of this book are still employed, we are all of us familiar with the fear of unemployment, and not unacquainted with the psychic misery involved in chronic unemployment, the demoralization, the morbid effects of boredom and the waste of vital energies and the absence of productivity (and this, even if we tend to grasp such things in bourgeois and introspective ways).

Now, however, we need to see how this particular Utopian figure generates its own opposite: for insofar as the emphasis is placed on the search for a solution to the disaster of permanent unemployment, a rather different one also lies to hand, and that is the guaranteed minimum wage, something which has occasionally been proposed by elements of the Left, but which would seem to constitute a more classically right-wing, not to say, fascist solution, in the Roman style of bread and circuses. Here the excess of wealth of the state and its patrons is sensibly and tactically motivated in order to produce the consumers required to keep the system functioning and to absorb production. It is a solution that has also had its Utopian advocates, and seems redolent of all the voluntary-labor

Utopias which boast the realization of the ultimate communist motto, "to each according to his needs". These Utopias are not generally obliged to enforce work in Draconian ways: ostracism (as in Le Guin's *Dispossessed*), along with desperate ecological crisis, is enough. Or else the society is fantasized as being at such a high state of production – and automation! – that machinery produces the required abundance with only a minimum of human labor, variously estimated at anything from two to six hours a day,[7] and this owing in some cases to the reduction of luxuries and consumption, and the "reeducation of desire", the retraining of the population in basic needs (Morris, Callenbach). But that retraining, and its possibility, implies a fundamental presupposition which has not gone unchallenged and which we will examine in a moment.

For the rest, the Utopia of abundance and absolute leisure is an ancient one: the famous *pays de Cockaygne* indeed reflects a peasant ideology in the combination of hunger and back-breaking toil it fantasizes away.

> Ah! those chambers and those halls!
> All of pastries stand the walls,
> Of fish and flesh and all rich meat,
> The tastiest that men can eat.
> Wheaten cakes the shingles all,
> Of church, of cloister, bower and hall.
> The pinnacles are fat puddings,
> Good food for princes or for kings.
> Every man takes what he will,
> As of right, to eat his fill.
> All is common to young and old,
> To stout and strong, to meek and bold.
>
> Yet this wonder add to it –
> That geese fly roasted on the spit,
> As God's my witness, to that spot,
> Crying out, "Geese, all hot, all hot!"
> Every goose in garlic drest,
> Of all food the seemliest.
> And the larks that are so couth
> Fly right down into man's mouth,
> Smothered in stew, and thereupon
> Piles of powdered cinnamon.
> Every man may drink his fill
> And needn't sweat to pay the bill.[8]

7 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and Rudolph Bahro, *The Alternative* (London, 1978 [1977]).

8 Quoted by J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 21.

In our time, in societies of high productivity, it also encourages fantasies of enclave life, as in the 1960s American counterculture, in which a bare minimum is necessary to survive and lead a different kind of Utopian life within standard American capitalist affluence. These Utopias are to be sure explicitly or implicitly collective in their nature: the medieval ones obviously taking the village and the older collectivities for granted, while contemporary versions presuppose a kind of secret underground network within the official state, so many clandestine communities of a hidden Utopian nature flourishing beyond the latter's reach and invisible to the latter's organs of surveillance. "Crime" is here what is defined by the law and legality of that official state, which can be ignored in the name of clan loyalty but which also, in a kind of dialectical reversal and paradox, can offer a new form of collective labor.[9]

Yet was not the whole purpose of the great socialist movements precisely to get rid of labor in the first place? And is it not something of a contradiction – if not, indeed, an outright admission of defeat – when such movements call for universal employment and wage labor generalized around the globe? Indeed, did not Marx's own son-in-law write a famous pamphlet entitled *Le Droit à la paresse (The Right to Idleness)*;[10] and have not the most consequent contemporary socialist theoreticians contemplated at some length the ambivalence of the "jobless future" which is both a nightmare and a "promesse de bonheur" all at once.[11]

Surely, however, the simple distinction between alienated and non-alienated labor[12] is enough to cut this Gordian knot and resolve what seems to be a fundamental contradiction between the proponents of work and the proponents of a realm, if not of freedom, then at least of free time. But I fear that the contradiction runs deeper than this, and that the distinction afforded by the concept of alienation is not enough to paper over these deeper warring ideological impulses.

There is indeed here a valorization of production and of modern conceptions of productivity which is clearly incompatible with the Rousseau revival and with images such as those Marshall Sahlins offers us of the "first affluent society":

9 I might as well here cite my unpublished paper on the Utopian aspects of the heist or caper film.

10 Paul Lafargue, *Le Droit à la paresse* (Paris, 1883); Lafargue is arguing against the misuse of the rhetoric of the "dignity of labor" and its "ennobling" function etc. by the capitalists and their ideologists.

11 The reference is to *The Jobless Future* by Stanley Aronowitz and William DiFazio (Minnesota, 1994). The other fundamental contemporary discussion of labor, alienated, non-alienated and Utopian is to be found in André Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason* (London, 1989); but see also Bahro, note 7, and Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Cambridge, 1996).

12 First elaborated in Marx's 1844 manuscripts. And, indeed, see Marx himself on the "realm of freedom", above, note 4.

> When Herskovits was writing his *Economic Anthropology* (1958), it was common anthropological practice to take the Bushmen or the native Australians as "a classic illustration of a people whose economic resources are of the scantiest", so precariously situated that "only the most intense application makes survival possible". Today the "classic" understanding can be fairly reversed – on evidence largely from these two groups. A good case can be made that hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society.[13]

In the 1960s, this incompatibility was expressed in the increasingly widespread characterization of Marxism as a productivist ideology which combined the most intense versions of Max Weber's "Protestant" work ethic (the admiration of Lenin and Gramsci for Taylorism and Fordism is frequently recalled) with a more properly "Promethean" domination of nature.[14] There are, to be sure, other and very different Marxisms (which also include the Utopian strains within Soviet Marxism itself);[15] but our interest here lies, not in the accuracy of either interpretive position, but rather in their deeper motivations and fantasy structure.

