

Spaces of Utopia

2nd Series, No. 3, 2014



Spaces of Utopia
An Electronic Journal,
2nd Series, No. 3, 2014

Presentation, Call for Papers & Guidelines

Spaces of Utopia is a double-blind peer review international e-journal of scholarly research in the field of Utopian Studies. It is published in English once a year as part of the Digital Library of the *Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* (FLUP), Portugal, and has an ISSN number (ISSN 1646-4729).

Founded by the members of the research project “Mapping Dreams: British and North-American Utopianism”, hosted by CETAPS - Centre for English, translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies, the journal aims at providing a space for the publication of studies on a wide spectrum of topics related to literary utopias and utopian thought and practices. Although its founding members work in the field of Anglo-American Utopian Studies, the journal welcomes contributions on all subjects within the general field of Utopian Studies (i.e., on any country, period, book, and experiment).

Spaces of Utopia is a pluralist publication with no ideological affiliation and open to proposals and perspectives from all research methodologies.

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- Articles - some issues may be thematic.
- Varia - articles on various topics, in case the issue is thematic.
- More Food for Thought - a space for the publication of new utopias (max. 15.000 words).

There is a standing call for contributions to the journal for sections 3 and 4. Contributions are to be sent both to utopia@letras.up.pt and to vieira.mfatima@gmail.com. Thematic issues will always be announced.

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- All essays should be typed in Times New Roman 12, double-spaced, with no more than 28 lines per page (ca. 1800 spaces). Pages should be numbered and the title typed in bold, Times New Roman 14.
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- All the published works are the authors' responsibility.

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Dinner in Utopia: Why did Plato Propose “Amazing and Frightening” Meals in Common?

Michael Jackson & Damian Grace

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

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“Let one open any book of history, from Herodotus to our own day, and he will see that, without even excepting conspiracies, not a single great event has occurred which has not been conceived, prepared, and carried out at a feast,” so said Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in the *Philosopher in the Kitchen* (1981[1825]: 54). Scholars of course know the faculty club and the conference dinner, where many events have been planned.

While Plato consistently recommended common meals, *syssitia* (literally “eating together”), and Aristotle accepted this one feature of Plato’s political program, their recommendations of these public meals as political practices have been treated in a perfunctory manner, limited to military purposes (e.g., Finer 1997: 338 and de Mesquita *et al.*, 2004: 174). In later utopian theory and practice, Thomas More, Tomasso Campanella and William Morris, among other utopian theorists, incorporated such meals, as have utopian communities from Oenida to the Kibbutzim, all to little comment. Insofar as the seed for the practice is found in Plato, a close study of his recommendation of common meals enhances our understanding of what such meals can offer. Why in *The Laws* (780a-d) did Plato recommend meals in common and why did he say that they were “amazing” and “frightening,” and perhaps not to be mentioned?¹ To better understand Plato’s approach to *syssitia* this essay summarizes common meals in the context of classical Greece, examines Plato’s discussion of political dining, emphasizes the role of women in common meals in Plato’s political theory, considers the role of these meals in the second-best ideal commonwealth of the *Laws*, and draws several conclusions.

Syssitia

There is ample evidence, both archaeological and literary, that common meals were practiced in Sparta, Crete and elsewhere in ancient Greece (Roussel, 1976; David, 1978; Pantel, 1992; Rundin; 1996; Fornis / Casillas, 1997); and Steiner, 2002). More generally on women in Sparta see Pomperoy, 2002). Herodotus in his *History* (1, 65) notes that common meals were a Spartan practice based on military training and experience, though there are also references to them in Homeric times (Rundin 1996: 205). Aristophanes in his comedy, the *Ecclesiazusae*, written perhaps twenty years before Plato's *Republic*, makes common meals integral to the communism of a utopia governed by women. In Sparta, *syssitia* provided a main meal for male citizens at the end of the day in communal dining halls, where tables were allocated to groups numbering about fifteen (Singor, 1999: 72; Rawson, 1969: 7; and Bitros / Karayiannis, 2010: 69). A citizen went to a certain building and ate at a specific table in the company of the same persons for life (Fornis / Casillas, 1997: 43). In Sparta, male citizens lived much of their lives in public, and the collective surveillance that this public life brought supported self-discipline. The meals were a very large part of that exposure (Finley, 1981: 28). Boys served at the meals from age twelve and were gradually inducted into a table by twenty. In Sparta these groups engaged in confidential discussion of public business (Pantel, 1992: 62 and Fornis / Casillas, 1997: 27).

Xenophon and Plutarch attribute the Spartan common meals to the reforms of the legendary King Lycurgus, one of many measures that created Spartan discipline.² They agree that Lycurgus' aim was to curb luxury. According to Xenophon (2013: 331), by making dining public, Lycurgus controlled extravagance, luxury and drunkenness. In Plutarch's (1914: 10, 254) account, common dining checked extravagance and display because the rich were prevented from flaunting their wealth while their characters were improved by dining with the poor. Common meals were also found in Crete, which, in contrast to Sparta, was notorious for luxury, perversion, and indulgence reminiscent of Persia. There is speculation that both polities reflect a mutual influence, perhaps Phoenicia, but if the practices had a similar origin, they took decidedly different turns (Drews, 1979: 47). There were, however, some instances of

limited public dining in Athens, for example, among members of the Athenian Council of the Areopagus (Steiner, 2002: 353).

It is worth noting that common dining served similar purposes. In the Middle Ages, “The feast’s defining rhetoric of honorable equality and commensality enabled new relationships to be legitimately forged, often between participants of markedly different background or economic status” (Rosser, 1994: 432). The point is that common dining can be instrumental in producing certain ends; it is not, as a casual reading of Brillat-Savarin might suggest, merely an occasion for taking political or commercial decisions. Nor is this practice in Plato a mere epiphenomenon of the social arrangements of a society as it is in the utopias of Campanella and Morris. Commensality in their imaginary societies is closer to the mess in military life or the refectory in monasteries and convents. There is conversation and learning, no doubt, but bonding in such environments is restricted compared with that effected in battle or in chanting the holy office. Yet common dining can be a moral device for social integration, as shown in More’s *Utopia*. It can be educational, formative, and unifying, especially for an egalitarian society. Hence Xenophon writes that common dining helped form boys’ characters, and prepared them for the rigours of military **service** by keeping them lean, fit, and able to survive with limited food during military campaigns (Xenophon 1890-1897).

Plato on *syssitia*

Common dining on the Spartan model was not practiced in Plato’s and Aristotle’s Athens. For them to recommend common meals is to invoke Sparta or Crete, neither of which would be welcome exemplars to Athenian citizens. Why did Plato recommend the practice? Athenians were more familiar with the *symposion*, or drinking party.

This question haunts Plato’s references to the *symposion* and *syssition* from the earliest of his dialogues to the *Laws*, usually taken to be one of the last, if not the very last. In the *Symposium*, wine is replaced with conversation, thus civilizing a frequently riotous occasion (Murray, 1991). In the *Republic*, he gives pride of place to “meals in common” (*Republic* at 416e).³ In the *Laws*, common dining figures even more prominently. This communism of the table remained while he dropped many other features of the *Republic* in the *Laws*.

In the *Republic*, Plato refers to meals in common in Books III, IV, and V where the political institutions of the ideal city are revealed. They are an aspect of his

communism. In the discussion of the rulers of the ideal city, Socrates says that these guardians “will go regularly to mess together, like soldiers in a camp and live a life in common” (416e).⁴ Only in Book V does he place common meals in the context of a general communism for the guardians, including women. Socrates says, “all of them [the guardians] will be together, since they have common houses and mess” (458d).

From these brief mentions in the *Republic* it is apparent that common meals are a part of the structure of rule. And that communism is one of the hallmarks of Plato’s political theory in the *Republic*. But there the meals are justified by argument, not by reference to either Sparta or Crete. The importance of this justification lies in the utter rationality of the first-best ideal commonwealth, where abstract argument suffices.

In the *Laws*, as Aristotle notes, rational argument is reinforced by the lessons of history (see Dawson, 1992: 17). The case for *syssitia* there in particular is supported by examples from Sparta and Crete, the cities from which two of the participants in the conversation come. The Cretan, Kleinias, gives the dialogue a very practical turn when he tells his companions that he is part of a group charged with devising a legal code for the new Cretan colony of Magnesia (702b-c). Moreover, the *Laws* seeks the assistance of the Muses, the source of education (654a), to support a reasoned approach to establishing a virtuous political community, that is, one in which virtue is recognised as the “concord of reason and emotion” (653a-655a). Basic to this goal is the fusing of the Spartan *syssition* with the Athenian *symposion*, extending “aristocratic and military rites of commensality to the entirety of the ... citizen class.” Dining will become political (Murray, 1991: 88 and 99).

The discussion of common meals runs throughout the *Laws* yet has no systematic exposition. Nonetheless the importance of *syssitia* is signalled in the very first exchange when the Stranger asks, “For what reason has your law ordained the common meals ...” (625c)? Kleinias having already noted that a god laid down the laws for his Cretan city replies, “these practices of ours exist with a view to war” (625e). He and the Athenian Stranger, agree (633a) that this is generally a good practice, but can sometimes be harmful (636a-b).⁵

After discussing administrative arrangements in each of the twelve local government districts of the city, the Athenian Stranger says that there “will be common meals [for officials] in each of the twelve districts where all of them **must** dine together” (emphasis added) for the first two years of a term. “If anyone is

absent from a common meal on any day” without an official reason, that absentee will be considered “as a deserter from the guard ... and held in ill repute, as one who has betrayed his share in the regime” (762c). Missing a meal is nearly treason! While it might seem extreme to put absences from *syssitia* on the level of treason, Plato is simply inverting established wisdom: while a tyrant fears common meals because plots might be hatched there, the citizens of Magnesia might fear that absent magistrates and officials could be plotting in private. On the next page the Stranger notes that this food is “humble and uncooked” (762e). A civic office does not entitle one to depart from the regulations of the city; indeed, officials should set an example of obedience to the laws, which is why absence from the common meals is particularly disturbing. Nor should they expect sumptuous meals; that too is an education in frugality.

That aspect of dining in common is not the strangest. In outlining his proposals for marriage, the Athenian Stranger says: “we are going to assert that our grooms must participate in the common meals no differently, and no less, than in the time before marriage” (780b). He continues that the creation of the institution of common meals “aroused amazement at the beginning when it was first introduced,” speculating that while it might have been an emergency measure in wartime, it had since become accepted. The Athenian goes on to say that it would not now be so amazing or “frightening” (780c2) to legislate common dining. What made common meals amazing? What made them frightening? And even more important, why would they no longer be so? Plato does not explicitly answer these questions in the *Laws*. The Athenian suggests a prejudice against them exists where they are not practiced but that is not “fright” (839d). Perhaps *syssitia* were regarded as the thin end of the wedge leading to communism: Aristotle claims in the *Politics* books I and II that legislators “introduced community of property in Sparta and Crete by the institution of public messes” (1263b).

There are parallels in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* with Aristophanes’ critique in the *Ecclesiazusae* (“Assembly Women”). This play is less a reflection on communism than a censure of “the greedy, individualistic attitudes of certain Athenians” (Rothwell 1990: 11). This censure is framed as a kind of female coup, in which the women outwit the men in order to gain political power. That coup is moral as well as political, for the virtues that convince the masculine assembly to yield power are feminine. The protagonist, Praxagora, disguised as a man, depicts women as clever, thrifty and discreet. Women freely lend each other things such as clothes, and jewellery, and duly return them, whereas men are prone to deny their debts.

Women do not inform on others or sue them or conspire against them. Men, by contrast, are shown as selfish individualists. Women “never divulged the Mysteries of Demeter” writes Aristophanes, obliquely referring to the profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, either by drunken members of *symposia* or, worse, by aristocratic men who thought themselves above the gods and the law (Murray 1990). Praxagora must make this speech disguised as a man because no respectable Athenian woman should know what she does know about public affairs - and about men. Beneath the comedy is not only the *possibility* but also the *plausibility* of government by women, based on the virtues of women instead of the vices of men, a more disturbing challenge to the social order than, say, the fanciful reign of Jonathan Swift’s Houyhnhms. The disguised Praxagora promotes the communal virtues of the home for the governance of the polity.

I propose that everyone should own everything in in common, and draw an equal living. No more rich man here, poor man there ... I will establish one and the same standard of life for everyone ... My first act will be to communize all the land, money, and other property that’s now individually owned. We women will manage this common fund with thrift and good judgment. ... the city [will be] one household by breaking down all partitions to make one dwelling... (Aristophanes, 2002: 321, 323, 339)

The Stranger, of course, can only recommend the *appearance*, not the reality that Praxagora offered, of a single house for the second-best commonwealth of Magnesia (779b). Privacy there is presented as a concession to the attitudes of the Cretan colonists, but it is also inherent in the Athenian’s civic theology, which requires that proper honour be paid to one’s ancestors, inevitably a private, not a common commitment.

As for meals, these will not only be common but undistorted by preference and affinity: “I shall draw a lot for each citizen, which ... will show the place where he must go to dine.” In making community of wives and children part of her project and promoting equality of desire in sexual relations, Praxagora, like Plato, elevates the political community above kinship and natural affinity. All relationships become, in effect, political. Perhaps this is frightening: it is certainly amazing. To modern ears it even sounds totalitarian. That *Ecclesiazusae* is a protean utopian comedy takes the edge off its political message, but that message nonetheless stands as an accusation against the conventions of fourth century Attica (Fredal, 2002: 601). It likewise anticipates some utopian efforts to transcend family ties.

Women at the table

This brings us to the role of women in the *Laws*. As we have seen above, the Stranger says that when common meals were established in both Sparta and Crete, “probably dictated by a war or by some event of equal potency,” it seemed “amazing.” Although the idea came to be accepted as contributing to security, “women’s affairs were in an altogether incorrect way left without legislative regulation, and the practice of common meals for them never saw the light” (779e-781a). According to Aristotle, who repeats Plato’s arguments, “Lycurgus did attempt to bring (women) under the laws, but since they resisted he gave it up” (*Politics*, 1270a). The Stranger deplors this neglect and proposes to remedy it, because “if it were ordained that every practice is to be shared in common by women as well as men, it would be better for the happiness of the city” (781b). Then follows what reads like an aside: “In other places and cities, where common meals are not at all officially accepted customs in the city, it is not possible for someone of intelligence even to mention it” (781c). Not only are common meals amazing and frightening, but now that women are involved they are nearly unmentionable. If common meals cannot be sensibly discussed for men, it is even harder to discuss the arrangement for women. Plato did not need to spell out the obvious: conventionally women belonged in the home, not in public. Although Athenian attitudes towards the appearance of women in public varied in the 4th century BCE, Anton Powell points out that common meals would have been confronting for respectable women: “To mix with men would be degrading” (Powell, 2001: 351). He claims that many women “would have clung with determination to a cloistered life, partly as a reflection of high status” (*ibid.*: 371). That might be why the Stranger thought his proposal so astonishing, but from a Platonic point of view, clinging to “a cloistered life” is putting private concerns before the good of the political community.

It was clearly a radical proposal. Aristophanes had broached women’s public participation using comedy and, in the *Critias*, Plato invokes the protection of history in recalling that, 9000 years previously, Athenian women could take a public role embracing even military service. This statement is no less confronting than women’s *syssitia*:

military pursuits were then common to men and women, (and) the men of those days ... set up a figure ... of the goddess in full armour, to be a testimony that all animals which associate together, male as well as female, may, if they please, practise in common the virtue which belongs to them without distinction of sex. Moreover, the habit and figure of the goddess indicate that in the case of all

animals, male and female, that herd together, every species is naturally capable of practising as a whole and in common its own proper excellence (Plato, 2008: 107).

In short, women participated in the hegemony.

There is nothing in the *Laws* to indicate there is any interaction between women and men at *syssitia*, and no explicit reason is given for women and men to dine in the same room at the same time. "Suppose," says the Athenian, "there were separate common meals arranged for men, and **nearby** common meals for the members of their families, including female children and their mothers" (806e, emphasis added). It seems women dine at the same time either in the same room or at segregated tables or in segregated dining rooms in a female public space, which by the standards of the day, the Athenian Stranger notes, will seem quite shocking to most, including women themselves. Quite so, but the *Republic's* proposal of including women at men's tables would have been even more shocking. The tenor of the *Laws*, not to mention the context of fourth century Athens, suggests that women's voices would have been driven into silence by dominant males. ("The Muses would never make the ghastly mistake of composing the speech of men to a musical idiom suitable for women." [669c].) Instead, the *Laws* gives women their own tables each with a female table ruler or warden, where their speech - the kind that Praxagora has with her female companions - becomes part of civic discourse. Women in the Athenian Stranger's scheme would not have to disguise themselves as men to participate in *syssitia*.

Michael Kochin (2002: 107 and 110-113) argues that, "the purpose of common meals would seem to be the erosion of the bonds between husband and wife, and especially of the husband's power over his wife."⁶ The Athenian wants to set limits to privacy, not abolish it, and as part of that strategy he wants women to have a public presence. Kochin takes the various measures to integrate women into this public life - education, military service, leisure - as an indication of a male-centred agenda to make "men" of women. Yet it is hard to see how things would look different from the Athenian's description if something like virtual equality were proposed for the sexes in Magnesia. Praxagora's regime might seem strange in Athens, but not in Magnesia.

In the *Republic*, Plato speaks of using all, not just half of the talent of a political community. He reiterates these views in the *Laws*, but this is no assertion of women's rights. Just as women's talents and participation in common meals could

enhance the welfare and security of the polis, so also their occupation of an unregulated domestic private sphere could endanger it:

half the human race - the female sex, the half which in any case is inclined to be secretive and crafty, because of its weakness - has been left to its own devices because of the misguided indulgence of the legislator. ... You see, leaving women to do what they like is not just to lose half the battle (as it may seem): a woman's natural potential for virtue is inferior to a man's, so she's proportionately a greater danger, perhaps even twice as great (781a-b).