One could, indeed, go on to identify a Christian and ascetic, self-punishing and guilt-ridden impulse in that requirement of work specified in many early Utopias; an impulse – the curse of the lost garden, the punishment of the "sweat of your brow" – that seems richly to validate Weber's religious specification of his modern work ethic. As has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, even the official Epicureanism of More's imaginary society is somewhat tarnished by his philosophical idealism as well as his nostalgia for monasticism and by the famous hairshirt (the date at which he began to wear it is, to be sure, unknown). Yet one can also adduce very different explanations for such "productionism" (and even, perhaps, for the religious traditions thus alleged to motivate it). Indeed, any inspection of contemporary right-wing materials often enough betrays the deepest anxieties as to what might happen to the social order if its institutions of repression and discipline, of obligatory labor, were to be relaxed; while any alert Lacanian will readily observe that envy of

13 Marshall Sahlins, "The First Affluent Society", in *Stone Age Economics*, p. 14. The essay is of a piece with Baudrillard and Pierre Clastres; see also note 14 in Chapter 2.

14 See for a paradigmatic expression, Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (Paris, 1973).

15 Sheila Kirkpatrick's assertion that there was such a thing as "daily life under Stalinism" has aroused the indignation of Cold War veterans. Yet, leaving aside Günter Grass' monumental *Ein weites Feld*, it might be best to leave the word to the Easterners themselves: see Slavoj Žižek, "When the Party Commits Suicide" (*New Left Review*, No. 238, November–December 1999); and for other expressions of what has come to be called *Ostalgie*, see Charity Scribner, "From the Collective to the Collection", *New Left Review*, No. 237 (September–October, 1999).

the *jouissance* of others, of the slackers and the allegedly "non-productive" members of society, is an explosive force indeed.[16]

Now we may perhaps return to the distinction between alienated and non-alienated labor in a new way by coming at its genealogy. Marx's 1844 innovation was indeed to have supplied a fourfold account of the nature of alienation itself (the worker is alienated from his tools, from his product, from his productive activity, and from his species-being as such, or in other words his fellow workers). But this concrete account of alienation leaves us at best with a more psychological and reactive picture of what non-alienated labor might be: a control over the production process, for example; a share of the product; a solidarity with fellow workers; and perhaps an innovative replacement of the static conception of property implied in the negative description by a new one organized around the experience of process and the categories of collectivity.

Yet the motivation for the new account of alienation – for which Marx drew significantly on Hegel – is to be found in an earlier moment in German idealism, namely in Schiller's theorization of play (*Spiel*) as a transcendence of Kant's division of the faculties.[17] Schiller indeed attempts politically and socially to complete that interpretive movement whereby Kant's *Critique of Judgment* was grasped as the link between the two other Critiques, and the latter's aesthetics seen as a bridge between his critique of epistemology and his ethics. The attempt thereby testifies to the temptation of an aesthetic solution to the dilemmas of what will only later be identified as alienation; and Schiller's concept of play – a very different kind of idea from anything to be found in either Kant's or Hegel's aesthetics – becomes the predecessor of the aesthetic politics of Ruskin, and following him of Morris: one in which non-alienated labor can finally find a positive analogue in art as such, it being understood that for both later theoreticians aesthetics finds its paradigm in architecture and construction (and in Morris' case in design) rather than in the more individualistic arts. This is a valorization of production which will return in the 1960s in Herbert Marcuse's Utopian vision, inspired by the contemporaneous "happenings", of the aesthetization of everyday life as such. And this is also perhaps the moment to observe the way in which aesthetic theories seem to shadow Utopian ones at every turn, and to make themselves available for plausible resolutions of otherwise contradictory Utopian dilemmas.

For the moment, however, it is important to note that both Ruskin's and Marcuse's aesthetic politics are responses to a historically new development in the social situations addressed by earlier Utopian thinkers, and that is the emergence of industrial technology. In particular, Marcuse's Utopian vision is

16 Slavoj Žižek, "The 'Theft of Enjoyment'", in *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham, NC, 2003), pp. 201–205.

17 Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (Cambridge, 1967 [1795]), and also Georg Lukács' remarkable essay on Schiller's role in the Marxist tradition, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Aesthetik* (Berlin, 1954).

explicitly enabled by his conviction that the state of productivity attained in the 1960s was capable, when organized and managed properly, of feeding the entire population of the world and abolishing hunger and want.[18] This technological optimism, which seems to have lasted until the end of the 1970s, at least in the US, was then brutally effaced by the neo-conservative revolution and its accompanying effects – the debt, population explosion, the failure of modernization – in the Third and later in the Second Worlds.

The separation of the theme of technology and invention from the "ugliness" of factory and industrial work as such can thus sometimes offer the relief of a *deus ex machina* to more modern Utopian dilemmas: witness those mysterious "force vehicles" which provide for the transport of goods in the "Nowhere" of the otherwise anti-technological Morris.[19] Witness also the computers which organize labor assignments in Le Guin's *Dispossessed* and the *heyimas* or communications center which more paradoxically takes charge of the dynamics of her pre-modern, proto-Indian villages in *Always Coming Home*.[20]

But these are still relatively primitive computers; and it does seem fair to me to suggest that the new wave of Utopian production in the late 1960s stops short of the cybernetic age, and fails to exploit its new and properly Utopian resources. The latter are certainly expressed, as a Utopian impulse, in movements like that of cyberpunk and in all kinds of Utopian fantasies associated with the Internet;[21] but the principal result so far seems less to have been the production of new visions of social organization and of social relations than the rendering anachronistic and insipid of the older industrial notions of non-alienated labor as such.[22]

18 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 84.

19 William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London, 1993), p. 186.

20 Ursula Le Guin, *Always Coming Home* (New York, 1985), p. 48.

21 *Wired* magazine is, I believe, the homeland for such Utopian fantasies about the Internet.

22 But even if the computer age is a "brave new world" whose Utopian or dystopian valences remain to be measured, the Utopian propaganda for cybernetics (or indeed for globalization itself) has exploited what is essentially its cultural or communicational dimension. Books like Thomas L. Friedman's *The World Is Flat* (New York, 2005), however, make it plain (whether explicitly or implicitly) that there is a whole business infrastructure whose communicational infrastructure would demand a very different representation than what is offered in the usual rhetoric of informational and communicational democracy (which has also been the underlying ideological theme of contemporary philosophy, from structuralism to Habermas). Indeed, the literary Utopists have scarcely kept pace with the businessmen in the process of imagination and construction, pursuing various forms of globalized Fancy and ignoring a global infrastructural deployment in which, from this quite different perspective, the Walmart celebrated by Friedman becomes the very anticipatory prototype of some new form of socialism for which the reproach of centralization now proves historically misplaced and irrelevant. It is in any case certainly a revolutionary reorganization of capitalist production, and some acknowledgement such as "Waltonism" or "Walmartification" would be a more appropriate name for this new stage than vacuous terms such as "post-Fordism" or "flexible capitalism", which are merely privative or reactive.

The negative affect of the older images persists, however, and has been displaced from the realm of industrial to that of informational production, as befits a cybernetic age. But at this point, rather than evoking alienated labor, we might rather speak of alienated leisure. For we here encounter that dimension of industrial production henceforth known as the media (a term which spans a whole range of communicational phenomena from automobiles and superhighways to radio and television): and it is in this area that industrial and post-industrial Utopias confront their gravest challenge. Morris did not indeed have to worry much about mass culture, which he expected gradually to be effaced by the new social relations and the return of handicraft and genuinely aesthetic work satisfaction.

Indeed, it is first on the Right that the political and social anxieties associated with "the masses" takes on a properly cultural dimension. For now the free time More provided his Utopians for spiritual and intellectual pursuits has been transformed into the commodity of "leisure" and is rapidly colonized by the entertainment industry. The resultant right-wing critiques of a "degraded mass culture" (in Heidegger, T.S. Eliot, Ortega y Gasset) are characterized by the omission of any discussions of capitalism and the eventual transfer of this particular form of entropy to this or that dystopian system, of which, to be sure, Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is the epic poem.[23] On the Left, similar anxieties are expressed in Stapledon's picture in *Star Maker* (1937) of his "other world", whose inhabitants become so addicted to the technological bliss of their telephonic taste system that they end up passing their whole lives in bed. The "culture industry" (1947) of Adorno and Horkheimer then theorizes the structure of the commodification of culture and provides a powerful dystopian vision of the alienation of leisure under capitalism which is not particularly relieved by any alternative accounts of a socialist (and mostly Stalinist) culture, and which hands its dystopian torch down to more contemporary critical theories, such as that found in Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1968) and in Baudrillard, where the final stage of commodity reification is famously discovered to be the image, and ultimately the simulacrum.

The image indeed abolishes that older distinction between mind and body, between intellectual and manual labor, on which the philosophical humanism of the theory of non-alienated labor was predicated. Commodified mass culture is indeed superstructure and infrastructure all at once; its consumption, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is just as much a matter of production as it is of consumption ("the technology of the culture industry confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what

23 The term dystopia has traditionally been used (as it is here) to designate representations of the future best characterized as "new maps of hell" (Kingsley Amis, 1960), and such predictions have loosely been grasped as anti-Utopias. Tom Moylan's work (Chapter 12, note 31) forces us to rethink this stereotype, as we shall see shortly.

once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society").[24] The Utopian return to the old Platonic distinction between true and false happiness, as in Marcuse, is now denounced as humanism by a mass culture flowering into full postmodernity, and unmasked as the elitism of intellectuals attempting to pass themselves off as philosopher-kings. Meanwhile, in the nightmare of social life as one long televised orgy (in Brian Aldiss' *Helliconia* trilogy [1982–85]) the opposition between puritanism and hedonism returns with a vengeance, suggesting that the Utopia of full employment and even of non-alienated labor as such is motivated by an idealism unwilling to trust a sinful human race with the poisoned gift of free time.

II

Such, then, are the dilemmas and contradictions of a Utopian meditation on production; but the same themes are to be found, rearranged in a somewhat different trajectory, in any meditation on Utopian consumption, let alone in that inspired by the question of distribution. For the dystopias of mass culture we have just touched on are merely the face of consumption glimpsed, as it were, from the realm of production itself. When we turn to the former more directly, the antithesis with which we are confronted is better formulated as one between abundance and poverty. But here poverty sheds the overtones of repression and Puritanism associated with the various labor debates and takes on something of the luminosity of a more joyous and Franciscan vision, of the light of the desert or the serenity that comes with fasting. But it is important to realize that neither of these poles – abundance and Franciscan poverty alike – exists in our world. Both are Utopian: the vision of abundance developing out of the Marcusean fantasy of high productivity, while the choice of poverty is constituted out of a radical aesthetic simplification of our everyday life in the present, a reduction of desire to the limits of need which has as little to do with moderation as a rather miserable class virtue as it does with real misery and the suffering of real hunger and destitution.

This is precisely what makes up the hidden imbalance or dissymmetry of Le Guin's wonderful juxtaposition of these two states of being in the twin planets of Urras and Anarres in *The Dispossessed*, whose very ecologies become expressions of their ideological antagonism. To be sure, the writer has attempted to transcend local Cold War stereotypes by making her communists over into anarchists, with overtones of Taoism: yet well before Stalin and his repressive industrialization, Morris had also distanced his own communism from a centralizing state socialism in advance (that particular revolution having failed, he tells us, and given way to the one portrayed in *News from Nowhere*).[25] Indeed, a

24 T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Palo Alto, 2002), pp. 95, 104.
25 Morris, *News*, pp. 140ff.

conventional state socialism (also present in *The Dispossessed* in the neighboring country of Thu) can easily be accommodated by convergence theory, which saw capitalism and Stalinist industrialization as two faces of the more general process of modernization. No such resolution can be imagined for the decentralization of Anarres, which is incompatible with the various Urras systems (the latter conveniently enough already representing First, Second and Third Worlds).