While the translation of this passage has been disputed - some deny that it is about the moral inferiority of women at all - in context it remains inclusive (Samaras, 2010: 189).⁷ The underlying problem of the *Laws* is the constant struggle (or war) for order, for virtue, and against self-interest. For wars occur not only between *poleis*, villages and individuals, but also *within* individuals. According to Kleinias, the Cretan, "not only is everyone an enemy of everyone else in the public sphere, but each man fights a private war against himself." (626d) The Athenian finds women the unacknowledged participants in such wars. They too must be subject to public laws; they too must be regulated. For if, as in Athens, the principal obstacle to good laws is the addiction of its citizens to luxury and indolence, then leaving half the population - women - unregulated would be sheer carelessness.

In book VIII, the Athenian asserts that setting up common meals elsewhere would be difficult but not in Crete "because they have long existed there, as well as in Sparta" (842b). In Crete the city supported common meals from its resources (847e). The contrast to Crete is Sparta where, according to Aristotle in the *Politics*, individuals paid subscriptions or forfeited citizenship (1271a).

In sum, the references to common meals in the *Republic* and the *Laws* are consistent. It is clear that common meals are regarded as essential and that Plato is not referring to them for the sake of tradition. The Athenian Stranger (whom we take to be the voice of Plato) says to his interlocutors that he would "like to explain the merits and disadvantages of this institution." He then goes on to discuss regulating the three instinctive drives for food, drink and sex. In this context, it seems that common dining for women is merely a way to regulate their appetite for food and drink but this cannot be the whole reason. In his earlier discussion of the virtues of the drinking party, the Athenian justifies drinking parties as opportunities to learn self-restraint amid the lures of pleasure (641a-650b). He clearly means more than learning to handle wine. Similarly, in prescribing girls' gymnastics and women's military training

he is not thinking merely of fitness or a reserve army. Self-restraint is a ruling value in the *Laws* (e.g., 635e, 644b, 696c and particularly 744a). *Syssitia* enable its development. They are an education in virtue, rather like the gymnasium (636a) or the symposium. They have direct parallels in the discussion of common dining for women. Later the Athenian stresses that public education will be compulsory for all, girls as well as boys (804e). Here, at least, equality is asserted and earlier qualifications based on the supposed weakness of women are abandoned. Hence, a “state of affairs ... where men and women do *not* have a common purpose and do *not* throw all their energies into the same activities, is absolutely stupid” (805a). This comment recapitulates the statement in the *Republic* (455d), “There is therefore no function in society which is peculiar to woman as woman or man as man; natural abilities are similarly distributed in each sex, and it is natural for women to share all occupations with men, though in all women will be the weaker partners.”

***Syssitia* in the Second Best Regime**

While extending common meals from men to their families is intended to break down the privacy of the family and the seclusion of women, the point in the *Laws* was not, as in the *Republic*, to abolish the family. The words of the Athenian must be kept in mind:

Our ideal, of course, is unlikely to be realized fully so long as we persist in our policy of allowing individuals to have their own private establishments, consisting of house, wife, children and so on. But if we could ever put into practice the second-best scheme we're now describing, we'd have every reason to be satisfied (807b).

The family is to be administered in parallel with the polis (808b), but it is no longer to be a refuge from regulation - not all of which can be written into a legal code. Plato's radical intention is nonetheless clear. Though the education of women is significant, it is of limited duration, and domesticity might counter its effects. Similarly, women's participation in war is not a regular, much less a daily activity. *Syssitia*, however, are continuous engagements with public life and women citizens are required to participate in them just as were Spartan and Cretan men.

Participation in women's *syssitia* brings citizens whose ends are not aligned with the public good of Magnesia, into administered space (805a). More positively, Thomas Pangle (1980: 473) notes that common meals for women would promote civic

spirit among them. He and other commentators think the common meals for women are at segregated tables at the same time and place at which men dine (Morrow, 1993 [1960]: 394-395 and cf. Kochin, 2002: 107). One woman would supervise the conduct of members at each table, preside over libations to the gods, and dismiss the assemblies (Morrow, 1993: 395). These together are important public rituals as well as social activities. There is no detailed account of what would happen at these *syssitia*, but their purpose seems to foster in women a civically engaged disposition that is consonant with the laws of Magnesia.

Of course, it is not only women who must be engaged in the polis. Men must give up their private interests and learn to harmonise their inclinations with others for the collective good. The Athenian does not want supine obedience to laws, but a willing engagement with them. Harmony plays an important role in ordering the soul, the fundamental accord being that between pleasure and goodness. Kleinias notes that only in Sparta and Crete are the arts stabilised by legislation, while elsewhere the dissonant influence of novelties prevails (660b). The Athenian only half approves. Sparta and Crete produce fine warriors, but they err because, he says, "You organize your state as though it were a military camp rather than a society of people" (666e). The details of public administration should disappear from view once Magnesia is established and interests are harmonised in pursuit of virtue. Persuasion suffuses the *Laws*, most notably in Plato's discussion of the "Preludes," which give rationales for regulations. It is clear that the Athenian wants all citizens to obey the laws freely and without compulsion. As R. G. Bury (1937: 304) observed, "In civic life this free activity is to be displayed in voluntary cooperation with the State Law, which is natural because rational; and this Law enforces itself by persuasion rather than coercion." That end does not require the abolition of the family, but rather the positioning of the family partly in public space. Instead of common dining being regarded as surveillance of the family - and particularly women - a reading closer to Plato's spirit puts the *polis*, in its constituents, under surveillance from those gathered regularly at table where they may talk politics. Pangle (1980: 476-477) notes that the demands on women to attend common meals would necessarily be tempered by pregnancy and the other duties of child-bearing and motherhood. Those concessions, however, would place women at risk of becoming second-class citizens. Moreover, it seems that a similar concession would not be granted to men for religious observances, a traditional excuse in Sparta, because the Athenian abolishes private religious shrines and sacrifices (909d-910d) (Plutarch: 239 and Kochin, 2002: 107). How this prohibition squares with his approval of "rites celebrated according to law at private shrines

dedicated to ancestral gods" (717b) is obscure. If, indeed, common dining is integral to the structure of this second-best polity, its implementation seems, somewhat paradoxically, to run up against problems that would not occur in a first-best utopia, where the kind of family privacy allowed in the *Laws* is all but abolished. As Martin Nilsson (1941: 331), Glenn Morrow (1993[1960]): 397), and W.K. Lacey, 1968: 180 and 314 n 14) have pointed out, the *syssition* and the family are incompatible. Yet Plato does not seize the opportunity to model his marriage regulations on Sparta (Morrow *ibidem*). Unlike the Spartan grooms, who remain in their *phiditia* (mess hall with attached barracks) after marriage, those of Magnesia are required to take their wives from family houses and establish their own home. Then the process of family formation is checked at its very beginning by the requirement that newly weds should attend *syssitia*. The Athenian anticipates that this will shock people (780b).

Women's *syssitia* and private rituals are linked as elements of a project to build the unity of the *polis* by "subordinating all familial relations to the laws" (Kochin, 2002: 107). Hence Hestia, goddess of both the domestic and civic hearths, is to be promoted from her central place in the family home to a public position of guardianship with Zeus and Athena in the Magnesian acropolis. Morrow argues that it was not Plato's intention to forbid private shrines (Morrow *idem*: 493), but it is hard to disagree with Kochin's view that, "In banishing Hestia from the home and returning her to the acropolis, the Athenian Stranger intends to elevate the cult of the unity of the city at the expense of the sacredness of the family" (Kochin *idem*: 108).

Pericles remains admired as an enlightened statesman, yet in his famous funeral oration he said this about women: "Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among men whether for good or for bad" (Thucydides, 1998: 117). Plato goes well beyond that terse affirmation of tradition though there remain substantial criticisms of his treatment of women in the *Laws* (Saxonhouse, 1985; Bluestone, 1987), Coole, 1988, or Moore, 2012).⁸ Susan Okin (1979: 44ff) has argued that in retreating from his position in the *Republic* and reintroducing the family into the *Laws*, Plato subverts the emancipation of women. Regulations, such as those prescribing different ages when men and women may hold office (785b), or differences in their eligibility to bring law suits (937a) impair the ideal of moral equality presented in the *Laws*. These political and social limitations on women are considerably offset by their inclusion in public life, notably *syssitia*. Point taken, but as Lacey (1968: 177-178) observes, the restoration of the family is limited. Indeed, placing women and children 'nearby' to

men's tables in common dining areas substantially removes the family from the private domain by placing it into the public one.

Aristotle accepts common meals because, empirically, they had been a widespread and enduring practice (Dawson, 1992: 17). For him, the table is a classroom for civic training and the skills of life, leaving women to the family, excluded from the lessons at *syssitia*, and more (Swanson, 1992). Jeff Chuska (2000: 218) draws attention to Aristotle's view of the political function of *syssitia*: "knowledge tends to create trust of one another" (*Politics*, 1313a41). The mix of citizens at Aristotle's table opens the opportunity to form a community of kindred interests and aspirations characterised as friendship in his *Ethics* (Finley, 1970: 8 and Kraut, 1992: 111). Richard Kraut (*ibidem*) also cites the *Ethics* in suggesting that Aristotle believes common meals build a friendly unity among citizens. Friendship would indeed be a deep foundation to a utopian community. Although Aristotle's reasons for approving common meals are practical and supported by the experience of political communities as different as Sparta and Crete, these reasons do not quite echo Plato's advocacy of *syssitia*.

For Plato, commensality is a means to virtue. Aristotle and those who have followed him are right to pick out the political and sociological benefits of common dining, but the main point of *syssitia* for Plato is not to feed and socialise men, women and children. The end to which common dining is directed is not social control, but rather to make people free to be good and happy. "The whole point of our legislation was to allow the citizens to live supremely happy lives in the greatest possible mutual friendship" (743d). Forever a utopian dream!

Conclusions

Common meals have an instrumental value. They set minimum and maximum levels of consumption; they foster a concern for the welfare of others, and inhibit envy. Beyond these instrumental functions, *syssitia* offer a socially integrative and politically stabilising device. More: they put the virtues within the grasp of ordinary people. In bringing together small groups of citizens of different ages and social backgrounds who, over the years, have the opportunity to interact across natural and class divides, they exhibit a communism of talents (Hodkinson, 2000: 216). In learning

to appreciate the laws under which they live and not merely observe them, the citizens at *syssitia* approach the ideal of unity that will only, perhaps, be found among the gods (739). For Plato women are integral to common meals from the *Republic* to the *Laws*, and through them, they join in political life.⁹ The effect of such a mix is to reduce the importance of private attachments, principally the family, and to promote understanding of and identification with the polis. Talking at the table is more important than the barley and wine consumed, how it is served, or financed. Plato designated table rulers - *archons* --in the *Laws*, so seriously did he take *syssitia* as occasions to learn from moral exemplars. These *archons* are women in the women's mess. No doubt their role was also to ensure that innovations and dangerous political novelties did not capture the imaginations of the table and lead to disharmony. It was normal in Sparta for citizens to discuss public affairs at *syssitia* and the age mix means generational transmission is inbuilt (Pantel, 1992: 62). The young serve at tables and in doing so inevitably audit the conversations and interactions of their seniors at the table, and thereby are gradually inducted into a table. This induction is part of the social reproduction of accepted values among citizens and citizens to be (Toynbee, 1968: 70). The public meals are, in that light, civic obligations (Roussel, 1976: 125).

The little communities at each table are stable and enduring components in the wider political community. Not only do they socialize their members in the proper conduct of free and equal citizens, but they also place them in the public eye each day. Exposure is a powerful socializing experience. They are on civic duty while dining in public; so serious is this duty that a failure of officials to attend is near treasonable, and not even newly weds are exempt from participation. The community at the table is a microcosm of the larger group in utopian theory and practice; by socializing the next generation it re-creates - moment by moment -- the community at each meal.

Plato, and later Aristotle, proposed a sustained and self-conscious effort at social mixing to give citizens continuing practice in the experience of public and moral life. Perfection is not the standard in the *Laws*; reason will not motivate it and human nature resists the regulation necessary to secure it. That being so, in the society imagined in the *Laws* the risk of placing of private interests above those of the polis is partly diminished through *syssitia*. This elevation of the interests of the whole is a common motif in later utopian literature.

* * *

We have suggested that persuasion suffuses the *Laws*. Yet there is also compulsion. Attendance at *syssitia* is mandatory. Compulsion and persuasion seem at odds in utopia, but by regulating meals Plato expects the pleasures of the table to persuade citizens of the advantages of *syssitia*, and recalling how plain the fare at the table is likely to be, the greater pleasure may be the companionship of others, as is often the case at clubs and conferences. As the end of the *polis* is a life of happiness enjoyed communally, Plato has first to show that such a life is worth having. Common meals demonstrate this value in microcosm. They are cultural as well as political affairs, amazing, frightening and unmentionable, he said, but only until experience reveals them as unifying, harmonising and pleasurable.

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Notes

¹ All references to Plato's *Laws* are to Thomas Pangle (1980), which is preferred for its literal translation. We give the Stephanus pagination for Plato and Aristotle's works, e.g., 780a-d.

² On the use of Plutarch as a source, see Donald Kagan (1969), x.

³ All references to the *Republic* are taken from Bloom (1968), which is preferred for its literal translation.

⁴ Some suppose that all citizens live in communism in the *Republic*, e.g., Mayhew (1997): p. 7ff. We contend that the logic of Plato's argument only applies to the guardians, leaving those in the producing class may live as they please.

⁵ Figueira (1984: 95 n 24) says in passing that Plato sets the number of participants at the common meals at ten in this passage, but we can find no support for that assertion.

⁶ Kochin's argument is that the *Laws* is profoundly misogynistic and makes concessions to male homoerotic inclinations that have to be rectified by laws such as that compelling men to marry.

⁷ Samaras offers a wide ranging discussion but does not mention the role of women as table rulers, which we emphasize.

⁸ Our purpose is not to adjudicate Plato's feminism or misogyny, but rather to examine the implications of what he explicitly says, more than once, as a forerunner of later utopias.

⁹ There is reason to believe that Plato acted on his own advice; Diogenes Laertius in his *Life of Plato* (III, 46) lists two women at the Academy when Plato died.

From More's natural Utopia to Cordwainer Smith's artificial pseudo-utopia

Maria do Rosário Monteiro

CHAM – FCSH/NOVA-UAc

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Utopian thinking is essential for our social, political, and psychological health, but, like everything else, utopian thinking is time- and place bound. One model does not fit all.

Lyman Tower Sargent (2004: 4)

Introduction

Two of the recurring debates surrounding utopia and its twin counterpart, dystopia, have been, in western culture, the difficulty of finding a balance between collective and individual domains, and the question of how to prescribe an evolutionary system of government for communities that, naturally, are based on evolution. When Elliott wrote his *The Shape of Utopia* (Elliott, 1970), the utopia/dystopia debate and literary production hanged, for several decades, strongly in favour of the negative view of a tightly regulated society, both as a menace for human individuality as well as for species' survival. The few who dared to write a utopian narrative were smeared by a "disillusioned" society.

This conflict between *eutopia* and dystopia started on the foundational narrative of the genre: Thomas More's *The Best State of a Commonwealth and the Island of Utopia* (MORE, 1965). *Utopia* shares with most of other foundational works the characteristic of enclosing all potential evolutions of the genre. Therefore, this kind of texts is generally open to multiple interpretations, according to the ever-changing cultural and historical evolutions. Many have read *Utopia* as a "political

manifesto"¹, others have disregarded the first book and commented or based their own utopias only on the second, others have disregarded the second book and commented or wrote new literary texts based only on the first book, developing the dystopian perspective.

Undoubtedly, *Utopia* encloses a profound political criticism, and that is probably the reason why it was not published in the English language until 1551, sixteen years after the author's death (More, 1551).² However, in my opinion, there should be no misunderstanding between utopia as a literary genre and utopianism as a social theory.³ Both are inevitably linked, but they serve their political agendas through different media, and that makes all the difference. While utopianism as a social theory is concerned with a social and political reality, the literary utopias should be interpreted for what they are: literary texts that create fictional worlds, more or less similar to the author's actual world, and its state of affairs. This is the perspective I will adopt in this essay, namely, comparing *Utopia* and "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" as literary utopias/dystopias. I will take into account the historical and cultural *milieu* in which they were written, to try to understand why they present such different fictional worlds and what messages may the actual reader construct after entering and travelling through those unfamiliar surroundings.

More's natural Utopia

When More wrote his most famous literary work, in 1515/16, Europe was on the verge of a radical cultural transformation. However, the times seemed to promise still, at least for the cultural elite formed by the Christian Humanists, a chance for peaceful and serene transformation, worked from within the Christian circles but having the Europeans in general as the main beneficiaries. They believed that it was possible to change society, the Church, and their practices using three complementary "weapons": first, reconstructing the biblical texts (particularly the New Testament) by means of more accurate Latin translations, based on both the Greek and the Hebrew texts. This should bring Christians nearer to the Gospel's message, correcting beliefs, practices, and ways of living both of the ecclesiastics and the laics. Secondly, the Humanists believed that through an ambitious program of education, aimed primarily at the upper classes, but also at women, in general it would be possible to change mentalities at the individual level, and later that would have inevitable reflexes on society as a whole.⁴ Thirdly, the humanists were a product of civil society and assumed that theirs should be a practice of political and civic involvement, both as

counsellors of powerful kings and princes, and as ambassadors or representatives of common interests to cities or countries. ⁵

Nevertheless, the program, as the movement itself, was neither coherent nor organized, and if one can find, nowadays, unquestionable marks of naiveté and lack of union, its common goals were quite revolutionary, in a period still profoundly marked by century old practices alongside the new challenges presented by ever-growing cities, with new economic and political demands.