Yet a stereotypical anti-socialist (or anarchist) convention is reproduced, as it were for even-handedness, in the emphasis on conformity in Anarres, on a kind of small-town bigotry which is conveniently allied to the accompanying stereotype of bureaucracy and its alleged jealousies and repression of innovation (Shevek's superior tries to take credit for his scientific discoveries, while the populace denounces his travel to Urras as treason in a prototypical mob scene). But the contrasting portrait of Urras (the two planets are assigned alternating chapters, in a bravura form in which Shevek's prehistory develops alongside the story of his decisive journey) does not offer a complementary critique of the political and social drawbacks of capitalism as a mode of production and regulation: rather it emphasizes the phenomenon of consumption as such, thereby both reproducing and critically estranging the classic dissymmetry of Western Cold War rhetoric, in which political objections (freedom) are enlisted against an anti-capitalist economic system. But in Le Guin no objections are implied against the Anarresti collectivist mode of production as such. Meanwhile, the political structures of domination and exploitation in Urras are withheld (we do not even know how A-Io is governed) until the climactic strike and repression, in contrast to the lynch mob on Anarres with which the book begins.

So it is that the narrative "rhetoric" of this "ambiguous Utopia" is on both sides of the diptych displaced onto the theme of consumption, which is calculated to estrange or defamiliarize our habitual perceptions and to shock us into some fresh awareness of everything nauseating about our own current wealth and our own rich commodity system (the subliminal images of food and eating are everywhere here, Shevek emblematically vomits at one point, and the word "rich" obviously carries nauseous culinary overtones with it). Commodity reification and consumerism then become vivid exemplifications of what Odo denounced as excess and excrement; but at this point the reproach of Left puritanism takes on plausibility again, while the very concept of reification, in which the religious overtones of the fetishized object are repudiated in the name of need and simple functionality, is seen as having a more suspicious motivation than that of simple materialism as such, which could always be reformulated in terms of the *pays de Cockaygne* and of physical pleasure.

Another way of grasping the new objection is to reformulate it in terms of aesthetics, or rather as a repudiation of aesthetics and art, even including the Morris–Ruskin celebration of beauty. For is not art in fact excess *par excellence*, the superfluous above and beyond sheer physical subsistence? Is it not

decoration (also denounced by Odo, along with ornament in the spirit of Adolf Loos) that adds something to human mere animal existence? Nor is Shevek insensible to this sensory and aesthetic splendor, which he finds in the landscape,[26] but above all in the magnificent fabrics, which adorn the rooms but are also suggestive of clothing, bodies and sexuality (even comfort is redolent of sexuality),[27] as are finally the commodities themselves: "The air of the shop was sweet and warm, as if all the perfumes of the spring were crowded into it. Shevek stood there amidst the cases of pretty luxuries, tall, heavy, dreamy, like heavy animals in their pens, the rams and bulls stupefied by the yearning warmth of spring."[28]

Yet it is not the minimalism of Anarresti art (see Chapter 12) which is opposed to the aesthetics of consumption on Urras: an opposition which would reassimilate this opposition to our own art history and the more familiar supercession of an aesthetic of beauty by a modernist aesthetic of the sublime. Poverty on Anarres is not to be identified with that sobriety of white walls and streamlining with which Le Corbusier and Loos rebuked a decadent nineteenth-century bourgeois taste: an aesthetic of the cold shower and of rigorous hygiene, a kind of reeducation of desire for the machine age, in which a new kind of athletic libidinal investment ultimately triumphs over its overstuffed predecessor.

Here we may rather speak of something like a displacement from aesthetic consumption as such to a transformation of everyday life. Ironically, however, the Ruskin prescription for such a transformation, in which the ugliness of the factory world was to be replaced by nature and a return to medieval handicraft, is as it were itself inverted, the new system demanding a libidinal dissociation from the consumption of individual objects or works, and a projection of these impulses onto social and collective relations generally. In Anarres, then, social relations, both private and public, are cathected with all the energies released by the abolition of property.

It is a transformation now surcharged and overlaid by another opposition, one of the most fundamental in all Utopian thought, namely the opposition between city and country, a Utopian antinomy which is now expressed within the realm of space as such, and which also tends to modulate our attention from consumption to production and distribution. For now Abbenay is characterized in terms of transparency, a rather different ideologeme associated with the reification debates, and tending to displace the suspicions of puritanism. Here what is definitional about the commodity is not so much its religious or spiritual "fetishistic" value, as rather its function as a disguise of labor. The fetishized commodity indeed interrupts the transparency of the

26 Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York, 1974), p. 82.
27 Ibid., p. 18.
28 Ibid., p. 211.

process of production and exchange: it inserts a sham materiality into something which is originally (and remains beneath the surface) a social relation, a relationship between people. In that allegedly original (and no doubt Utopian) relationship, the human labor that gives an object its value is visible to the consumer, as is that of the object it is exchanged for. In the process of consumption we have here preeminently to do with labor time and with a reciprocity of work, a primordial division of labor in which it is not the talents of the respective workers which is at stake but simply their mutual complementarity. With the developing inequality of human relations, however, consumption risks being burdened with guilt, as we glimpse the expense of toil and labor time which has gone into the production of what becomes for us a luxury: thus the materiality of the object itself is summoned to veil the human relationship and to give it the appearance of a relation between things. This is the analysis which the development of reification theory in recent times (in France and in Germany alike, with *Tel Quel* as much as with Adorno) has crystallized in a striking motto, namely, that reification can be defined as the effacement of the traces of production on the object.