The humanist movement was not a historical event but a cultural one. The Christian humanists' historical times marked the frontier between the Middle Ages and the Modern Ages they helped bring along. They were like a "bridge" where one can move forward and backward according to the circumstances.

Thomas More's *Utopia* is a mixture of new ideals and old traditions, as it is a mixture of satire and irony, of old and new knowledge, of bold ideas and reactionary ones. What the text is not, in my opinion, is a political manifesto *tout court*. In *The Praise of Folly*, Erasmus proposes to give to Folly the right to advocate its double benefits: those of folly and those of wisdom, thus writing a strong critic of European institutions, attacking all social strata. *Utopia* should be the opposite, according to More's and Erasmus' common plan: it should be the encomium of sapience, which should confront the discourse of the insane sage (Raphael Hythlodæus) with the scorn of the political "sane" elites. ⁶

Both humanists shared the same thoughts concerning education, and the irony and satire they both admired in the works of Lucian of Samosata they had translated, proved to be a powerful instrument (though not free from dangers, as Erasmus would soon find out through the violent criticism his text unleashed).

Apparently, Thomas More, after his return from Antwerp, in 1515, revised his work and added a first book. This one functions as a counterpart to the second book, establishing, at the same time, a silent dialog between the dystopian state (More's London/England) and the land of Utopia, or Hagnopolis, as Budé calls it, the land "below the level of heaven but above the rabble of this known world" (More, 1965: 13). ⁷

More had a long experience in the contact with different levels of society, due to his profession, and he was not a naïve man. He knew, both by experience and by study, that the human society would never be perfect, but it could definitely be

better. Though writing to his peers and fellow humanists, More is committed to the improvement of society as a whole (as any true humanist should) and he could not turn a blind eye to the appalling conditions of the vast majority of the people, contrasting with the luxury of the upper classes.

In *Utopia*, Thomas More tries to represent a country marked by egalitarianism, communion of goods, solidarity, and equal access to knowledge. These, considering sixteenth century English reality, are radical proposals, inconceivable to many. A complete subversion of the *status quo* that only a (wise) fool would dare to propose. However, these are also rational ideas, based on principles Thomas More found in the texts about the early church, in the monastic life (he himself experienced for some time) and in Plato's *Republic*. To these he even adds a certain Christianised Epicureanism. If Plato and Epicurus were part of the "new knowledge", the former were old news dating from the first Christians down to the Middle Ages. This constant mixture of "new" and old material marks most of Hythlodæus' monologue on *Utopia*, but the seriousness of the message is always undermined by the use of nonsense in the naming, and by a subtle irony. This combination destroys, in my opinion, the possibility of interpreting the island of Utopia as being a perfect society, as many later writers have done, and opens the narrative to further discussions.⁸

The utopians live in community, are free to choose their profession according to their personal preferences, but they all have to work in the fields, even if temporarily, since agriculture was a common profession. Agriculture was the most important economic activity, the warrant that secured the equal division of goods and brought stability to society. They took pride in their gardens and orchards, and nature was the mother they all tended. All the other crafts and professions were subordinated, belonging to the individual sphere, but having the common good as their main goal. They lived long, natural, healthy lives, working six hours a day and enjoying the rest of the time pursuing their favourite hobbies. Most chose reading, by far the most common volunteer activity, for education was a constant endeavour. Sound body and sound mind would be an appropriate *motto* for utopian life, an epicurean society combining pleasure, reason and a mystic vision of life.

However, this apparently perfect society had a system of obligations that conditioned individual liberty in the benefit of the community. Professions such as butchers, that had in medieval times a negative connotation, are considered in Utopia as necessary but controlled and established outside the cities. Furthermore euthanasia was admitted, slavery was applied both to defeated foreigners warriors, and as

punishment of several crimes committed by utopians. The death penalty was also applied, though slavery remained the most common penalty since death of a convicted meant fewer workers for the common good.

A perfect society would not need such a system of justice, but utopians are humans, therefore imperfect. Compared to the reality of sixteenth century England, Utopia would be, for the vast majority of the people, a place very close to paradise, a true Hagnopolis.⁹ It promised healthy conditions of life, long hours of leisure, and food on the table every day. Besides, the bases of this society were not strange to any Englishman living in small rural villages, since English society was still a patriarchal system, though less rigid. Losing individual liberty was not an issue for sixteenth century peasants, neither was it the compulsory agricultural work. Those who might protest were the nobles for whom these conditions would seem preposterous and unacceptable, a true dystopia.

Cordwainer Smith's artificial pseudo-utopia

Cordwainer Smith was an American science-fiction writer who wrote one novel and twenty-two short stories all revolving around the same subject: the extrapolation of a possible human history spanning for several millennia and ending precisely in the only novel he wrote (Smith, 1993b; 1994).¹⁰

Analysing Smith's published work the main feeling is that all his writings have two common denominators: the quest of human evolution in order to achieve a perfect society without losing its characteristics as a species; inquiring on what does it mean to be human. In the end no conclusion is definitive in a world where relativity and evolution are the main operators.

In the short story "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard", the reader is introduced to a fictional world where a utopian state of affairs is being destroyed. Apparently, around the year 16000, humanity had arrived precisely at that "country" in the map "at which Humanity is always landing. And when humanity lands there, it looks at it, and seeing a better country, sets sail" (Wilde, 1912: 43). Only, in this case, after founding utopia, humanity set sail to the past.¹¹

We were drunk with happiness in those early years. (...) Reconstructing the old cultures, the old languages, and even the old troubles. The nightmare of perfection

had taken our forefathers to the edge of suicide. (...) We had no idea when we would die. Formerly, I would be able to go to bed and think, "The government has given me four hundred years. Three hundred and seventy four years from now, they will stop the stroon injections and I will then die." Now I knew anything could happen. The safety devices had been turned off. The diseases ran free. With luck, and hope, and love, I might live a thousand years. Or I might die tomorrow. I was free. (Smith, 1993a: 375)

Smith contradicts Oscar Wilde, for progress is not the answer. Perfection, if it means the end of all troubles, all diseases, all work, all efforts, kills the will to live, the ability to enjoy life precisely because it has become predictable, reliable, undervalued. Life is worth living because it is uncertain, unexpected. Because it can be long or cut short without any previous notification. The natural cycle of being born, maturing and dying had been disturbed, controlled, became rational and therefore unnatural.

The analysis of "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" reveals an intertextual interference, not with More's *Utopia*, which, as demonstrated above, is not a perfect society though its inhabitants live a natural life, close to nature. Smith's main intertextual reference is a kind of romantic pastoral, a philosophical novel written by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in 1789, *Paul et Virginie* (Saint-Pierre, 1984). The connection is made clear, though slowly, using the names of the main characters, Paul and Virginia. The delay in the identification is Smith's rhetorical device to force the reader to re-evaluate his/her assumptions. The *paratext* had predisposed the reader to a narrative of extrapolation into the future. However, the beginning gives rise to the first doubts. For the first time in many centuries, people were given names instead of numbers and the female character's name appears in the last paragraph of the first page (p. 375). The narrator's name, who is also the main character, pops up for the first time on page 381. Thus, the reader finds himself dealing with two quite different fictional worlds that, unlike *Utopia*, are not contiguous. They remain looming in the recesses of memory: the year of the first edition of *Paul et Virginie*, the same of the French revolution reminds the promise of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*.

The short story then becomes a much more composite of intertextualities. The end of utopia, decided by the supreme governors, intends to reconstruct the ancient cultures and let lose all controlled diseases. Paul and Virginia are part of the experiment, guinea pigs:

I myself went into a hospital and came out French. Of course, I remembered my early life; I remembered it, but it did not matter. Virginia was French, too, and we

had the years of our future lying ahead of us like ripe fruit hanging in an orchard of perpetual summers. (SMITH, 1993a: 375)

If More, through the wordplay and continuous irony, constantly asks his readers to reconsider their expectations, Smith does the same by relying on the reader's literary culture. One who has read *Paul et Virginie* knows that the two main characters also expected to have "the years of [their] future lying ahead of [them] like ripe fruit hanging in an orchard of perpetual summers." However, the "perpetual summers" are cut short by a natural atmospheric event.¹²

While More's utopians live under the same rules established long before by their founder, the inhabitants of Smith's newfound and still forming dystopia/utopia have to discover the regulations at their own expenses. They are thrown into a new world with imprecise rules, but with the memories of the old order. They are not quite the narrators of a newfound society. They are the constructors of a new one using words they do not know the significance, practising acts, which objectively they ignore the meaning, and having to find them out with every mistake made. They are like infants without guidance thrown in a merciless society from which, suddenly, all safety devices have been removed. Unlike More's utopians, they cannot count on the solidarity of their fellow citizens because this new world is not one of *égalité et fraternité*. All they have left is freedom. Freedom to do whatever they want or feel like, to love or to hate, to trust or to suspect, to protect or to kill. The freedom afforded by the instincts let loose and memories made useless by lack of reference.

The keywords in Smith's short story are precisely equality and fraternity. The previous utopia Paul had experienced was made possible through the slave work of genetically transformed beings, the Underpeople, living out of sight, with few practical exceptions, underneath the planet surface, with no rights, no payment, only duties. However, the Underpeople, though lacking freedom, could count on the fraternity and support of all other unprivileged living in the same conditions: they formed a coherent society that fought for the only right they did not have.

This short story still has other layers of meaning running under the main events. Paul and Virginia are set on a quest for the Abba-Dingo, an obsolete computer renowned for making predictions.¹³ It was popular knowledge that the computer always made truthful prophecies if people travelled the Alpha Ralpha Boulevard, so accessing the computer by the northern side. This kind of common knowledge reminds the reader he/she is in a fictional world that, as in some actual regions of Earth, has

some of its knowledge based on superstition. Even when humans lived under the stupor caused by perfection, this knowledge was accessible to some of them. It was the case of Virginia. Before being French, she had travelled with an aunt to consult the Abba-Dingo. Expecting to have a prediction, they got none because they did not travel the Alpha Ralpha Boulevard.

What is then their quest? Virginia wishes to know if the love she feels for Paul is true or just another memory implanted in her brain.¹⁴ In other words, Virginia wishes to know the truth, to access the “tree of knowledge”. A third character, Maximilien Macht, a tall and sunburnt German with red hair, plays the role of the serpent, the tempter.

During their perilous travel through an abandoned route that climbed up into the clouds to the centre of power, Earthport, Macht takes pleasure in smashing some eggs with his feet, killing unborn birds. Paul, disgusted with this gratuitous action, discovers he can hate, and even kill if necessary. This upsets him deeply:

I liked him not at all. The words of forgotten crimes came into my mind: assassination, murder, abduction, insanity, rape, robbery... We had known none of these things and yet I felt them all. (Smith, 1993a: 389)

The explosion of emotions, unexpected since silenced for centuries, proved that humanity did not evolve under the utopian rules; they had been just like zombies, deprived of feelings, emotions, desires. Left to themselves, all these silenced feelings would surface again, and humankind would travel the same old route of violence and war.

The tempter, the serpent that gives access to knowledge, will be Paul’s guide into the dark recesses of the human mind:

[Fear] is delicious, [Macht] thought. It makes me sick and thrillingly alive. It is like strong medicine, almost as good as stroon. I went there before. High up, I had much fear. It was wonderful and bad and good, all at the same time. I lived a thousand years in a single hour. I wanted more of it, but I thought it would be even more exciting with other people [...] This is what the Lords of the Instrumentality never let us have. Fear. Reality. We were born in a stupor and we died in a dream. Even the underpeople, the animals, had more life than we did. The machines did not have fear. That’s what we were. Machines who thought they were men. And now we are free. (Smith, 1993a: 389)¹⁵

Smith’s short story remains faithful to Saint-Pierre’s novel, even in its final moments. Paul and Virginia get their predictions: Virginia’s is written in her own flesh

and blood, Paul's in a scrap of tissue that once covered an old corpse. Both predictions are painfully true.

Virginie drowned on the shores of her island, before her lover's eyes, because bashfulness — a feeling she had learnt while living in the French society — made it impossible for her to do the right thing: to undress herself and accept the naked mariner's hand to help her swim ashore.

Virginia's blame is by far more profound, because it reveals a flaw of character. She chooses to die rather than let an Underperson touch her. It was pure repugnance, profound disgust, a complete inability to accept the other, even in a life-threatening situation.¹⁶ As predicted, Virginia died twenty-one minutes after Paul received his own prediction on the scrap of cloth.

Paul's previous compassion for the unborn birds dictates his fate, whatever it may have been, for the narrative is left open.

The someone else was C'mell, whom we had first met in the corridor.

I came to get you both, she thought at me, not that the birds cared about her.

What have the birds got to do with it?

You saved them. You saved their young, when the red-topped man was killing them all. All of us have been worried about what you true people would do to us when you were free. We found out. Some of you are bad and kill other kinds of life. Others of you are good and protect life.

Thought I, is that all there is to good and bad? (Smith, 1993a: 398)¹⁷

The paradoxical truth of Smith's technological utopia resides in C'mell's, the cat-woman, underlined words. While human beings were under the control of highly developed technology that left them all in a state of numbness, depending on drugs to avoid depression and suicide, the slaves, the Underpeople, did not have their freedom, but they had security. The change in humans' lives would definitely change the known *status quo*, probably for worse, because humans left loose, without guidance, without a social order or strategy would probably return to their predatory behaviour that almost led them to total annihilation several times in the past.

Conclusion

Comparing two utopias written almost four and a half centuries apart probably should reveal more differences than similarities in what regards their ideas, the message they convey to a critical reader or, using Eco's definition, to an "ideal reader" (Eco, 1997: 21-23). In fact, though they both create two completely different fictional worlds, a *quasi*-medieval one and an ultra-technologically sophisticated other, they both focus on the origin of all utopias: a wish we all share, whose roots are lost in the mists of time and myth, the wish for a better, more harmonious way to live in society. The balance between the individual needs and desires, and the communities' hangs on very uncertain premises.

In the sixteenth century, Thomas More and his fellow humanists shared the dream of a more human society, achieved mainly through the education of princes and the ruling classes, and engaging themselves in active roles of civic life. However, time proved them wrong. Princes and Kings seemed much more attracted to rule according to Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Maquiavel, 2008; Machiavelli, 2008)

Being a critical and intelligent citizen, with strong ties to the community, knowing the ways of the lords and those of the people, Thomas More created an open narrative, a dialogue to be resumed some other day, because Utopia was not yet the right answer:

When Raphael had finished his story, many things came to my mind which seemed very absurdly established in the customs and laws of the people described (...). I knew, however, that he was wearied with his tale, and I was not quite certain that he could brook any opposition to his views, particularly when I recalled his censure of others on account of their fear that they might not appear to be wise enough, unless they found some fault to criticize in other men's discoveries. I therefore praised their way of life and his speech and, taking him by the hand, led him in to supper. I first said, nevertheless, that there would be another chance to think about these matters more deeply and to talk over with him more fully. If only this were some day possible! (More, 1965: 245)

In my opinion, More shared a faint hope that some kind of a better society would be possible one day if, and only if, the transformation came from within each person. Utopia achieved its state of "perfection" at the cost of individual freedom, denying any change that could threaten the established *status quo*, severing human creativity. Utopians can copy, but they cannot create. They are stuck in place and in time forever. That is unnatural, even in a utopia that promotes a healthy, natural way

of living for all. Rationality without emotion, order without disorder, are not successful forms of living, for they are contrary to nature.

Cordwainer Smith, whose professional career was, for a long time, the study of psychological procedures to control masses, compares a natural utopia (*Paul et Virginie*), written in the year of the French Revolution, to a highly technological utopia. From this comparison, he leads the reader to draw the conclusion that the supposed utopia was, in fact, a dystopia that would lead human beings to annihilation. The cost of a peaceful society cannot be achieved by denying human emotions and feelings. Moreover, ignorance is not the right answer.

Paul and Virginia are two persons left unprepared to face and understand the meaning of living in society, the meaning of life itself. They are puppets at the hands of a superior power, lab rats that will die or survive according to decisions they are not ready to make because they lack all the feedback that culture provides. They are not the romantic lovers that grew up surrounded by responsible adults amidst a luxuriant natural milieu. Without social ties, without the background of culture, humans are condemned to extinction.

The apparent choice to be made here, taking More's and Smith's narratives into account, seems to be either lingering or dying. However, that is not what both writers had in mind. Literary utopias are narratives that have an implicit warning, a political aim, and a pedagogical purpose. Human society is always on the verge of self-destruction (warning). Politics are to be conducted by taking into account the whole human being, with all his/her inherent complexities (political aim). Society should never cut its ties with culture and creativity, for its future depends on the way people are educated and integrated into a whole, sharing more than laws and regulations (pedagogical purpose).

Perfection is not part of human DNA, evolution is.

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Notes

1 To refer just one of the most recent critics, I suggest the reading of Fredric Jameson's book (JAMESON, 2005).

2 Aires do Nascimento, in his introduction to the Portuguese translation of More's Utopia, publication actively promoted by Professor J. V de Pina Martins, points out that: "o [primeiro] tradutor inglês (...) transformou a obra num relato de viagem, ganhando em pitoresco, mas apagando a tensão entre o real e o imaginário; se o contexto político assim o exigia, nela, o prolongamento da frase retira a condensação e o valor do significado original, mascara a expressão do autor em função da mensagem filtrada" (MORE, 2009: 152-153) ["the [first] English translator (...) transformed the work on a travel narrative, gaining in picturesque, but erasing the tension between the real and the imaginary; if the political context thus demanded, the lengthening of the sentence withdraws the thickness and the value of the original meaning, masks the author's intention due to a filtered message"].

3 On this matter see, Kumar (Kumar, 1991), Sargent (Sargent, 2010) and Vita Fortunati (Fortunati e Trousson, 2000: 634-643; 2008: 19-30).

4 The humanists considered women had a very important role in the social and political structures of any civilized society for they were the first, and therefore, the most important educators.

5 More wrote the first part of Utopia while he was in Antwerp, performing the duties of ambassador for the city of London.

6 The opinion that The Praise of Folly and Utopia are the outcome of a common plan delineated by Erasmus and More during Erasmus long sojourn at More's house (1509-1511) is advocated, among others, by André Prévost (Prévost, 1978: 65-67) and Pina Martins (Pina Martins, 2006: 82).

7 In spite of Budé's characterization of Utopia as a place between heaven and earth, one must remember that, just a few lines before, Budé baptized the island as Udepotia, a never land. Thus, he takes part, in my opinion, in the same game of words and double senses that runs throughout the entire narrative and gives it its peculiar characteristic of seriousness and *jeu d'esprit*.

8 On Utopia being an open narrative see "Utopia I e Utopia III; a continuação de um diálogo humanista" (Monteiro, 2013).

9 Sargent expresses a similar vision: "... if I were a poor peasant in 1516 I would find [Utopia] extremely appealing" (Sargent, 2004: 4).

10 For a more detailed analysis of Cordwainer Smith's narratives see "People e Underpeople ou as involuções e evoluções da humanidade" (Monteiro, 2012).

11 For a chronology of Smith's "history of humanity" see Lewis (Lewis, 2000: 14).

12 In *Paul et Virginie*, the plot is set in the Mauritius Islands, then a French Colony. Smith's setting is Martinique, a French Department. Both islands, though in different oceans, share similar tropical climates and natural atmospheric disturbances such as hurricanes and tropical tempests. In both, nature is luxuriant.

13 Anthony Lewis suggests that the name Abba-Dingo may mean "father of lies" (Lewis, 2000: 17).

14 In *Paul and Virginie*, Paul expresses the doubt about the faithfulness of their love. He is the one left behind while Virginie is sent to France, to be properly educated as a young woman of high society should be.

15 Not underlined in the text.

16 At this point, I think it is important to take into consideration the cultural moment during which the short story was written: 1961. Civil rights were beginning to become a hot political issue in the United States, mainly in the southern states, and soon it became a judicial problem too, with consecutive rulings from courts up to the Supreme Court. Cordwainer Smith having been a military and a University professor was quite aware of the problem and I think he did not let it pass unnoticed both in this short story, but especially in the novel, *Norstrilia*. Though being published only posthumously, important parts of it ("The Planet Buyer" and "The Underpeople") were published in 1964 and 1968. For further information on the changes of science fiction and utopia in the 60's see Fitting's "Utopia, dystopia and science fiction" (Fitting, 2010).

17 Not underlined in the text.

Teilhard de Chardin's idea of progress and theory of cosmological evolution

José Eduardo Reis¹

UNIVERSIDADE TRÁS-OS-MONTES E ALTO DOURO

INSTITUTO DE LITERATURA COMPARADA DA FACULDADE DE LETRAS DO PORTO

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The aim of this article is to discuss Teilhard de Chardin and his theory of cosmological evolution. However, such a discussion cannot take place ignoring the notion of progress - established, in the context of Western culture, by French social, political and philosophical thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - or without addressing the cultural foundations of this notion, which are rooted both in a Judeo-Christian, apocalyptic conception of time, as well as a belief - which may be rational or fideistic - in the evolving nature of the cosmological process and the course of history. Indeed, it is my view that, in the wake of studies by Ernest Lee Tuveson (1964) and, more recently, Jean Delumeau (1995), no hypothetical history of the notion of progress can begin to consider the origins of this idea without referring to its clear ancestry in the biblical millennial speculations and expectations which, as Norman Cohn (1957) exhaustively demonstrated, fed the imagination of medieval man.

It should be noted that progress is not an ideal Renaissance concept. In the minds of its most illustrious representatives, interpreted in the words of Frances Yates, human history does not arise as mere

evolution from primitive animal origins through ever growing complexity and progress; [in the mind of the educated Renaissance man] the past was always better than the present and progress was revival, rebirth, renaissance of antiquity. The classical humanist recovered the literature and the monuments of classical antiquity with a sense of return to the pure gold of a civilisation better and higher than his own. (Yates, 1978: 1)

It would not be thus in the century of the Enlightenment. In the euphoric rationality found in the writings of its most eminent spirits - from the English empiricists to the criticism of Kant, through the French encyclopedists - the eighteenth century did not feel indebted to the past, and was not so much renovative as strongly innovative. It was then that the notion of progress took shape as an autonomous and distinct chapter in the history of thought. Assimilating the ideas of inevitable development of being and prosperous evolution of society, it became a code word to describe the axiologically upward movement of human becoming towards ever more perfect stages of moral achievement and social coexistence. Moreover, despite the radically innovative intentions of its greatest theorists - the social thinkers that Frank Manuel calls *Prophets of Paris* (1965), namely, Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon and Comte -, the formulation of the notion of progress also saw a resurgence in the general principle of a finalist explanation of the world, by then no longer theological but historical-philosophical, involving the concept of linear time inherent to Judeo-Christian eschatology, as well as a resurgent appreciation of the future dimension of time. The social philosophers of the eighteenth century and the first sociologists of the nineteenth century - *The Ideologists of Progress*, as Krishan Kumar in turn calls them (1978: 13) - viewed the successive ways of thinking and acting evidenced through History as signs of the process of growth and maturation of Humanity, impelled by a desire for continuous intellectual and social progress pointing to the future as the final culmination of its ontic and material fulfilment. Thus, the fundamental idea of progress, as formulated by the free thinkers of the eighteenth century and systematized by their followers in the nineteenth century, is based on four key points, namely: (i) the acknowledgement of a discernible continuity to the evolution of man's social and spiritual history, albeit not without turbulence, hesitations or retrogressive movements, which is divisible into phases or stages, revealing in their sequence an inherent design of maturation and perfection, both ontic and material; (ii) that this continuity is governed by historical laws rationally induced from analysis of the events produced by man and not deduced from belief in a providential scheme of divine ordination, (iii) that through knowledge of these laws it is possible to predict the ineluctable nature of advancement from one particular stage of development to the next; (iv) finally, that this advancement requires the intervention of the will and effort of men to be achievable.

As can be seen, the notion of progress constitutes the cornerstone of secular and materialist philosophies of history, which clearly prolong and provide continuity, in empirically recycled patterns, to the eschatological visions of the becoming of humanity under the providential direction of divine will. It is worth making brief mention here of one of the most stunning theologies of History, that of the late twelfth century abbot Joachim of Fiore, one of the most remote representatives of the lineage of thought which Teilhard de Chardin follows, both in his study of reason (as a paleontologist) and study of faith (as a theologian).

In his own way, Joachim of Fiore was a kind of philosopher of history seeking to provide a coherent explanation and make logical sense of the world's temporal course. Accordingly, he founded his whole theory about the meaning of historical becoming on a basic principle of reason, able to discern the purpose of the past, present and future order of human affairs. Of course, in twelfth century Europe this principle of reason could neither be sufficient nor immanent but necessarily transcendent, induced from Christian theology and the narrative contents of the Bible, the matrix book which informed all essential truth about the history of the world, the designs of God and his progressive revelation. Devoting all his intellectual energy to the in-depth reading and exegesis of the Holy Book, Joaquim inferred analogies and established correspondences between numbers, events and characters from the Old and New Testament, thus building up an intricate network of symbolic meanings which, according to him, consistently and successively revealed the action of the various attributes of the persons of the Holy Trinity at different stages in the History of the world. In other words, the becoming of time and human History itself was intrinsically linked to the trinity of the Christian God, which was revealed progressively in its paradoxical unity and heteronomy: if the Son proceeded from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeded from both, then History, understood as a process in which free human action was subsumed and determined by the will of God, was no more than a reflection of this divine triple avatar. History was thus divided into three phases or three states (*status*): the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of these three states was split into seven periods (the number seven, which had already been used by St. Augustine to establish his own chronology of the world, having its biblical basis by analogy with the seven days of the Creation), the *aetates*, each designated by the name of a notable figure from sacred history.

Considering the time span of human history as if it were an unfolding of different divine attributes, as a spiritual progress, Joachim zealously describes it in

biological terms of germination and fructification, of conception and birth. Therefore, the state of the Father was conceived or germinated with Adam, began to bear fruit with Abraham and ended with Zechariah, father of St. John the Baptist. It was a state characterized by the prescription of divine law, by the ordering of commandments aimed at disciplining and instilling fear in Man. The state of the Son germinated with Osias (king of Judah in the seventh century BC), began to bear fruit with Jesus, and would come to an end, according to the calculations of the Calabrian abbot, around 1260. Its fundamental attribute was the humility of God, who became incarnate to redeem His creation. The men of this more civilized / spiritualized age no longer responded with fearful obedience, but with confident concern for the will of God. Nevertheless, His law remained external and did not correspond completely with human will. The state of the Holy Spirit, which germinated with St. Benedict (c.480-547), would begin to bear fruit around 1260 and end in the Consummatio Seculi, at the end of time. It is a condition in which, due to the general illumination of mankind by direct action of the Paraclete, spiritual freedom and compassionate love would reign, human will merging with divine will. This is how Marjorie Reeves describes this sequence:

In a lyrical impulse towards the end of the Liber Concordie he [Joachim] makes use of imaginative sequences to express this supreme movement of history: the first status was subordinate to the law, the second status to grace, the third status, expected soon, was under a still greater grace; the first fell to scientia, the second to sapientia, the third will be that of plenitudo intellectus; the first was lived in the servitude of slaves, the second in the servitude of sons, but the third will be in freedom; the first was the time of punishment, the second of action, but the third will be the time of contemplation; the first was lived in fear, the second in faith, the third will be in love; the first was the status of slaves, the second of sons, but the third will be that of friends; the first was of the elders, the second of the young, the third will be of the children; the first was lived under starlight, the second at the light of dawn, the third will be in full daylight; the first in winter, the second at the beginning of spring, the third in summer; the first is that of nettles, the second of roses, the third of lilies; in the first there is grass, in the second rye, in the third wheat; to the first belongs water, to the second wine, to the third oil. (Reeves, 1976: 14-15)

Joachimist theology of history ultimately reveals a fideistic belief in the measured and benign becoming of History, in the phased rise of Humanity towards theological goodness and happiness. Though on the margins of the official doctrine of the Roman Church, which was firmly Augustinian and Thomistic in essence, it aroused and legitimized expectations of social movement and change among the dispossessed throughout the Middle Ages. Yet it also reveals a conviction that would later come to be secularised in theories of social emancipation and philosophies of progress, heralding a final and perfect time in the course of history. Among many other

concepts postulated by the free-thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such theories ranged from Auguste Comte's representation of the positivist state to the communist society outlined by Karl Marx, through Hegel's projected Prussian state - the complete consummation of the absolute Idea, according to the idealist German philosopher.

The "spiritual posterity" of Joachimist thought - to paraphrase the title of a voluminous work by Cardinal Henri de Lubac (1978) - is indeed varied and profuse, and one of its most illustrious and rightful heirs is the Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), who produced, in the mid-twentieth century, a fascinating evolutionary and prospectivist theory of the world.

His thought combines science, religion and prophetic utopianism. He offers a rational explanation of the origin of life and the emergence of human intelligence, founded on empirical observations and logical axioms (which is basically summarised in the first three chapters - "La prévie" (Pre-Life), "La vie" (Life), "La pensée" (Thought) - of his foremost book *Le Phénomène Humain (The Human Phenomenon)*, written in the late 1930s and early 1940s and which sums up his essential and original lines of thought as a paleontologist). In addition, he strives metaphysically to substantiate the cosmic fact - *Le Milieu Divin (The Divine Milieu)* - as well as outlining prophetically, from his scientific theses and theological speculations, the becoming of man and the world - *L'Avenir de l'Homme (The Future of Man)*. In simple terms, it may be said that de Chardin's theory of evolution is a modern substitute for Joachim's concept of the progress of history towards a stage of general illumination of mankind. However, while Joachim understood such illumination as an effect of the descent of the Holy Spirit and as an imminent event, enunciated cryptically by God's Book, de Chardin sees it as a collective and convergent ascent to the divine, as an ultimate product of cosmic evolution: its future occurrence - which he predicts to be in a few thousand years - is certain and pre-heralded in the very framework and laws governing the structure of nature. It is an illumination that will signal and coincide with the final stage in the evolution of conscious life, a stage to be determined by the principle of full solidarity and total union among men, that is, determined by the same synthetic principle that governs the essential activity of nature, and which can immediately be witnessed in the congregating movement of the molecular particles constituting inorganic matter, the "lithosphere" - the first layer, we could say, of the composite and diverse structure of the world.

As opposed to the Darwinian idea that life is a process subordinated to the principle of separation and division, a ruthless selective struggle for survival and assertion of the fittest, de Chardin's core theory is that the primary and radical condition of life is precisely union: evolution does not separate but rather becomes more complex through increasingly more elaborate, focused and structured syntheses of matter, in an *élan*, or life-force, that continues to manifest and determine the progressive increase in consciousness. In *Le Phénomène Humain*, Chardin proposes the following equation: *Evolution = Rise of Consciousness. / Rise of Consciousness = Effect of Union* (Chardin, 1955: 243); and in *L'Avenir de L'Homme* reiterates it, slightly altering the terms: "*Progress = Rise of Consciousness. / Rise of Consciousness = Effect of Organization.*" (Chardin, 1959: 93)

For Chardin, the "rise of consciousness", synonymous with the idea of progress, in turn an effect of the tendency towards general synthesis to which the different states of matter obey, is thus the central term of the equation that represents one of the fundamental tenets of his thought, namely: that consciousness - being revealed at a higher level with the advent of reflection, with the phenomenon of knowing what we know, that is, with the "homanisation" of the planet - is a kind of entelechy already present in less elaborate forms of matter in primordial life - even before that, in pre-life - and remarkably, in its most complex original form, with the formation, the 'awakening' of the cell. In this perspective, the cell is simultaneously regarded as the 'natural grain of life', i.e. as the first vital corpuscular manifestation, but also as a kind of minimal unit containing psychic energy - this energy being relatively higher than that of the molecular 'grain' - which prefigures or prepares a series of psychic transformations that will subsequently lead to the emergence of the human phenomenon. This relatively crude psychic energy that the cell is made to carry is what de Chardin designates the interior, the *Dedans* of matter itself, coextensive to its exterior, its *Dehors*, its granular form, its mechanical quality. The very substance matrix - *L'Étoffe* (The Stuff) - of the Universe, which participated in the formation and continues to participate in the evolution and transformation of the world, is bifacial, at once internal consciousness and external matter. This leads de Chardin, therefore, to concede that even before the awakening of cellular life, i.e. before the formation of the "biosphere", "a certain mass of elementary consciousness was originally imprisoned in terrestrial Matter." (Chardin 1955: 62)

The transition from inorganic to organic, from pre-life to life - the "cellular revolution" - is but the realization of a particular form of synthesis, a higher form of

the organization of matter, of the integration in a minimal space of a great organic multiplicity (albuminoids, proteins, water, phosphorous, different kinds of minerals), together with an increase in interiority, a qualitative change in the psychism latent in inorganic matter. This "rise in psychic temperature", this increase in interiority correlates with the increased interiority of the Earth itself. Essential to de Chardin is the idea that matter - regardless of its degree of magnitude - complexifies through folding, and that consciousness - regardless of its level of participation - arises from the supportive interconnection of different energy centres. Accordingly, from there, he emphasizes the importance played by vectors of compression and agglomeration in the arrangement of higher forms of human organization and socialization: at whatever stage of the world's evolution, what prevails is always the same tendency towards synthesis and realization of the fundamental condition of "unity of diversity". Once the "step of life" is taken, it has but to expand and rise, and with it consciousness. Following the birth of thought, of reflection, and the fact that consciousness, "folding back" on itself, has acquired the ability to observe itself, another sphere has begun to expand, conditioned by and organically related to the lithosphere and biosphere, and becoming coupled to both in the evolutionary process of the constituent complexification of the world: the noosphere.

In the view of Teilhard de Chardin, the world thus appears to consist of three different layers or strata, which correspond to three different stages in its evolutionary formation: the lithosphere or inorganic layer, the biosphere or living layer and noosphere or layer of thought. In all of these layers, psychic energy operates in a more or less latent and indelible fashion, and although their configuration is one of relative constituent autonomy, they retain between them nexuses of organic and functional interdependence.

With due recognition of the theoretical differences in play, some analogical connections can be established between Joachim of Fiore's theory of history and Teilhard de Chardin's theory of cosmic evolution; the same hermeneutic scheme at once ternary and unitary for deciphering the progress of the world is in some way common to both: whereas the former saw divine action as the driving force of history and full spiritualization of man, the latter sees the action of cosmic time - which his religious sentiment interprets as a manifestation of God's will - driving the process whereby matter becomes conscious, the condition of its future full spiritualization. Joachim saw the action of the *Unus Deus* throughout time and divided the course of history in accordance with the discrete and successive predominance of each of the

essential attributes of the three Persons of the Trinity. De Chardin, meanwhile, sees the action of the substance (*L' Étoffe*) of the universe, at once material and spiritual, folding back on itself and being succeeded ternarily by ever more complex strata of material synthesis, endowed with increasingly intense, focused and differentiated consciousness.