The description of Abbenay draws on this conception of reification in terms of transparency and opacity:

> Abbenay was poisonless: a bare city, bright, the colors light and hard, the air pure. It was quiet. You could see it all, laid out as plain as spilt salt.
>
> Nothing was hidden ... The activity going on in each place was fascinating, and mostly out in full view ... No doors were locked, few shut. There were no disguises and no advertisements. It was all there, all the work, all the life of the city, open to the eye and to the hand.[29]

Transparency becomes here a vehicle for the collective totality, which is able to grasp how the specialized work of each group is necessary for the whole. In principle it is this transparency then, this grasp of the social totality, which serves as the "moral incentive" on Anarres, and which replaces the profit motive (the catch being the pressure of conformity and group intolerance which confronts Shevek in this Utopia's "ambiguity"). It will also be noted that the hostility to commodity reification and consumerism is reproduced in the hostility to commerce as such: here the "advertisements" become bad aesthetic excess, and when Shevek is asked on Urras, "Is there anything you aren't?" with some wonderment at the variety of trades he has practiced, he decisively replies "A salesman."[30]

Unsurprisingly, then, the counterimage of Urras will take the form of the commodity and its aesthetic excess. This image in fact sums up Shevek's

29 Ibid., pp. 98–99.
30 Ibid., p. 216.

experience of the capital city, A-Io, which unlike Abbenay does turn out to have concealments and the "mystères" traditionally associated with the city as such: hiding places (let us remember that these are denounced in a peculiar and memorable passage of Thomas More: "nullae latebratae"),[31] places of conspiracy (and sexual excess) and of refuge against the state and its power. For Shevek must himself hide out in such a place during the revolutionary insurrection, accompanied by a wounded participant who dies during the concealment. It is an experience which accounts for Shevek's final characterization of Urras to the Hainish ambassador:

> It is a box – Urras is a box, a package, with all the beautiful wrapping of blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities. And you open the box and what is inside it? A black cellar full of dust, and a dead man.[32]

What is, however, paradoxical about all this is the appeal to nature imagery to characterize the aesthetic illusions of Urras, Anarres being itself a barren desert for which none of these evocations of nature are appropriate.

But this is not normally the way in which Le Guin positions herself on the Utopian spectrum: indeed we have already identified her emblematically as the prototype of a Utopian commitment to the countryside and the village, to agriculture and small face-to-face groups, as opposed to the urban celebrations of a Delany: the commitment of a pastoral Morris, as opposed to the industrial Bellamy. Indeed, the opposition probably becomes meaningful only after industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One would not, for example, consider Hythloday's account of Amarautum as the expression of any particularly urban ideology (despite More's own identification with London, or the setting of *Utopia* in Antwerp); nor would one characterize Fourier's phalansteries as being particularly expressive of any great commitment to the land and the soil.

But it is clear enough that Delany's *Triton* takes up the challenge, and celebrates precisely those "latebratae" forbidden by More and lived as nightmarish by Le Guin's Shevek. This is indeed the sense of the so-called unlicensed sector within the official Utopia of Delany's novel:

31 See More, *Works*, Volume IV, pp. 146–147: "Now you can see how nowhere is there any license to waste time, nowhere any pretext to evade work – no wine shop, no alehouse, no brothel anywhere, no opportunity for corruption, no lurking hole, no secret meeting place. On the contrary, being under the eyes of all, people are bound either to be performing the usual labor or to be enjoying their leisure in a fashion not without decency."

32 *The Dispossessed*, p. 347. It is only fair to add that Le Guin uses the same figure in her decidedly anti-Utopian attack on socialism called "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" (*The Wind's Twelve Corners*, New York, 1975); and see the special issue of *Utopian Studies* on this text: Volume 2, Nos 1 and 2 (1991).

> At founding, each Outer Satellite city had set aside a city sector where no law officially held – since, as the Mars sociologist who first advocated it had first pointed out, most cities develop, of necessity, such a neighborhood anyway. These sectors fulfilled a complex range of functions in the cities' psychological, political, and economic ecology. Problems a few conservative Earth-bound thinkers feared must come, didn't: the interface between official law and official lawlessness produced some remarkably stable unofficial laws throughout the no-law sector ...[33]

But caught up in perpetual warfare and organized around total informational surveillance, Triton is the repressive side of Utopia, into which, as a rectification and a kind of supplement of freedom, the unlicensed zone has been introduced: something like the Sade Utopia ("Français, encore un effort"), where anything goes and indeed the law requires everything to be permissible (under pain of death); except that here the "anything" is carefully limited, thereby replicating and reproducing that peculiar phenomenon of the boundary and the limit which inaugurates Utopian closure in the first place, something like Carl Schmitt's "amity line",[34] and introduces all the ambiguities of secession and imperialism we shall deal with below.

The unlicensed zone is thus the city's ironic commentary on the freedom which ostensibly defines it in the first place. "The freedom of the city" – *Luft der Städte*: the "licensed" city is preeminently the place, in the Middle Ages, of refuge and sanctuary: the end of the underground railway, the space which releases the landed peasant or serf from bondage to his lord and from servile status; which releases him, indeed, from Marx's "rural idiocy", from the bigotry of village life, where envy and the baleful spells and witchcraft of the sorcerer neighbors reign supreme.

This political or social freedom is then, in the imaginary of the city, redoubled by another, which reinforces it with *jouissance*, namely the freedom of sexual encounter celebrated most openly by Baudelaire:

> Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
> Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragon,
> La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.
>
> ("A une passante")

But this "freedom" invested in the urban term of our opposition is most often incarnated in the problematical third term, which, as distribution, should

33 Delany, *Trouble in Triton* (Middletown, CT, 1996) the title was changed from the original *Triton* [1976], p. 8.

34 See Carl Schmitt's discussion of the "amity line" in the *Nomos der Erde* (Berlin, 1950), pp. 60–69: a boundary beyond which "anything goes" between states officially at peace.

in principle function as the liaison between city and country; and that is commerce. The association of the city with business is doubly paradoxical, given the way in which, for most Utopias, money has been an irritant and a foreign body which the new Utopian arrangements and organization are generally concerned to regulate and control, if not to banish altogether. The city, which as a mythic image oscillates back and forth between the New Jerusalem and Dis or Satan's city Pandemonium, is thus available for anti-Utopian and dystopian functions fully as much as for more properly Utopian ones.