According to de Chardin's evolutionary theory, all of this growth, expansion and elevation of life is naturally subject to a temporal process, a *Durée*, which marks the rhythm of creative action and closes an intention of sublimation. The world is essentially a continual manifestation and transformation of energy; any element of nature, any corpuscle is animated by energy, which manifests itself in two distinct ways: tangentially - that is, by mechanical, physical, associative energy, which acts by drawing together all elements of the same natural order and making them mutually supportive -, and radially - that is, by psychic, boundless, dynamic energy, which acts by boosting elements to states or levels of organization that are more complex, more "folded" and "focused". The first of the two forms of energy is reproductive and its main function is to operate the synthesis between the elements considered individually; the second is transformative in nature, generating the intrinsic and qualitative changes to which matter is subject. From one fold to another, each synthesis to the next, metamorphosis to metamorphosis, time promotes the elevation of life, until the appearance of the "Human phenomenon". This is the highest existing level of consciousness and the perfected product of the combined action of tangential energy with radial energy, which animates the élan of the cosmic substance (*L'Étoffe*). It is a hyper-complex biological phenomenon that on another scale of synthesis and organization of matter cannot cease to reproduce the same principles and laws that led to the awakening of the cell: the socialization of human history prolongs the vital organic movements and the social phenomenon is the culmination of the biological phenomenon. The social evolution of man itself is nothing more than a progressive, integrative unification of differences (consummation of unity of diversity) that tends towards a critical stage of overcoming. It is the forces of confluence that arise in the very process of branching and differentiation between species, races, peoples and nations, as though the level of conflict inherent in the evolution of life could play only a secondary role in relation to the objective of the final cohesion. Teleology and the idea of future govern de Chardin's evolutionary thought and cosmic-eschatological hope; his scientific research as a paleontologist, as a reader of the distant signs of the origins of life on Earth, as a speleologist of the past, allows him to preview and make a forecast of the future, and legitimizes his prophecy of a "mega-

synthesis" of humanity and its metamorphosis in a higher ontic state into what he calls survival (*Survie*). "The future is more beautiful than all of the pasts, this is my faith" - (*apud* Onimus, 1968: 153); but faith in what future, it could be asked? A future that will prolong the constructive ingenuity of the forms of organization of matter until its final consummation, and which will take to an ultimate end the synthesis of the highest organization of intelligent matter, human society. This will be transformed into a super or ultra-humanity, consciously awakened and in global solidarity, "super-personalized" and with each turned to the other; in short, a future super-conscious. This survival or subsequent state in the evolution of life will be characterized by the triumph of totality over individuality, without implying the annihilation of the singular human being. Each individual, despite or as a result of the natural propensity to unite, will gain greater personality; not being mistaken in the whole, nor disassociated from it, but participating in it with his irreducible difference (an organic network of centres of conscious energy cooperating between themselves and achieving the aforementioned "unity of diversity"). It will be a state attainable not by forced processes outside the intelligent will, but by the effect of the "conspiracy of love" and as the inevitable result of the "great option" - the convergence - that will be arise in the becoming of essential, vital evolution. De Chardin is in no doubt, therefore, that humanity has reached a phase of accelerated collectivization. It is a world converging on the increasingly intense union of individual consciousnesses, in which each thinking element realises his own purpose not in the consummation of himself, but by exceeding himself, by virtue of radial energy, and incorporating himself onto a higher plane of consciousness that extends beyond there from individuality to universal substance; a world witnessing the formation of the 'grain of thought', the whole scale, as in the distant past it witnessed the formation of the cellular 'grain of life'; a world that is seeing an unprecedented development of the noosphere and a collective synthesis, which is a demonstration of the potential of the fundamental energy of life, of the love that in solidarity deepens the relativity of the individual sense of existence. In such a world, the future appearance of another state must be considered, beyond the collective, beyond socialization and co-reflection, beyond the noosphere, and beyond the ultra-human. Teilhard de Chardin thus considers that the present indications of increased global awareness, the result of the phenomenon of socialization, far from being representative of a final stage in the evolution of conscious matter, correspond rather to a transition to a new and final phase that will be defined by its spatio-temporal transcendence, by the spiritualisation of matter and finally by the extinction of the planet as a physical, material entity. The present well-being, sign of a general improvement in forms of

social organization (but whose empowerment without spiritual elevation could ultimately only lead to a life of tedium), will be sublimated in a future of increased being, and the excessive compression of the noosphere will transform psychic qualities into spiritual qualities: humanity will then be set to converge on what Chardin calls the Omega point. As a corollary of the mechanism of planetisation, we have then to admit the existence

ahead of, or rather in the heart of, a universe prolonged along its axis of complexity, [of] a divine centre of convergence. That nothing may be prejudged, and in order to stress its synthesizing and personalizing function, let us call it the point Omega. Let us suppose that from this universal centre, this Omega point, there constantly emanate radiations hitherto only perceptible to those persons whom we call "mystics." Let us further imagine that, as the sensibility or response to mysticism of the human race increases with planetisation, the awareness of Omega becomes so widespread as to warm the earth psychically while physically it is growing cold. Is it not conceivable that Mankind, at the end of its totalisation, its folding-in upon itself, may reach a critical level of maturity where, leaving Earth and stars to lapse slowly back into the dwindling mass of primordial energy, it will detach itself from this planet and join the one true, irreversible essence of things, the Omega point? A phenomenon perhaps outwardly akin to death: but in reality a simple metamorphosis and arrival at the supreme synthesis. An escape from the planet, not in space or outwardly, but spiritually and inwardly, such as the hypercentration of cosmic matter upon itself allows (...). The more I think about this mystery, the more it appears to me, in my dreams, as a "turning-about" of consciousness - as an eruption of interior life - as an ecstasy. There is no need to rack our brains to understand how the material vastness of the universe will ever be able to disappear. Spirit has only to be reversed, to move into a different zone, for the whole shape of the world immediately to be changed (...). It is then, we may be sure, that the Parousia will be realized in a creation that has been taken to the climax of its capacity for union (...). Within a now tranquil ocean, each drop of which, nevertheless, will be conscious of remaining itself, the astonishing adventure of the world will have ended. The dream of every mystic will have found its full and legitimate satisfaction. (Chardin, 1959: 155; 402)

It is understandable that writings of this tenor, though written by a devout Jesuit, were regarded as suspect and were subject to admonition by the Vatican. The truth is that such a scientific conception of the world, more scholarly than sceptically creative, necessarily also has the equally heretical theory that consciousness manifests itself, albeit in a rudimentary way, in inert matter or in its non-intelligent organic form (plant, animal), i.e. that matter is inseparable from spirit². De Chardin's evolutionary theory is based on his duly reasoned work as a paleontologist, worthy of the greatest scientific credit. He boldly explains the process of how the transformation of matter follows a transcendent plan but requires the immanent to become manifest in increasingly complex and refined ways. These explanations aim to demonstrate that time is providentially benign in creating new levels of consciousness and strengthening the bonds of affection between beings. Ultimately, future time will

redeem all creation and ceasing to be time, will be dissolved into another dimension. The evolution of conscious matter will eventually see the expansion of love on a universal scale. Without apocalypses or transient stages of grace, the world will be extinguished by the effect of “psychic (over)heating”, by the metamorphosis of the unitive state of mystical consciousness - in a return to the most perfect synthesis of all, the indivisible origin of the universe or, in religious terms, the integration of the divine whole. All will fatally end well - that is Teilhard de Chardin’s fedeistic message of hope. Everything will end up blessed.

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Notes

1 The author would like to thank Jonathan Lewis for his qualified English modelling of this essay.

2 The latest theories of physics and biology appear to reiterate and confirm Teilhard de Chardin's theories of evolution and expansion of consciousness, particularly when they undo traditional ideas about the structure of matter and the distinction between the organic and inorganic world, as well as differences in behaviour that separate the human from the nonhuman. In this regard, read the Oration of Sapience given by Boaventura Sousa Santos at the University of Coimbra in 1985. It reads as follows: "The characteristics of self-organization, metabolism, and self-reproduction, previously considered specific to living beings, are now assigned to pre-cellular systems of molecules. And in both are recognized properties and behaviours previously considered specific to human beings and social relations. [...] all these theories [of eminent contemporary scientists] introduce to the field concept of historicity and process, freedom, self-determination and even consciousness before man and woman had reserved it for themselves. [...] in a certain return to the panpsychism of Leibniz, there begins today to be recognized a psychic dimension in nature, "the broader mind" that Bateson speaks about, of which the human mind is only a part, an mind inherent to the global social system and to the planetary ecology that some call God" (Santos, 1993: 37-38).

From “the tyranny of the stomach” to the World “beyond”: Food and Utopia in *The House of Mirth*

Stéphanie Durrans

UNIVERSITY BORDEAUX MONTAIGNE

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Introduction

(...) what a study might be made of the tyranny of the stomach—the way a sluggish liver or insufficient gastric juices might affect the whole course of the universe, over-shadow everything in reach — chronic dyspepsia ought to be among the ‘statutory causes’; a woman’s life might be ruined by a man’s inability to digest fresh bread. Grotesque? Yes — and tragic — like most absurdities. There’s nothing grimmer than the tragedy that wears a comic mask.

Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth

This is how Ned Silverton expresses the power of food in a long tirade directed against George Dorset’s dyspeptic condition, which resulted in their ending up on “such a damned hole as the Riviera” (*ibidem*). The role played by food and eating habits in *The House of Mirth* has probably been underplayed as a jarring note in a novel otherwise intent on depicting Lily’s tragic fate. Of course, Wharton’s self-definition as a novelist of manners can account for the presence of so many details about dining styles and eating habits as indicators of the evolution of New York’s aristocratic society, but the intrusive, ostentatious nature of references to people’s stomachs and digestive troubles remains most unexpected under the pen of such a well-bred young lady who had no doubt been brought up in the belief that such things should not be mentioned in good company.¹ As a keen observer of the social scene, Wharton could not fail to take an interest in the development of eating patterns at the time. The many pages she devotes to the dinners and delicacies of old New York in *A Backward Glance* testify to the power of food on the mind of an author looking back with

nostalgia to the days of her childhood. However, relishing the memories of her childhood dishes is one thing; describing the digestive system of her characters is another that is slightly more unexpected from the daughter of Lucretia Rhineland Jones. Somehow, the comic touch brought by references to food² in *The House of Mirth* does not fit in with more sentimental or tragic readings of Lily's fate. To my knowledge, only two critics have called attention to the role played by food in the novel. In "From Tea to Chloral: Raising the Dead Lily Bart," Bonnie Lynn Gerard draws attention to "metaphors of food and digestion" (Gerard, 1998: 409) and points to fruitful areas of research, but the bulk of her essay focuses on Lily as a naturalistic heroine and Gerard never actually investigates the deeper significance of such a metaphorical network. In his brilliant study of foodways in nineteenth-century American literature, Mark McWilliams analyses the luncheon scene at the Barts' as part of Wharton's more global social satire: "The chicken in aspic and the fish mark the scene, remaining on display even after the servant attempts to remove them, with an insistence that simultaneously highlights both the substance and the superficiality of wealth" (McWilliams, 2012: 175). But even he goes no further and fails to take into account the role of food metaphors in dramatizing the plight of the heroine. And yet, Wharton undoubtedly stands out as one of the novelists who explored and capitalized on the rich narrative possibilities of food and dinner gatherings at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century - a world in which "a good cook was the best introduction to society," according to Carry Fisher (Wharton, 1990: 88).

But *fin de siècle* America was also fertile terrain for dystopian impulses as fears of decadence and degeneracy were gradually gaining ground, replacing the mid-century ideals that had led such thinkers as Fourier and Emerson to establish utopian communities like Brook Farm. Wharton started writing at a time when literary utopias of all sorts were flourishing on both sides of the Atlantic: *Mizora: World of Women* (Mary E. Bradley Lane), generally acknowledged as the first feminist utopian novel, was published in 1881, *Looking Backward* (Edward Bellamy) in 1888, *News from Nowhere* (William Morris) in 1890, *A Traveller from Altruria* (William Dean Howells) in 1893 and *The Time Machine* (H.G. Wells) in 1895. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that Lily Bart should find herself torn between two alternatives that crystallize such a tension: on the one hand Lawrence Selden's ideal "republic of the spirit," and on the other hand the more materialistic universe of upper-class New York, a world revolving around dinner tables to the point of becoming obsessed with its digestive apparatus.³ This essay consequently purports to throw light on Lily's halting progress towards redemption and a utopian space of her own as revealed

through her ambivalent relationship to food. After a preliminary overview of the dramatic changes that affected American society in the second half of the nineteenth century, we shall focus on Lily's destiny as a potential prey striving to survive in a world of predators. As we are going to see, each of the details provided about food in *The House of Mirth* acquires both social and metaphorical significance, and one could even identify an underlying narrative thread charting Lily's initiation to life through the main dinner scenes punctuating the novel. From such a perspective, her search for a utopian space of expression culminates in her encounter with Nettie Struther in whose kitchen she spends a few moments before going back to her room and taking a lethal dose of chloral.

Food and Society in Nineteenth-Century America⁴

The power of food was clearly demonstrated by the outcome of the presidential election of 1840 after a breathtaking campaign that pitted "soupe à la reine" (i.e. the incumbent president Martin Van Buren) against "raw beef without salt" (his Whig opponent, William Henry Harrison). Van Buren's detractors did not hesitate to read out the whole menu of a White House dinner in front of an assembly of congressmen with a view to exposing the extent to which the president had alienated himself from his people by such dubious associations with French cuisine and "royalist" dishes.⁵ Inversely, Harrison had allegedly survived on "raw beef without salt" and was thus a more fitting representative for the conquering nation's democratic ideals. More than anecdotal evidence, the raw beef that brought Harrison to power is a telltale sign of the nation's consciousness that "food reflects and shapes individual and national identity" (McWilliams, 2012: xv). By the end of the nineteenth century, such concern with preserving the myth of Republican simplicity came to clash with modern modes of conspicuous consumption. The utopia that the US was supposed to embody in the eyes of the world somehow turned into dystopia under the pressure of market forces, consumer culture and excesses of all sorts. The period during which *The House of Mirth* is set was indeed characterized by "dramatic changes in eating habits" and "continuing tension between republican simplicity and cosmopolitan sophistication [that] helped create the American food scene we know today" (*idem*, 16). The period between the Civil War and the First World War was marked by the rise of haute cuisine. At the same time, though, "increased consumption was celebrated in popular guides like T.C. Duncan's *How to Be Plump* (1878)" (*idem*, 112). New kitchen ranges

and cookstoves revolutionized family life, cookbooks became increasingly popular and the first American cooking school was established by Juliet Corson in New York City in 1876 (*idem*, 132). Eating habits were most dramatically affected both inside and outside the domestic sphere. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a new type of restaurants sprouting up across America (and especially in New York):

Unlike the eating house or inn common in earlier periods, where a single meal with a fixed price was served at set times at a common table, restaurants offered what Joanne Finkelstein calls a 'diorama of desire': a menu of individually priced dishes served at any time at private tables (idem, 117).

"[O]bscene displays of wealth and poor taste" (*ibidem*) could be observed in certain restaurants as the pressure of conspicuous consumption reached its peak. As shown in *The House of Mirth*, such restaurants collapsed the boundaries between public and private spheres by turning fancy dinners into a veritable spectacle to be reported in the popular press of the time, hence the presence of the journalist Dabham, specifically invited by Mrs. Bry to make sure the news of her success with the Duchess would reach across the Atlantic, not to mention the mass of people gathered at Bécassin's with the only purpose of watching the guests gorge themselves on sumptuous food. As underlined by McWilliams, "Dining became an individual act communally visible, and even restaurant design, with large windows to attract guests and spacious rooms filled with individual tables, encourages both voyeurism and performance" (*idem*, 119). Even after her disgrace, Lily significantly makes a point to eat only dishes that show she can still afford them; form and status consequently prevail over matters of taste. She goes to the restaurants she used to frequent in better days, restaurants where "she lunched luxuriously, as she said, on her expectations" (Wharton, 1990: 178). The aim is not to eat but to *be seen* eating the kind of food that helps her keep up appearances in the face of adversity: "Think of Grace Stepney's satisfaction if she came in and found us lunching on cold mutton and tea! What sweet shall we have today, dear - *Coupe Jacques* or *Pêches à la Melba*?" (*idem*, 178).

While the boundaries between public and private spheres became porous in the newly fashionable restaurants of the time, strict compartmentalization was still the rule at home. In *The House of Mirth*, threats of transgression in the social order are consistently associated with food and eating habits. Lily's intense discomfort when waking up at Gerty's the morning following her confrontation with Trenor is first generated by "a smell of cooking [penetrating] the crack of the door" as she is lying in

bed (*idem*, 134). Gerty is indeed first introduced to the reader as a young woman who has “such queer things to eat. Her cook does the washing and the food tastes of soap” (*idem*, 8). By the same token, “the mere idea of immorality was as offensive to Mrs. Peniston as a smell of cooking in the drawing-room” (*idem*, 100). As for Trenor, he does not hesitate to denigrate his hosts behind their backs and he expresses his reluctance to stay for dinner at the Wellington Brys’ or even accept the offer of a cigar since “likely as not the *chef* buys the cigars” (*idem*, 109). Lastly, the façade of the Greiner house (significantly bought over by Rosedale) is described as “a complete architectural meal” and consequently reveals the humble origins of a man who “came from a milieu where all the dishes are put on the table at once” (*idem*, 126), as opposed to the Trenor house, built with the best of tastes and which “doesn’t look like a banqueting-hall turned inside out” (*idem*, 126-127). In all these cases, preserving the purity of this aristocratic caste is predicated upon the ability to restrict cooking and its attendant smells to their proper sphere, thereby containing the potential threat of contamination within prescribed limits. Interestingly enough, though, Wharton’s own ubiquitous use of food metaphors points to the failure of these attempts to restrict such risks of invasion.

Lily Bart as Fair Game in a World of Predators

Men’s relationship to food usually serves as a good indicator of their position or of their role in society. George Dorset is introduced as “a mournful dyspeptic, intent on finding out the deleterious ingredients of every dish and diverted from this care only by the sound of his wife’s voice” (*idem*, 44). As for “young Silverton, who had meant *to live on* proof-reading and write an epic, [he] now *lived on* his friends and had become critical of truffles” (*idem*, 45, emphasis added). Rosedale’s social ascent is significantly measured by the number of banquets and high society dinners he is invited to (*idem*, 188). Even his presents bespeak the importance of dinner invitations as indicators of social acceptability, as shown by the comically disproportionate diamond pendant, “as big as a dinner-plate” (*idem*, 72) that he gives to Gwen Van Osburgh on her wedding-day. But the man who undoubtedly dominates the social scene is Gus Trenor who, “with his heavy carnivorous head sunk between his

shoulders" is described "[preying] on a jellied plover" (*idem*, 45) during the dinner given at Bellomont.

While men are defined by what they eat, women are more likely to be defined by what they cook and how they cook it. In most American novels of the time, "Skill in cookery and household management became portrayed as a measure of a woman's moral worth" (McWilliams, 2012: 63). Failures in cookery could even be signs of serious character flaws (idem, 77). McWilliams shows the extent to which such a metaphorical "code [became] internalized [so that] novelists [could] use this shared knowledge to shape readers' opinions of fictional characters" (idem, 80). "Women who cannot cook are either dangerous (...) or deeply immoral" (idem, 81) and initiation to the art of cooking was often used to give the measure of the heroine's growth and spiritual development. Such literary codes could well apply to Gerty Farish. The young woman arouses a sense of wonder in Selden as he marvels at her ability to make her own caramel custard and later inquires about her domestic arrangements, learning how to "improvise delicious dinners in a chafing-dish" (Wharton: 1990, 122). This leads Selden to wonder naively about Lily's own abilities as a housewife as he contemplates proposing to her, but Wharton actually appropriates the language of cuisine to portray her female characters (Gerty excepted⁶) in a more disturbing light:

Miss Van Osburgh was a large girl with flat surfaces and no high lights: Jack Stepney had once said of her that she was as reliable as roast mutton. His own taste was in the line of less solid and more highly-seasoned diet; but hunger makes any fare palatable, and there had been times when Mr. Stepney had been reduced to a crust (idem, 40)

Later, Miss Van Osburgh's face is said to be "turned towards her companion's like an empty plate held up to be filled" (*idem*, 40). Even Carry Fisher has a "general air of embodying a 'spicy paragraph'" (*idem*, 45). As to the Gormers, they "swallowed [Lily's] past as easily as they did Miss Anstell's, and with no apparent sense of any difference in the size of the mouthful" (*idem*, 182). In the refined world of *The House of Mirth*, women consequently assume the unexpected role of gourmet fare - not the role of cooks or housewives one would expect them to be given.⁷

As pointed out by Gerard, "Wharton's New York society in *The House of Mirth* is, without doubt, a consuming society, both figuratively and literally" (Gerard, 1998: 409) and "Lily Bart's pursuit of social status as an empowered consumer presents her with a paradox: in order to become a consumer she must first present herself as an item to be consumed" (*idem*, 410). Women undoubtedly stand out as beautiful objects destined for male consumption - a word to be taken quite literally in *The House of Mirth*. Instead of participating in the game, Lily turns into fair game for the male

predators around her. Her “flesh and blood loveliness” (Wharton, 1990: 106) in the *tableau vivant* scene further dramatizes this tragic plight. Men like Van Alstyne significantly prefer to leave the place before dinnertime, implying that the sight of such “goddesses gobbling terrapin” (*idem*, 109) would spoil their own pleasure and constitute a breach in these women’s assigned status as mere objects of consumption. Lily’s observation that “[f]inery laid off is as unappetizing as the remains of a feast” (*idem*, 133) similarly draws a disquieting parallel between food and women if we consider the recurrent metonymic association between women and clothes. Even in the restaurant scene with Rosedale, at the end of the novel, Lily’s beauty is made to stand out against the “dull chocolate-coloured background of the restaurant” (*idem*, 226). When Rosedale takes Lily back to her place, they both walk through a neighborhood that is strewn with “the *disjecta membra* of bygone dinners” (*idem*, 229). The Latin phrase emphasizes another disquieting parallel between humans and refuse. It thus takes on metaphorical significance and resonates hauntingly in the minds of readers who are aware of Lily’s move from the dinner tables on which she figured as a gourmet dish to the rubbish heap of high society.

More disturbing still is the fact that even relationships between women are characterized by this type of survivalist attitude. As one who can easily move back and forth between the aristocratic world of New York and a more disreputable society, Carry Fisher is in the best position to highlight this other, seamy side of the social tapestry. As she is about to hand Mrs. Bry over to Lily, Carry reassures her friend: “oh, we’re on the best of terms externally; we’re lunching together; but at heart it’s *me* she’s lunching on” (*idem*, 156). About Gerty, who she dismisses as a very dull, bland young woman, she says to Lily: “you’re used [to] a little higher seasoning, aren’t you, dear?” (*idem*, 181). And it is Carry again who pointedly comments as follows upon Mattie Gormer’s striking up a friendship with Bertha Dorset: “I’ve no doubt the rabbit always thinks it is fascinating the anaconda” (*idem*, 196).

A Novel Structured around Dinner Scenes and Tea Ceremonials

Such scenes as dinner parties and tea ceremonials are crucial to establishing Lily’s relationship to the society on whose margins she hovers. The novel is structured like a chiasmus around four passages staging tea ceremonials: the first one at Selden’s (Book I, chapter 1) is echoed by Lily’s last visit to the young man in Book II, chapter 12 while

the second one (with a potential suitor, Percy Gryce, in Book I, chapter 2) is echoed by the scene in which Rosedale (another potential match) offers to take Lily to the Longworth's for a cup of tea (Book II, chapter 10). Interestingly enough, though, Lily declines Selden's offer of tea in their last interview (238).

Dinner gatherings also serve as a backbone for the novel. It all starts, chronologically, with a luncheon scene at Mr. and Mrs. Bart's. This is what provides the context for the announcement that will precipitate Lily's fall—Mr. Bart's ruin. Wharton's handling of dinner scenes reveals once again her love of symmetry. The dinner at the Trenors' (Book I, chapter 5) that is filtered through the eyes of Lily is echoed by the dinner at Bécassin's in which Selden takes over the role of a focalizer (Book II, chapter 3). Mrs. Bry's dinner in Monte Carlo is very much of a public affair for which even journalists have been invited ("the restaurant was crowded with persons mainly gathered there for the purpose of spectatorship" *idem*, 168). This is an elaborate ritual, complete with an audience and a young maiden unaware that she is going to be sacrificed on the altar of society's petty ambitions.

However, the high visibility of such dinners should not eclipse the powerful influence of hidden forces—dinners that are not actually represented in the novel but that still played a determining role in shaping Lily's destiny. These two dinners face each other on either side of the break materialized by the move from Book I to Book II: the first one is the dinner organized by Mrs. Peniston after Jack and Gwen's return from their honeymoon, a memorable event seeing as "Mrs. Peniston disliked giving dinners, but she had a high sense of family obligation" (*idem*, 97). She had mentioned the possibility of including Grace among the guests but Lily managed to persuade her aunt that "a dinner of 'smart' people would be much more to the taste of the young couple," whereupon Grace was crossed out of the list. The grudge she holds against Lily who she obviously suspects of such foul play is what leads her to ruin her cousin's reputation with insinuations about gambling and flirting with married men. Similarly, in Book II, chapter 2, Lily's undoing is precipitated by her being "engaged to breakfast (...) with the Duchess of Beltshire" (*idem*, 153). What she is not aware of is that Mrs. Dorset has taken offence at not being included in the invitation and she refuses to see Lily before the latter leaves the yacht to join the Duchess, heedless of the tragic consequences of her insouciance. Such a slight undoubtedly prompted Bertha to get her own back on Lily by exposing her to public contempt at Bécassin's after the dinner given in honor of the Duchess. In both cases, the shame or spite that exclusion from a dinner party brings about acts as a catalyst for Lily's downfall.

Oddly enough, we only see Lily actually eating something at the end of the novel. To be sure, all the dinner gatherings that have been depicted so far focused on the guests' orgy of consumption, but Lily herself always adopted the position of a detached observer of the social scene. At the Trenors' in chapter 4, we are told that "Lily did not want to join the circle about the tea-table" (*idem*, 40). Later, during the dinner that takes place the same night, she observes the guests around the table at length and lends a compassionate ear to Dorset's stomach complaints but never actually eats herself. The situation might have been reversed during Mrs. Bry's dinner at Bécassin's, since this time Selden is the one who observes the small assembly of guests, but once more not a mention is made of Lily's eating habits, table manners or favorite dishes. After Rosedale's visit in Book II, chapter 11, "She lay late in bed, refusing the coffee and fried eggs which the friendly Irish servant thrust through her door" (*idem*, 235) and after wandering in Central Park, she "took refuge in a little restaurant in Fifty-ninth Street. She was not hungry, and had meant to go without luncheon; but she was too tired to return home, and the long perspective of white tables showed alluringly through the windows" (*idem*, 235). The women in the restaurant "were all engrossed in their own affairs, (...) *devouring* magazines between their hurried gulps of tea" (*ibidem*, emphasis added) and Lily felt lonelier than ever, but after drinking a few cups of tea and eating a "portion of stewed oysters," she felt regenerated: "her brain felt clearer and livelier when she emerged once more into the street" (*idem*, 235-236). From a sociological point of view, oysters are indeed one of the dishes Lily could easily afford despite her limited means since they were, at the time, one of the most common, inexpensive dishes on all American tables (Mallery, 1888: 203-204); but, from a more symbolical standpoint, oysters also happen to be intimately connected with Lily's present status if we keep in mind that the word "ostracism" derives from the oyster in whose shell was written the name of the person sent into exile by the citizens of Athens in Greek antiquity. The oyster is also well-known as a symbol of femininity, love and beauty (at least ever since Venus-Aphrodite is supposed to have emerged from its shell). At such a point in the novel, therefore, Lily seems to have internalized her condition as an outcast (as indicated by her ingestion of oysters) and her refusal to be "consumed" by any man is marked by the fact that *she* is the one eating this time. This also throws light on her refusing the cup of tea offered by Selden in their last interview—the stimulant most often associated with hypersensitive, nervous women at the time.⁸

Lily eventually rejects such a role, intending to live on more substantial fare from now on. Such a dramatic change is not easy to negotiate for a young woman

whose resistance to food and to the rumors upon which other women appear to live is manifest right from the beginning of her journey. She feels at odds with Mrs. Trenor's voracious appetite for gossip (Wharton:1990, 110), for instance, and worries about the fact that "rich people always grow fat" while waiting for her aunt's will to be disclosed: "If I inherit, I shall have to be careful of my figure" (*idem*, 174). Lily's real appetite is of a higher moral order, as suggested earlier in the novel by the following passage in reference to her short-lived interest in poor working-girls: "her taste of beneficence had wakened in her a momentary appetite for well-doing" (*idem*, 119). Her insatiable yearning for the world "beyond"—significantly associated with a flying ship on Lily's stationery—also brings utopian ideologies into play, suggesting a desire to reach out to some imaginary world that can never find concrete expression within the limited space of her existence. Selden had already allowed her to catch a glimpse of such a utopian world when sharing with her his dream of building some ideal "republic of the spirit," a non-place where he would be free from everything, "from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents" (*idem*, 55). I agree with Lois Tyson, however, when she points out that this "quest for transcendence is a quest for social superiority as well: Selden wants to be 'above' his social group in every sense of *above*. The irony is that this very desire, because it is socially produced, ties him to the society he would transcend. Selden doesn't escape social desire; he merely abstracts it" (Tyson: 1994, 27). When read along such lines, it makes sense that Lily's own spiritual journey should reach its apex not in the imaginary unsustainable world of Selden's republic but in the enclosed, protective space of Nettie's kitchen, where she can find the kind of nurturing atmosphere necessary to find her own way towards a utopian space of her own.

Utopian Space: Nettie's Kitchen as the Climax of Lily's Initiation

In many ways, the kitchen scene appears as the culmination of a long initiation whose starting-point can be identified in the luncheon scene at the Barts', a scene to which it provides a perfect counterpoint. Just like the many other references to food, this scene has been stripped of all metaphorical significance and disparaged as a mere lapse into sentimentality by most of Wharton's critics.⁹ These responses were understandably prompted by such rapturous descriptions as "Mrs. Struther [proceeding] to prepare a bottle of infantile food, which she tenderly applied to the baby's impatient lips, and while the ensuing degustation went on, she seated herself with a beaming countenance beside her visitor", whereupon she even offers Lily

“some of baby’s fresh milk” (Wharton: 1990, 244). Lily’s identification process with the baby has been noted by many scholars. Not only is the little girl named after the historical figure played by an actress who reminded Nettie of her benefactress, but she is also characterized by the same “instinctive motion of resistance” (*idem*, 245). In the end, though, “the soothing influences of digestion prevailed, and Lily felt the soft weight sink trustfully against her breast” (*ibidem*); the identification process is complete when “the weight increased, sinking deeper, and penetrating her with a strange sense of weakness, as though the child entered into her and became a part of herself” (*idem*, 246). When Lily returns to her room, she still has mixed feelings about food: she decides that she cannot “go without food because her surroundings made it unpalatable” and she makes up her mind to join the other boarders in the restaurant below but at the same time “she [is] glad that (...) the repast [is] nearly over” (*ibidem*) when she reaches the table. How then does the kitchen scene connect with Lily’s spiritual journey?

Gerard has suggested that the “soothing influences of digestion” similarly act upon Lily “whose ‘old life-hunger’ has come to represent the ‘happiness’ of belonging to an intimate human community . [...] Such imaginative empathy and communion is new to Lily, and it replaces her former distaste for working-class people and scenes” (Gerard, 1998: 421). I would suggest reading it in the light of Wharton’s fascination with anthropology, in which case “imaginative empathy and communion” with the working class give way to more unsettling visions of cannibalism as Lily ends up incorporating the body of the child in a metaphorical move towards renewal and redemption. In her own discussion of the scene, Hoeller already points to the function of the kitchen as “a different, predominantly female world, in which women do not negotiate but give freely to each other” (Hoeller, 2000: 118). Hoeller’s argument is based on Lewis Hyde’s seminal distinction between a gift economy and a market economy, which leads her to perceive motherhood as “a form of gift economy and thus as a form of ‘anarchy,’ a female domestic space that defies the rules of the market” (*idem*, 115) while “Nettie’s baby symbolizes the abundance and fertility of a gift economy” (*idem*, 116). I would like to extend this argument by showing how Lily’s identification with Nettie’s little girl forms part of a wider metaphorical network that takes the reader back to the first luncheon scene at the Barts’ and also to the cannibalistic attitude of Lily’s society at large, which allows Wharton to have both the sentimental and the realist traditions coexist in an unresolved tension throughout this scene.¹⁰

Wharton's worldview was deeply influenced by her early readings in anthropology. Versed as she was in cultural ethnography, she was well acquainted with the most recent developments in this field, including the groundbreaking work of British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor.¹¹ Anthropologists had recently developed a veritable fascination with food rituals and eating habits. Garrick Mallery's essay "Manners and Meals" appeared in one of the first issues of *The American Anthropologist*, and William Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) included a whole chapter on food. In the literary field, William Dean Howells had already made ample use of food metaphors to denounce the abuses of capitalism in the Gilded Age. In his series of utopian novels generally known as the Altrurian Romances (the first volume of which appeared in 1893), Howells uses the character of Homos to expose the hypocrisy of American society and "the predatory ethos that dominates American life" (Rubin, 2009, 221). As he discovers this new world, Homos

identifies the conspicuous consumption of the upper classes as inseparable from their cannibalistic social, cultural, and political policies. Even though they do not literally eat human flesh, Howells implies that the upper classes enforce a system of inequitable cultural appropriation and consumption. (idem, 222)

In this scathing satire of the American system, Howells explicitly contrasts countries "where people live *upon* each other as the Americans do" with countries where people live "*for* each other as the Altrurians do" (*ibidem*, Howell's italics, qtd by Rubin). Lily consequently exemplifies the eat-or-be-eaten ethos that typified late nineteenth-century America and turned it into a dystopian universe, one in which the ideal simplicity and frugality of Republican America has given way to veritable orgies of consumption. The disturbing undercurrent that undermines the romantic, sentimental surface of the text is best evidenced in the sea anemone with which Lily is compared in one of the most famous extracts from the novel¹² and which has systematically been confused with its counterpart on earth, the wood anemone. This partly accounts for critics' failure to perceive Lily's metaphoric cannibalistic nature—the sea anemone being a meat-eating plant.