Indeed, when we reach late or postmodern capitalism – that stage of finance capital in which Utopian impulses and alternatives have been stifled and suppressed as much as possible – some of those energies seep into what used to be dystopian figures; and cyberpunk revels in the demonic energies of the "sprawl" and of metropolitan excess in ways that are certainly celebratory and often proto-Utopian. Everything depends, here, on how the opposite of a potentially Utopian freedom is conceived; and also, and fundamentally, to what degree nature and the natural are still able to be grasped and articulated as positive terms and forces, and their opposite as artifice, the unnatural, the toxic and poisonous, as in Stapledon's vision of the technologies that blast the healthy "natural" development of a given society. The nature into which Ridley Scott's blade runner and his android lover flee, the intact and inhuman Mars on which Robinson's "first hundred" land, are a good deal more forbidding than the fields tilled by Le Guin's First and Last Americans; while the alien agriculture glimpsed in Lem too insistently reminds us of agriculture's artificial origins to be able to function in any ideologically organic way.

III

At this point, however, semiotic oppositions have crystallized which can be abstracted from their original economic contexts – those of production, consumption and distribution – and transferred onto a range of other Utopian polemics, most notably those in which the political itself makes its intermittent and conjunctural appearances. I am tempted to assert that the political is always a category mistake which arises at moments of crisis or deeper contradiction, and takes its form of appearance from the nature of the crisis itself. It would be tempting, but facile, simply to observe that the very space of the political itself (and of power) varies so completely with the mode of production of which it is a function that it cannot be generalized and resists all definitional conceptualization. To put it another way, the source of the political – Schmitt's state of exception,[35] Negri's constituent power[36] – is always outside conceptualization and codification, so that it brings with it a kind of

35 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago, 1996).
36 Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies* (Minnesota, 1999), p. 324.

inverted Gödel's law where the foundation is always open and indeterminable.

So it is that the political formulations we begin to approach by way of a Utopian antinomy between city and country are never autonomous: and this is most striking in the case of what may be the most recent or postcontemporary opposition to emerge from the Utopian debates, namely that between complexity and simplicity. The new positive or substantive term, which finds a host of equivalents in related areas – such as the popular characterization of late capitalism as a "flexible" kind (in opposition to the presumably more rigid Fordism – "any color you like as long as it's black") – can also be identified as the sequel to older slogans, and in particular to the notion of decentralization, once popular on a Left-liberal agenda. This older version had the advantage of projecting a powerful negative term in the form of a bad and tyrannical centralization, which overrode local differences and autonomies and ruthlessly standardized its field of power. Decentralization could then be an appeal to local democracy and pluralism and some initial affirmation of what will later come to be valorized as Difference.

It might be thought that in the economic area the agenda of decentralization would offer an advantageous space for the critique of monopoly and multinational "giants"; unfortunately the alternative – presumably small business, entrepreneurship and invention – no longer strikes anyone as a viable one, but rather as a species on its way to extinction. In this situation, flexible capitalism can arrogate the virtues of multiplicity and difference to itself, in the way in which computerization enables niche production and the systematic variation of products, while so-called postmodern marketing supplies globalized corporations with the rhetoric and imagery of multicultural adaptability and the contextualization of their products around the world.

Under these postmodern conditions, and in the discursive struggles that are appropriate to them, it is difficult for the earlier positive term to win back much credibility: how many people today are willing to shoulder the banner of centralization, for example, let alone the rigid standardizations of Fordism? As for the socialist equivalent, the valorization of the Plan, now burdened with the epithet of "central" planning, the excitement it generated in the 1920s and 1930s, at the beginning of the Soviet experiment, has been completely forgotten, and that exultation of human power and collective control has been transmuted into the standard dystopian lust for power, itself by now become an utterly antiquated caricature. Meanwhile, the alternative version of the return to simplicity – in the face of the aesthetically more stimulating appeal of the various forms of "complexity" on offer – yields an odor of nostalgia: the simple life, indeed, regressive images of village culture, whether in the sixties communes or the hunters-and-gatherers of tribal societies, seeming less and less plausible in the era of world-wide ecological disaster and global warming. The semiotic content shared by both centralization and anti-complexity is then energetically unmasked as that bad old metaphysical entity

Nature itself. Even Raymond Williams' argument that socialism would not be simpler, but far more complex, than capitalism,[37] a shrewd intervention in a discursive field increasingly dominated by Thatcherism and Reaganism, is suspected of harboring regressive sympathies for nature and the yeoman farmer; while the concomitant conception of a "human" nature – already denounced as "humanism" by the Althusserians of the 1960s – is readily dispatched as essentialism and foundationalism: while Delany's prosthetics – the optional antlers and extra arms and organs of the earlier novels, culminating in the sex changes of *Triton* – are fundamental exhibits in the new post-human lifestyles[38] designed to replace the older natural ones (the related case of the infamous centered subject will be discussed in the final chapters).

This is the point at which the currently enfeebled Utopian debates reach all kinds of interesting contradictions and dialectical reversals. Complexity (Luhmann's favorite word, adopted by Giddens and "Third Way" theorists) is certainly a slogan which can triumphantly accommodate the market and money, particularly in its current post-monetary forms: the mediation is secured by cybernetics and the computer, without which the new transnational finance capitalism would be impossible. But what becomes, in that context, of the polemics explicitly waged against socialist planning (let alone of that much more immediate version directed against the planning of the Welfare State)? Here the anti-Utopian arguments revert to Edmund Burke, whose attacks on revolutionary hybris and on the catastrophic results of Jacobin constructionism and planning were very much staged in terms of nature: the slow growth of institutions and indeed (in the most literal sense) of "culture" itself. This strategy is then reproduced in the contemporary debate, which, following some of the most ancient defenses and apologias for capitalism, argues that the market is grounded in human nature, and that it is precisely the effort to remove it which is unnatural and which leads to violence.