As underlined by Judith P. Saunders, Wharton also happened to be Franz Boas's exact contemporary.¹³ Generally acknowledged as the founding father of American anthropology, Boas was particularly well-known at the time for his extensive studies of a North American tribe that practiced cannibalistic rituals, the Kwakiutl. This is a tribe for whom the act of eating (or, inversely, the need to control one's hunger) actually provides a key metaphor to their whole worldview and relationship to the

world, as shown by a number of later anthropologists (Robbins, 2012: 131, 139). Boas's studies of the Kwakiutl also included compiling a collection of the tribe's recipes (156 in total) and culinary rites, most of which make use of what was the staple fare of the tribe, salmon. Whether or not Wharton was acquainted with such a collection, one cannot help noticing her insistence on salmon in the luncheon scene at the Barts', a scene situated at the other extreme of Lily's initiation process since it marked the very beginning of her downfall. What McWilliams writes about this scene at the Barts' is actually not quite true, strictly speaking. What stands out is the salmon, not the chicken, as will be shown if we consider the development of the scene: the "cold salmon of the previous night's dinner" (Wharton: 1990, 27) is referred to right at the beginning; it is mentioned again with more ominous undertones when "Mr. Bart dropped into a chair, and sat gazing absently at the fragment of jellied salmon which the butler had placed before him" (*idem*, 27); before breaking the news of his ruin to his wife and daughter, Mr. Bart again "sat motionless, his gaze still fixed on the salmon, and his lower jaw dropped" (*idem*, 28); and when Lily eventually leaves the room, she turns back and sees her father "sitting with both elbows on the table, the plate of salmon between them, and his head bowed on his hands" (*idem*, 28). At the time, Lily is still a complete stranger to the complex symbolism conjured up by the fish on the family table. As a symbol of sacrifice, salmon is most appropriate to initiate a journey that will lead her to experience death to gain a new life, a journey that will lead her to swim against the social current and go back to the origin of life. In the Kwakiutl's mythological system, salmon stood for so many disembodied souls and eating salmon was a way to commune with these souls. Situated as it is in a position that foregrounds its function as a reflection of the luncheon scene, the kitchen scene acquires metaphorical significance as a necessary stage and even a rite of passage in Lily's initiation. Lily's own "disembodied soul" has been transferred onto the baby (as indicated by the naming process) and, by communing with the baby's flesh, Lily now negotiates her own sacrificial return back to the original scene but with a newly-awakened consciousness about the world she lives in. The Kwakiutl believed that

when a person dies, his or her soul leaves the body and enters the body of a salmon. [...] Once the soul enters the body of a salmon, it remains there, living in a salmon world that socially resembles the human world. However, when the salmon is caught and eaten by human beings, the soul is once again freed and enters the body of a newborn child. (Robbins: 2012, 139)

Controlling one's hunger is also regarded by the Kwakiutl as one of the main ways of solving political, economic, or social issues (*idem*, 140).¹⁴ In such a

perspective, Lily's own attempts to regulate her appetites place her in the position of a novice and further estrange her from the voracious, carnivorous, dystopian society surrounding her. Such patterns of imagery offer further evidence of Wharton's anthropological outlook on the society of her times right from the early years of the twentieth century, that is a long time before she wrote the novel in which she would explore the society of her childhood as an archaeologist cum anthropologist (*The Age of Innocence*).

Conclusion

In an article addressing the naturalist dimension of *The House of Mirth*, Lori Merish evokes the fact that quite a few writers, at the turn of the century, "called for a 'roast beef' of narrative style and an unremitting clarity of vision as against the 'drama of the broken teacup' and the proprieties of popular sentimental fare" (Merish, 2003: 235). Strictly speaking, however, "the drama of a broken teacup" was actually associated by the one who coined the expression not to sentimental fiction but to the realist genre: "Realism is minute; it is the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner," writes Frank Norris in "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" before concluding:

Let Realism do the entertainment with its meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wall-paper and haircloth sofas, stopping with these, going no deeper than it sees, choosing the ordinary, the untroubled, the commonplace.

But to Romance belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man. (Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," 1901)

Such a plea for romantic fiction, coming as it does from one of the foremost exponents of naturalism, makes it clear that naturalism was not conceived as a mere outgrowth of realism but as a way of probing the secrets of the human soul in a truly Romantic spirit. Far from undermining the romantic surface of the text, the naturalist quality of Wharton's prose allows us to probe deeper into it and ultimately retrace the spiritual itinerary of her tragic heroine from the "broken teacups" of good society to the "roastbeef" of a cannibalistic capitalist system.

Torn between these two extremes, Lily finds in Nettie's kitchen the right kind of spiritual food to nourish her newly-found appetite: food that circulates one-way in a gift economy without any hope of return on investment—the kind of ideal, utopian space of expression that leads her to throw Bertha's letters into the fire while Selden is *not* watching. While her first attempt to ingest something more substantial than tea had first led her to seek reintegration into the carnivorous society that sets the rules of her world, she unexpectedly deviates from the path she had set herself and takes the direction of Selden's apartment with the pack of letters that she originally intended to barter in exchange for rehabilitation. As she crosses the street and enters the Benedick, Lily leaves behind her the dystopian House of Mirth¹⁵¹⁶ and makes her way towards the light in Selden's window, and significantly "the sudden longing to see him [grows] to *hunger* as she [pauses] on the pavement opposite his door" (Wharton, 1990: 237, emphasis added). In the end, Lily enters the House of Mourning and she comes to embody the utopian "republic of the spirit" towards which Selden was supposed to guide her, while Selden himself remains chained to the social world from which he aspires to take his flight.

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Notes

1 "In 1859, Eliza Leslie advised, 'allusions to dyspepsia, indigestion, or any other disorder of the stomach, are vulgar and disgusting. The word stomach should never be uttered at any table.'" Eliza Leslie, *Miss Leslie's Behavior Book: A Guide and Manual for Ladies* (New York: Arno Press, 1972, 131), quoted by Mark McWilliams, [p.](#) 148.

2 Think, for instance, of the description of "Mrs. Bry (...) throned in apoplectic majesty between Lord Skiddaw and Lord Hubert" (Wharton: 1990, 168).

3 Garrick Mallery noted as early as 1891 that "a large part of the important work of the civilized world is accomplished or regulated at social dinners" (Mallery, 1888: 195).

4 The first part of this presentation draws from McWilliams's well-documented study of eating rituals and dining habits in nineteenth-century America, especially when it comes to historical background and anecdotes.

5 As pointed out by McWilliams, "soupe à la reine is merely a form of chicken broth, 'but Queen's soup sounded dishonorably regal enough for political purposes'" (McWilliams, 2012: xiv).

6 Gerty's first defining trait in the novel, as she is mentioned by Lily for the first time, is her odd eating habits: "[Gerty has] such queer things to eat" (Wharton, 1990: 7). She is later described as "a parasite in the moral order, living on the crumbs of other tables, and content to look through the window at the banquet spread for her friends" (idem, 118). The narrator also points out that her affection for Lily "had learned to keep itself alive on the scantiest diet" (idem, 119).

7 Wharton would make use of such patterns of imagery in later novels, as shown in the following passage from *The Age of Innocence*, when May and Newland are about to give their first big dinner as a young married couple: "(...) a big dinner, with a hired chef and two borrowed footmen, with Roman punch, roses from Henderson's, and menus on gilt-edged cards, was a different affair, and not to be lightly undertaken. As Mrs. Archer remarked, the Roman punch made all the difference; not in itself but by its manifold implications—since it signified either canvas-backs or terrapin, two soups, a hot and a cold sweet, full décolletage with short sleeves, and guests of a proportionate importance" (Wharton, 1996: 270). One notices how the "full décolletage," i.e. the low-cut neckline exposing a sizable part of the woman's breasts, is interestingly presented on the same level as other such delicacies to be put on the table.

8 See George M. Beard's landmark study of such social phenomena in *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences*.

9 Cynthia Griffin Wolff, for instance, argues that the mother and child imagery linking this episode and Lily's deathbed scene points to "Lily's inability to conceive of herself in any other way than as the object of aesthetic attention" (Wolff, 1977: 130-131). Patricia Meyer Spacks similarly deplors the sentimental quality of the scene in which she sees the mere expression of Lily's "escapist fantasy of motherhood" (Meyer Spacks, 1975: 241).

10 For an extended analysis of the topic in Wharton's fiction, see Hoeller's remarkable study in *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimental Fiction*.

11 Judith P. Saunders has remarkably contextualized Wharton's fascination with anthropology and provided a stimulating reading of *The Age of Innocence* in "Portrait of the Artist as Anthropologist: Edith Wharton and *The Age of Innocence*." Nancy Bentley's *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton* also insightfully probes into the complex relationship between literature and anthropology in Wharton's work.

12 "Inherited tendencies had combined with early training to make [Lily] the highly specialized product she was: an organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the sea-anemone torn from the rock" (234-235).

13 See Judith P. Saunders, "Portrait of the Artist as Anthropologist: Edith Wharton and *The Age of Innocence*." Saunders points out that "Bronislaw Malinowski, a valued friend of Wharton's during the latter part of her life, was one of the many prominent ethnologists indebted to Boas's teaching" (87).

14 In "Manners and Meals," Garrick Mallery argues that fasting "probably arose from the desire of primitive and savage man to bring on those abnormal nervous conditions which are supposed to give direct access to the spiritual world, that is, to produce ecstasy" (202).

15 The title of the novel comes from the famous passage in *Ecclesiastes* according to which "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (*Ecclesiastes*, 7: 2-4).

Reimagining the Body in Post-Singularity Techno-Utopias

Teresa Botelho

Nova University of Lisbon/CETAPS

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Our version 1.0 biological bodies are (...) frail and subject to a myriad of failure modes, not to mention the cumbersome maintenance rituals they require. (...) The Singularity will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. We will gain power over our fates. Our mortality will be in our hands. We will be able to live as long as we want.(...) By the end of this century, the non-biological portion of our intelligence will be trillions of times more powerful than unaided human intelligence. (Ray Kurzweil¹)

“What was once called Natural Law”

The technological² imagination, invested in mythologies of ever increasing man-made progress, has shaped a vast corpus of visions of a better world, under the premise that human mastery over an adversarial sphere of the natural, led by reason and governed by ethics, would be instrumental to the improvement of mankind's condition. This utopian trend has its foundations in the early European writings of Campanella, Bacon and Condorcet³ and continues throughout the nineteenth century in the proposals of Fourier and Owen⁴ amongst others. It has used the tropes of scientific and technological progress as signifiers for desired social orders and happier futures available to those who share the knowledge required to control their environment; how far these imagined landscapes depend on the techno-scientific innovations envisaged or work them in tandem with other social and economic changes varies greatly, but as Segal points out, in countries like the United States, where the rhetoric of the “technological sublime” discussed by Perry Miller, Leo Marx and David Nye⁵ always stood at the center of the national narrative, a great number of utopian works present a degree of reliance on applied scientific advancement that oftentimes supplants proposals of social rearrangements (Segal, 2005: 2). Many of these articulations of techno-utopianism do in fact equate progress with practical achievements brought about by advancing efficiency in production and in communication and transportation systems thought to establish new conditions that would improve humanity's choices in terms of work and lifestyle, freeing citizens not only from poverty, hard and repetitive labor, but also from major sources of

individual and collective unhappiness, from illness, crime, social disorder and urban dysfunction to war, thus enabling them to attain emotional and psychological harmony.

Significantly, most of these American nineteenth and early twentieth century texts present themselves not as distant visions of dreamy better futures that may happen in some unpredicted time and place, but as grounded and attainable rationally driven tomorrows that are not, “unscientific, out of touch with reality” utopias “in the clouds”⁶, as Charles Williams Wooldridge would explain in the preface to his 1902 *Perfecting the World: A Piece of Possible History*, but extrapolations which remain “true to the laws of cause and effect, and duly regarding the limitations of nature” (Wooldridge, 1902/1971:11). This is the case not only of Edward Bellamy’s influential *Looking Backward* (1888) and its sequel *Equality* (1897), but of the twenty-five technological utopias identified by Segal, produced in the fifty years that separate John Macnie’s *The Diothas: Or, For a Look Ahead*⁷, published in 1883, and Harold Loeb’s *Life in a Technocracy: What It Might be Like*⁸ from 1933. Early feminist utopias, even if still shaped as hybrid texts which invoke the tropes of fantasy, also commonly associate scientific and technological advances with social and political emancipation. This is the case of *Mizora: A Prophecy*, first published in installments between 1880 and 1881 by Mary L. Bradley Lane. Considered the first depiction of a single-sex self-sufficient utopia and preceding Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s better known *Herland* by three decades, *Mizora* describes a society where applied science is central to its collective identity construction⁹ investing, as Christine Mahady points out, in “the utopian potential in reconceptualizing human relationships with nature” (Mahady, 2004:94). Claiming to be “a people who have passed beyond the boundary of what was once called Natural Law” (90), the Mizorans have developed the capacity to manipulate nature, namely producing artificial food and provoking rain by means of electrical charges, and have acquired the specialized knowledge that enables them to use the parthenogenesis reproductive techniques that make their survival possible.

If imagining these radical manipulations of the body would seem, in the late nineteenth century, an improbable transcendence of the limitations of nature, in the early twenty-first century, ideas about the announced obsolescence of what singularity theorist Ray Kurzweil calls our “1.0 biological bodies”, on the threshold of a different type of transcendence generated by enhancement and fusion with non-biological components, have become part of the cultural conversation signaling, as Joel Dinnerstein remarks, that “the Enlightenment utopia of the mind - as the rational host of self-control, self mastery and perfectibility - has shifted to the body” (Dinnerstein, 2006:573-574). Unlike the techno-utopias of one hundred years ago, which centered on the control of the environment and could assert themselves as grounded in logical possibility because the near future they projected seemed knowable and predictable, contemporary imaginings of what is to come are more troubled by uncertainty, “entranced” as the editors of *Science Fiction Studies* suggest, “between the prospect of a technological transcendence that will make the future mute and inaccessible”

and a collapse of the future into the present, that is, between the unknowns beyond a predicted Singularity Horizon and the constant and accelerated presentification of what not so long ago could only be described as pertaining to the realm of fiction (Editors, 2006:338).

The Utopia called Singularity

Singularity Theory, the dominant topos of transcendent progress that has been described as the “quintessential myth of contemporary techno culture” (Csicsery-Ronay, 2008:262), as it was first articulated by mathematician Vernor Vinge in a foundational paper delivered to NASA in 1993, predicts an increased acceleration¹⁰ of technological progress that will culminate in the “imminent creation of entities with greater than human intelligence” effecting a change of such magnitude and unpredictability that can only be compared “to the rise of human life on earth” (Vinge, 1993). This paradigm shift caused by the exponential growth of genetic engineering capacity, nanotechnology and robotics (the trilogy of agents of radical change commonly known by the acronym NGR) will change our understanding of what it means to be human and our relation with time and space in ways we are not yet equipped to imagine. The core of this formulation, which has dominated the discourses of science fiction for the last three decades, has travelled outside the fictional domain becoming, as Raulerson argues, “the object of a larger cultural interrogation” and a “potent signifier for the present historical moment” (Raulerson, 2013:4-5). It has been taken seriously by policymakers, companies and academics, who coalesced, for example, in the creation of the Singularity University, whose declared purpose is “to help individuals, businesses, institutions, investors, NGOs and governments understand cutting-edge technologies, and how to utilize these technologies to positively impact billions of people.”¹¹

Interpretations of the outcomes of Singularity vary significantly in reach and tone: while sharing a prediction of an incremental acceleration of knowledge, they differ both in terms of the pace of that process and of the legibility of the future beyond that Event horizon. Vinge’s warning against the possibility of predictable extrapolation, a “not knowing” which in his fiction seems to translate as a quasi-deterministic rush towards an ambiguous and not so happy future for humanity¹², is not shared by all futurists, especially by the most influential and optimistic of the Singularity theorists, Ray Kurzweil, the author and computer scientist who is presently director of engineering at Google. Both in *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (1999) and in *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005), Kurzweil argues that the principle of accelerating change, caused by an incremental, exponential and linear technological innovation that feeds on itself and therefore accelerates ever faster, will bring about not only a future which is near and predictable, but one which will be remarkably better for humans. This utopian optimism, not

so different in its enthusiastic overtones from that which shaped the techno-utopias of the past, is grounded on a cluster of “interlinked and overlapping topoi” which Raulerson has grouped into three major categories - “the material, the political-economical and the eschatological” (*idem*, 37). These pertain more specifically to three main utopian mythologies of the singularity discourse: the posthuman future of the body, the reconfiguration of the social and material structures of society, brought about by post-scarcity economics¹³ and by adhocracy¹⁴ organizational models, and the belief that what is to come is so radically different from what we know that the transformation is akin to the refoundation of human history. Of these prefigurations, the future of the human body has developed a particular hold on the contemporary imagination, captivated by the consequences of the transcendence of the organic-machine divide. According to the predictions of posthumanist theory, the path towards the fusion of organic with inorganic will proceed along a number of stages starting with the transhuman phase where human bodies will become gradually more synthetic and “life will be prolonged and enhanced through cyborgization - body-improving prosthetic technology that will replace deteriorated body parts” (Dinello, 2005:19), and ending in the posthuman condition where, as Katherine Hayles describes, our “coupling with intelligent machines” will be “so intense and multifaceted” that it will no longer be possible to distinguish “between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed” (Hayles, 1999:35). In parallel with the trope of the emergence of sentient machines, “who will appear to have free will” and “spiritual experiences” (Kurzweil 1999:6), these imaginings are fed by a constant flow of information that instantiates the collapse of the future into the present identified by the editors of *Science Fiction Studies*; we may not yet be on the verge of transcending the limitations of our biological “1.0” bodies and “wetware” brains but current advanced medical research has already produced robotic exoskeletons which, responding to signals sent from a wearer's brain, enable those who have lost the use of their legs to walk again¹⁵, bio 3D printers are expected to be in general use to print skin, bones and joints in the very near future¹⁶, and the Blue Brain Project in Lausanne is building a fully functional simulated brain in a supercomputer, tasked with digitally recreating all the behavioral structures of a biological brain. This will provide unprecedented opportunities to study the fundamental nature of cognition, fundamental for research in neuroscience, even if one dismisses as naive some of the utopian overreach of the project described by its director as a useful tool for solving human conflicts: “If the planet understood how the brain functions,” Dr. Henry Markram muses, “we would resolve conflicts everywhere. Because people would understand how trivial and how deterministic and how controlled conflicts and reactions and misunderstandings are” (*apud* Kushner, 2010).