But the appeal to human nature is no longer plausible in the postmodern and constructivist spirit of late capitalism and its ideologies. This is indeed the ambiguity of postmodernism as a philosophy, that its progressive endorsement of anti-essentialist multiplicity and perspectivism also replicates the very rhetoric of the late-capitalist marketplace as such. As for planning, socialist or otherwise, what could be more complexly post-human than the attempt to direct the multiplicities of contemporary production and consumption, of the labor market, of investment and ecology? Clearly, it is the computer which is central to this version of imaginary economics: what Soviet planning so desperately lacked, finance capital can be said to have diverted for its own unproductive purposes. But then in a final turn of the screw the computer

37 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London, 1979), p. 433.

38 The various current conceptions of the post-human presumably spring from Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" (see Chapter 8, note 16).

has also been celebrated as *natural*, by virtue of its derivation from the even more complex human brain itself.

It has already been observed that none of the now classic Utopias of the 1960s were able to confront the realities of the computer and the Internet: and that even Le Guin's proposals for a Utopian use of cybernetics, in *The Dispossessed* and *Always Coming Home*, are timid and discreetly self-effacing in comparison to a delirious contemporary rhetoric about which it is difficult to decide to what degree it is really Utopian – the Internet as an immense collectivity – or merely a substitute for and a displacement of the Utopian: we thereby find ourselves replaced in that alternation between the Utopian program and the Utopian impulse with which we began.

From another, political rather than economic, standpoint the question about the Internet resolves itself into a familiar and ancient philosophical antinomy: does it relate or does it separate and disperse? Is it the sign of identity or of multiplicity? In politics that centralization mostly today repudiated in the name of a decentralization now associated with democracy was not always oppressive: the local, in feudalism, was rather itself the locus of repression and domination, from which an appeal to the center and the monarch was often the only resort. Meanwhile Rousseau's notion of the unanimity of the general will is incompatible with decentralization (and has been denounced as Jacobin and totalitarian), despite Rousseau's own utopian preference for the village or the commune as over against the corrupt big city.

The Utopians have been divided on the matter: More's fifty-four cities are all alike "insofar as the terrain permits",[39] while Bellamy's industrial system ("nationalism") is resolutely centralized. This is the sense in which centralization can be inflected either in an economic or a political direction: for it can designate unanimity in Rousseau's sense fully as much as an organized locus of state power or industrial production; Yugoslavian workers' self-government ("autogestion") was an old symbol of this combination, to which ideological lip service is still sometimes paid. But today the presence to hand of the computer has blurred the economic issues, allowing one to assume that decentralization can now magically be achieved by the new technology, and thus flattening out and defusing the contradiction which Utopian solutions were one called into being to resolve, at least in the imagination.

It is not so easy to fantasize away the political ones, however, where the antithesis between this or that avatar of the state and the radical grassroots democratic process generally invoked by the Left remains a dilemma: is it really so, as the conservatives argue,[40] that the more genuine democracy is achieved on that grassroots level, the more ungovernable a country becomes?

39 More, *Works*, Volume IV, p. 117.

40 Samuel Huntington's famous remark, elaborated in M. Crozier, S. Huntington and J. Watanuke, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York, 1975).

Certainly the American experience of these matters offers a perpetual history of sectarianism, marked by schism and secession, a fission process leading to smaller and smaller and more and more impotent groups and groupuscules. The model of direct democracy, however, which Marx and Lenin admired in the Paris Commune, and which several American states, most notably California, have since written into their constitutions – the well-known processes of referendum and recall – tends to be based on a Rousseauian idea of unanimity and the general will. (And obviously the more Utopian American projects of this kind were devised before the emergence of the media and its current monopolies on information: although the Internet has even more recently seemed to offer – at least in fantasy – a counterweight to the media problem.)

For the Utopian hostility to "democracy" in its current populist formulations needs to be properly situated. In More as well as in Rousseau, it is inspired by the fear of factionalism, a classical concept subsuming groups ranging from political parties as such all the way down to ethnicities and lobbies of various kinds. It is in order to discourage the emergence of factions, for example, that More forbids political discussions, a law which sounds ominous indeed to modern ears: "To take counsel on matters of common interest outside the senate or popular assembly is considered a capital offense".[41] *Red Mars*, on the other hand, is richly informed by the omnipresence of factions and the political problems they present (which are, to be sure, unified by the outside threat of an armed takeover by Earth). The status of politics in Utopia is in any case bound up with this issue of factions: the party constituting the unthinkable concept lying mid way between the individual and the social totality.

IV

But I hope some readers will want to take the position that postmodernism in economics is not at all the same as postmodernism in thinking or in philosophy; and that a principled rejection of the old "centered subject" (whether in psychology or in ethics) ought not to be discredited by the replication of its form in globalization, in business and in finance. This is an awkward historical situation, and it is by no means always cheap invective and mud-slinging to argue, as some of us have from time to time, that such replication is exceedingly suspicious and testifies to the way in which postmodern or decentered thinking and art reinforce the new social and economic forms of late capitalism more than they undermine it. The new values thus often seem to offer training in a new logic, and thereby to strengthen and perpetuate trends in the infrastructure in such a way as to cast doubt on all the older programs of critique and critical distance.

41 More, *Works*, Volume IV, p. 125.

Meanwhile, even if we divest such arguments of their invective and their personal reference, and transform the debunking stance and the accusation of ideological intention into some more neutral historical description, a fear remains which is now that of the *Zeitgeist*: some immense historical process and mutation whereby everything from the economic to the philosophical is stamped with the same forms and logic irrespective of political and ideological commitment. Indeed, the presumption of the existence of something like postmodernity was always based on the evidence of those thoroughgoing modifications of all the levels of the system which we call late capitalism. The issue here then becomes that of the nature and structure of historical transitions from one stage or period to another.

We may, however, also observe that the homology of forms and structures between the various socio-economic and cultural levels is itself a function of increasing abstraction: so it is that forms of complexity which develop within concrete economic institutions slowly become divorced from their substance or content and as free-floating patterns migrate to other areas and become available for quite different uses and applications – in design fully as much as in the allegorical organization of scientific propositions, or the newer systems of conceptuality. We may even be tempted to reverse the thrust of the argument and to suggest that the deployment of such forms in the economic realm is itself the result of their concrete emergence in newer kinds of social life (let alone in new discoveries in the scientific realm).

But this leaves the political question intact: namely, whether resistance is still possible under such a regime of replication. It remains a theoretical question: whether homologies can generate oppositions or negations; as well as a historical one: what kind of system it is in which such structural standardization or contamination is possible in the first place. But perhaps it is in terms of our previous Utopian oppositions that the whole problem needs to be restaged: as the return of that old opposition of difference and identity between which Utopianism has oscillated throughout history – More's (and indeed Plato's) commitment to identity coming to seem rather dystopian to us today.

I believe, however, that it is best to consider this particular dilemma as part of a Utopian debate in a new sector of thematics which we have not yet touched on, namely that of subjectivity. For even the premise of some fundamental Utopian depersonalization takes a position on subjectivity and individualism, a position which is indeed more closely allied with postmodern thought and its decentering of consciousness than with more bourgeois and humanist notions, even though More's external social forms seem to reflect a logic of identity at odds with postmodern Difference.

But the more fundamental categories for any discussion of Utopia and subjectivity would rather seem to me to be those of pedagogy and of transition: or in other words, the question of the formation of subjectivities, and that of

the problems posed by their death and succession, by the generations and the relationship of the later classes of subjects to the institutions of Utopia laid in place by their predecessors. To put it this way is to realize that in socialism both of these poles are subsumed under the notion of cultural revolution: the collective pedagogy of subjects to be formed or reformed for life and activity in the new mode of production – a process which is then supposed to secure the social reproduction of the new social world across a number of generations, if not indefinitely.

This is probably the area in which the modern concern with freedom, which replaces the older Utopian preoccupation with happiness, can most adequately be grasped. Although conveniently transferable to the political field and available for all kinds of ideological exploitations, the demand for freedom in the Utopian tradition seems more plausibly read as an irritation and an impatience with pedagogy – with the philosopher-king, with the state and its ideological apparatuses, with Skinner, with More, with theories of pedagogy in general; as well as a resistance to older generations. It seems on the face of it unlikely that early modern experiences of the state could be direct or immediate enough to have a formative influence on values so existentially and passionately held as those that resonate in words and concepts like "freedom": the exception would no doubt be that of life under foreign or domestic military (or police) occupation. This is not to abandon the priority of a political unconscious over a Freudian one: Sartre once very sensibly observed that both acknowledge the family as the first structure through which classes and the social are learned along with the structures of desire.[42] In any case both the family and the official world of the state and of society are subsumed under the mode of production itself. As always, determinism here, and causality as such, are more a matter of determination and its limits, that is to say, of the availability of certain structures and their content or on the other hand the historical non-existence of such possibilities.

Thus, any number of models of a complex and decentered system seem to have emerged in recent times, of which older versions, such as Leibniz's monadology, seem but clumsy and pre-technological fantasies or anticipations. Clearly the evolution of cybernetic systems has enlarged what can be imagined, that is to say, what can be schematized: yet this is not to say that it is the new technology itself which has in the last instance enabled the emergence of such schematizations and their application to a wide range of other areas. That application exists, to be sure, only in fantasy in any number of cases: thus I have tried to show, in another place, that much of so-called cognitive philosophy – the attempt to "explain" consciousness on the basis of hypotheses about the decentered functioning of the brain – functions in reality as a political allegory and offers pseudo-scientific models of what are

42 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York, 1963), pp. 61, 100–101.

actually political systems. Such scientific and philosophical speculations, whatever other value they may have and however testable or falsifiable in the laboratory, are also ideological constructs designed to ground a particular political system in biological nature.[42]

This brings us to what is perhaps the fundamental Utopian dispute about subjectivity, namely whether the Utopia in question proposes the kind of radical transformation of subjectivity presupposed by most revolutions, a mutation in human nature and the emergence of whole new beings; or whether the impulse to Utopia is not already grounded in human nature, its persistence readily explained by deeper needs and desires which the present has merely repressed and distorted. As we have implied in some of the preceding chapters, this is a tension which is not merely inescapable; its resolution in either direction would be fatal for the existence of Utopia itself. If absolute difference is achieved, in other words, we find ourselves in a science-fictional world such as those of Stapledon, in which human beings can scarcely even recognize themselves any longer (and which would need to be allegorized, as we have tried to do so in Chapter 9, in order to bring such figuration back to any viable anthropomorphic and Utopian function). On the other hand, if Utopia is drawn too close to current everyday realities, and its subject begins too closely to approximate our neighbors and our politically misguided fellow citizens, then we slowly find ourselves back in a garden-variety reformist or social-democratic politics which may well be Utopian in another sense but which has forfeited its claim to any radical transformation of the system itself.

As for that achievement of a radical impersonality in Utopia, the effacement of the private property of the self and the emergence of some new decentered and collective practice of social and individual relations, it would in the best of cases scarcely correspond to an abolition of subjectivity but rather merely to a new form of the latter, in which bourgeois individualism – another name for the old humanist "centered subject" under attack by contemporary theory – has been replaced by the "multiple subject positions" of postmodernity and late capitalism. Once again the notion of the replication of the system becomes the final form of conspiracy theory, and the concept of a Utopian transformation becomes an additional resource in the warehouse of late capitalism's ruses and lures.

But it is time to conclude this interminable inventory, and to observe that even though each of these oppositions seems to confront us with a fundamental choice and a fundamental decision about the very nature of Utopia – even though, indeed, the very reading or construction of utopias remains a dead letter if the text in question fails to challenge us in this well-nigh visceral

43 I must here refer to an unpublished analysis of Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*, which will appear in Volume II of *The Poetics of Social Forms*, on allegory.

way – it may well be misguided to respond to the challenge on its own terms; and even more misguided to attempt its resolution by way of this or that compromise, combination or synthesis. How this new problem is to be met will be addressed in the following chapter.