At the same time, only thirty years after Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. human enhancement technologies already allow a number of individuals to claim Cyborg status. This is the case of Neil Harbisson, the founder of the Cyborg Foundation based in Barcelona, and performance artist Stelarc. While Stelarc had a cell-cultivated ear surgically attached to his

left arm and has performed with a mechanical human-like third hand under the motto *The Body is Obsolete*, Harbisson, who describes himself as fully transhuman and is biologically color blind, has an eyeborg implanted inside his skull; this antenna, connected to a chip, allows him to perceive colors translated into sounds and to access the internet and receive phone calls directly into his brain via an external device. "I don't feel like I'm using technology, or wearing technology," he explains. "I feel like I am technology. I don't think of my antenna as a device - it's a body part" (*apud* Jeffries, 2014).

But if it is true that the future is becoming the present at a quicker pace than ever before, it is in science fiction that the topoi of the Technological Singularity have emerged as an irresistible magnet for a debate that is as much about the future as it is about the present. The vast corpus of recent filmic, televisual and literary post-singularity narratives that have explored the interrogations and anxieties of the announced transcendence of the natural body have, to a great extent, interpreted its most commonly predicted tropes - the transhuman and the posthuman - either through the techno-optimist validation of disembodied consciences (in contrast with the ambiguous noir aesthetics of *Cyberpunk*), through the anti-technological visions of what Daniel H. Wilson has called *Robopocalipses* (Wilson, 2012), or through an exploration of the ever frailer borders between humans and sentient artificial entities.

Following the speculations of Margey Piercey's *He, She and It* where the protagonist assures Yod, her android lover, that his artificial sentient self is just "a purer form of what we're all tending to" as "we are all unnatural now", "all cyborgs", (Piercey, 1991:150), recent post-cyberpunk science fiction narratives directly engaged with the Singularity Hypothesis have been particularly concerned with the subjectivity of these new identities, scrutinizing the construction of selfhood of both technologically mediated humans and non-human sentient entities. This remainder of this paper discusses two science fiction novels shaped by this new vision of the human - Charles Stross's novel *Glasshouse* (2005) and Cory Doctorow's *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003) - examining in particular the visions of the relationship between body and mind they foreground, and the role of disembodiment and embodiment in the creation of stable selves in the enhanced humans they imagine.

Bodies that do not Matter

Cyberpunk may have been responsible for the introduction of a rhetoric of technology which, embracing the Cartesian duality between body and mind, construed consciousness as independent from the limiting restrictions of the "meat machines" that enclose it. For Cyberpunk's techno-cowboys like Neuromancer's Case, who "lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace", addicted to the projection of disembodied consciousness into the "consensual hallucination that was the matrix", a "certain relaxed contempt for the flesh"

(Gibson,1984:12) did not come hand in hand with utopian visions of better post-body worlds, but with dark and cynical landscapes of futures dominated by corporations run amok, where body and mind enhancements do not operate to liberate the self from the panopticon quality of the social environment, aligning the subgenre, as Tom Moylan suggests, with the classical dystopian tradition of Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell (Moylan, 2010:84)

In contrast, post-singularity fiction, especially that of Charles Stross, concerned not so much with the “brain in the vault” trope as with the modes of conceiving the self without stable bodily groundings, has deliberately engaged with the utopian possibilities of the technology that liberates the body from its biological destiny, also pondering at some length on some of its economic, social and political consequences. In parallel, awareness of a debt to cyberpunk clearly shapes its visible counter-narrative strategies, choosing to move away from the nihilistic, male-centered and emotionally autistic character constructions to play with gender, identity pluralism and subjectivity.

The perceived utopian naivety of Stross’s enthusiasm for post-singularity possibilities has been scrutinized by critics, suspicious of its embrace of a kind of acritical techno-utopian telos. Steven Shaviro, for example, finds Stross’s work lacking a modicum of “existential anguish”, creating naively optimistic post-human vistas as if “cyberpunk had never happened” (Shaviro, 2009:109).

This may very well be the case of *Accelerando* (2005) the novel Shaviro discusses. Here Stross maps out a through-the-singularity vertiginous journey which begins in Amsterdam in 2010 and ends sometime in an after-Earth multiverse in the twenty-third century, following the creation of a post-scarcity society where goods are available to all, assembled by combinations of artificial intelligence and nanotechnology (an extrapolation from Eric Drexler’s thesis in *Engines of Creation*), where mind-uploading and body reassembling have become the norm, where the Reversibility, the process by which one can back oneself up, pick different life courses and choose which works best, has been discovered and is widely practiced, where the creation of group-minds and distributed intelligence and the possibility of multiple simulated concurrent existences are no longer new, all in a vortex of deconstructions of the now that mirror directly the most outlandish premises of Singularity Theory.

In contrast, the different narrative strategy of *Glasshouse* (2006), which takes the time sweep of *Accelerando* further into the future to the twenty-seventh century, allows for a more intimate and nuanced examination of the challenges of living in the posthuman condition. While the material conditions of a post-scarcity economy are very similar to those described in the previous novel (abundance of goods and services for all generated by nano-production), and a landscape of political instability that emerged from a previous war between Polities is sketched, *Glasshouse* concentrates on a first person narrator and on his subjective experiences, invoking, as Sarah Herbe suggests, a “pseudo-autobiographical mode” that

provides “ample insight into how it feels to live several lives” and to be autonomous from one specific body and life cycle. (Herbe, 2011: 223)

The narrator is Robin, whom we first encounter inhabiting a male orthohuman body recovering from a procedure of identity reindexing, which included a major memory excision; his body had also been edited as he had taken the opportunity to have his age reset, choosing a post-adolescent body-plan, a rejuvenating cycle he had undergone many times before in his 70 years. What Robin remembers, how reliable these memories are, what he has lost and why, are at the core of his search for knowledge that is also a search for selfhood. Dispersed “shards of memory remain”; he remembers having once been an academic, a historian. Crucially, he tells himself, his sense of identity was configured around the key idea that “I wasn’t solitary” (203); there had been a loving stable family relationship with three other core partners (two human and a xenomorph) and two children, whom he remembers as having died in the Censorship Wars. He also hypothesizes that his “radical rebuild” was not the result of a need to “refresh himself” as he tells Kay, whom he first meets in the same rehab facility as a woman in a xenohuman body (she has had a body transfer, as she last inhabited a primitive non-human alien identity), but rather the result of “knowing too much”(3), although he can no longer recall what that dangerous information was. He is convinced that the memory excision was done under duress, that “someone had made him an offer he couldn’t refuse - either to consent to memory surgery or his next death would be the last” (4). At least that is what his former self wrote in a letter to his future instantiation before a part of his memory had been destroyed.

The threat of having one final death from which he would not return has to be understood in the context of a society where involuntary total erasure is postponed indefinitely thanks to the existence of assembler gates which use nanotechnology to reconstruct bodies if they are ill or hurt, and to the practice of having a regular backup of one’s present instantiation so that a temporary death can be reversed as a dead body can be reassembled and given the stored mind back-up.

Hesitant about what to do next with their new bodies, both Robin and Kay decide to participate in an archeological experiment that is designed to simulate the pre-singularity “dark ages”, recreating life in the early twenty-first century, as the records of that primitive time have been lost. The participants will be assigned new non-modifiable bodies and live with the limited economic and technological resources of a recreated twenty-first century suburban community panopticon, where their behavior will be observed and recorded. In preparation for the experiment, Robin emerges backed up as a female, a body-plan he recollects having used sometime before. As part of the simulation he/she is given a husband, a suburban house to live in, a dark ages job as a librarian, all under the gaze of a system of social monitorization directed by the experiment organizers.

Using a narrative strategy that creates distance and estrangement between what is recreated as a past that readers recognize as their present, and the post-singularity present that shapes the gaze of the observer describing that past, the text always informs by contrast. So, when as a pre-singularity human in a female body Robin, now Reeve, encounters with shock and horror the indignities of the biological body he is now forced to inhabit, especially fertility, an idea that turns his/her "world view (...) upside down and whacked down with a hammer", a fresh gaze at other possibilities is narratively suggested. When the realization that "the orthohuman bodies they put us in are so ortho that we could generate random human beings if we have sex" (142) terrifies Reeve and her temporary husband, at least as much as the realization of the limitations of biologically based medicine where being ill implies coping with dark ages tech - no disassembling and rebuilding people, no self-replicating organisms, no medical assembler, just "medicine, drugs and surgery" (276) - the utopian qualities of the technologically superior future would seem to be vindicated.

As the real facts of the twenty-seventh century world that filter through the memories of the protagonist paint a scenario of generalized abundance and health that is nevertheless shadowed by conflict and totalitarian threats, that superiority gains an ambiguity that the rest of the text deliberately cultivates.

These tensions are made visible to Robin only gradually, as bits of the autobiographical memory contained in the pre-excision letter he wrote to himself return in the form of dreams. But not knowing if what he remembers is true or if his memory has been hacked renders all this self-awareness unstable; as he asks himself "Did I lie when I was writing it? Did that other me tell the truth or was he spinning a pretty tapestry of lies for the stranger he was to become in the future?" (91) He remembers, for example, the war that disabled the reassembling facilities and permanently killed his family, and even recalls having temporarily been the non-biological nervous system of a combat weapon, believing for a while that war crimes he does not remember committing may have caused his need for radical identity reindexing.

The final realization that memory excision had been part of a coordinated opposition plan, for which he had volunteered, that intended to infiltrate and sabotage the "dark ages" reconstruction experiment, which was in fact part of a rogue authoritarian attempt to breed a new accommodating population for a future cognitive dictatorship, allows the memories of Robin's several lives as a male or female human and as a mechanical entity to consolidate into a recognizable map of disembodied selfhood, detached and independent from the many human and non-human bodies it had inhabited.

More significantly, this consciousness is anchored in emotional memory and permanent qualities - love for a lost family, dedication to a professional calling, devotion to principles, loyalty to an aim that demands self-sacrifice - vindicating the thesis of the autonomy of the mind as the site for selfhood construction, irrespective of the technologically generated bodies it may inhabit.

Cory Doctorow's *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003) takes the reader to a twenty-second century Earth dominated by the Bitchun Society, the guarantor of the utopian order which promotes the end of scarcity to the few "off-world" mountain dwellers who still resist Free Energy and the end of death; the basic material conditions are similar to those described by Stross (no poverty, no necessary work, no sickness and no death thanks to nano-production, mind-uploading and body cloning) but some satirical *nova* introduce a critical gaze at the blissful utopian future imagined, which is already placed on the verge of satire by the incongruous location chosen for the central action - a Disney World ruled as an adhococracy where different groups struggle for simulacra of power.

One of these *nova* imagines a radically new economic order, based not on money and the value of material objects, which would make sense when traditional work is no longer necessary and people live for as long as they choose, but on prestige and individual reputation. The new currency, Whuffie points, are attributed to each individual according to their creativity and socially useful endeavors. The points are instantly known to everybody with whom they interact, as one's scores are accessed via the networked brain implants all citizens of the Bitchun society have, thus introducing a new type of social hierarchy based on a "likeability" status that, as Doctorow confirms, "punishes minority opinions instead of protecting them" (*apud* Fletcher 2010:91) in a society that defines itself by its equality of access to prosperity.

The second *novum*, the practice of deadheading, is used as an antidote to the flipside of the end of death and eternal happiness, namely boredom. Better described as a temporary death from which one may reemerge anytime one chooses, as one leaves one's conscience backed up ready to unload into a fresh body, the practice is recommended to those who feel they have seen all there is to see, done all there is to do and secretly wish for permanent death. Keep A-Movin' Dan, a Bitchun missionary to the off-worlders finds himself in such a quandary. Deadheading, which the narrator recommends suggesting "why not just deadhead for a few centuries, see if there's anything that takes your fancy and if not, back to sleep for a few more?", does not seem as attractive for someone "thinking the old way" as just ending: "You really think," he asks, "there is going to be anything recognizably human in a hundred centuries? Me, I'm not interested in being a post-person. I'm going to wake up one day and I'm going to say, 'Well, I've had seen about enough' and that will be my last day" (13).

The ironic distancing from the utopian promises of what Kurzweil called "control over our mortality" is maintained when the text revisits the disembodied mind trope in new ways, introducing a degree of instability in the process of body reassignment and mind uploading that was seen as whole and certain in *Glasshouse*, all things being equal. When early in the novel Julian, the narrator, is murdered, a futile exercise of violence inexplicable because of its reversibility, his backed-up mind, used to restore him to life, naturally lacks the memory of the murder and this, by itself, introduces a paradox in his continued sense of self. This is

further interrogated when the sameness of his copy is called into question, namely by his old friend Dan, who clings to the belief that “there is a difference between you and an exact copy of you”, and that “being destroyed and recreated” cannot possibly be the same as “not being destroyed at all”, in the same way as the “quantum mechanics” that destroy and recreate us “a trillion times a second” cannot be equated with the process of becoming “a clone with a copied brain” (41-42). Although Julian lightly dismisses his friend’s ontological doubts, stressing that he feels like himself, the narrative arc of the story shows that that is not exactly the case and that between his old self and the new there are significant changes, namely in the perception and critical evaluation of the goodness of the world that he had never previously questioned.

Even considering, as Fletcher concludes, that *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* enacts a “complex ironized view of the costs and benefits involved in technological change” (*ibid*, 92) that distances itself from the rosy posthuman futures predicted by Singularity theory, the belief, as Doctorow asserts, that we will become “not less human but different kinds of human” (*apud* Fletcher, 2010:92-93) is maintained at its core, along with the utopian possibilities of transcending the organic limitations of the body by conceiving it as a replaceable, separate encasing for the mind.

Other alternative science fiction visions have centered not on humans wanting to transcend their limited “meat-bodies” but on sentient machines reaching for personhood by creating for themselves those same cumbersome flesh bodies for which cyberpunk has such “relaxed contempt” and which Stross’s and Doctorow’s futures did so much to render irrelevant, editable, interchangeable or easily reassembled, or on humans facing the challenges of the future from the fragility of their decaying 1.0 organic instantiations (as is respectively the case of the much discussed television series *Battlestar Galactica* 2004-2009 and the film *Interstellar*, 2014); in both cases, an aesthetic nostalgia for pre-singularity assurances seems to point in the opposite direction, overturning the premises of the disembodied mind and the imperishable or eternally reduplicable or replaceable body.

Whether the contemporary techno-utopias grounded in Singularity Theory are compatible with the concept of the ‘lived body’ and with the perception that “as a material ensemble, the human body (...) our phenomenological, mortal perceiving human body is the only available *analogon* for thinking a certain complexity of thought,’ (Lyotard, 1991:22) is perhaps irrelevant to the current debate over our posthuman futures. As readers of technological utopias one hundred years ago probably were, contemporary readers may well be aware that promises of redemption through applied science have their limitations, and that the more outlandish predictions of “the death of death” will probably have the same fate as the pathogeneses maternity of the 1880s Mizorans. They will most certainly be aware of how culturally rooted these predictions are, of how, as Dinnerstein asserts, they frequently function “as forms of social evasion”, foregrounding deterministic futures that will happen regardless of

the efforts of the billions of humans grappling with urgent problems of survival in the here-and-now, and of how they tend to “recapitulate the Western tendency to universalize its own experience” (*idem*, 570-571), an effect that should be counterbalanced by contact with more ironic and skeptical narratives coming from authors who are not at the center of the techno-centric world that generates these visions¹⁷. But while pondering these many caveats that shadow the utopian promises of NGN mediated posthuman features, the questions identified by American philosopher Steve Fuller in a recently published study tellingly entitled *Humanity 2.0: What it Means to be Human Past, Present and Future*, remain relevant. Discussing the argument that “semi-siliconized cyborgs or outright computer androids might function equally well - if not more efficiently - as successor vehicles for the transmission and cultivation of what is distinctive about our being, whilst avoiding many if not all the liabilities of human biology”, a position that relies on the popularity of a vision that “treats the possession of an animal body as only contingently related with our humanity” (Fuller, 2011:2), Fuller challenges us to consider “whether we would like to continue to anchor humanity in our carbon-based bodies” or whether we should “leverage humanity into more durable” and efficient “silicon-based containers” (*idem*, 3) or, in fact, whether there are not other more creative hybrid options open to us.

Technological science fiction utopias, as thought experiments where notions of the hypothetical and not only the possible may be acted out, offer a fertile ground for grappling with the transitional anxieties of the Singularity Theory, imagining future configurations of the human we may contemplate, scrutinize and ultimately find compelling or abhorrent. In *Accelerando*, Charles Stross claims, tongue in cheek, that the *Singularity* started its inexorable course “on June 6, 1969, at eleven hundred hours eastern time” when “the first network control protocol packets were sent from one data port of one IBM to another - the first ever internet connection” (191). Even if we do not accept that “since then we’ve all been living in a universe that was impossible to predict from events prior to that time” (*ibidem*), the future is already here, as it has always been, and through its fictions we can do what we have always done - consider the utopian or dystopian implications of our unending scientific and technological inventiveness and then make choices.

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Notes

1 Kurzweil, Ray (2006), *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. p.9

2 The term "technological" is used here to signify applied science, and not in the stricter sense of machines and hardware, bridging what Segal defines as the separation between "knowing how" and "knowing why" dominant until the early nineteenth century (Segal, 2005: 13)

3 See Tommaso Campanella (1623/ 1971) *The City under the Sun in Peaceable Kingdoms: An Anthology of Utopian Writings*. Ed. Robert L. Chianese. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovitch, pp. 8-41; Francis Bacon (1627/1999) *New Atlantis in Three Modern Utopias*. Oxford: Oxford University Press pp: 149-186; Marquis de Condorcet (1795/1955) *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. New York: Noonday

4 See Charles Fourier (1971) *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love and Passionate Attraction*. Ed. Johathan Beeker and Richard Bienvenue. Boston: Beacon Press; Robert Owen (1816/1970) *A New View of Society and Report to the County of New Larnak* ; Or,

Essays on the Formation of Human Character Preparatory to the Development of a Plan for Gradually Ameliorating the Condition of Mankind. Ed. A.C. Gatrell. Baltimore: Penguin Books

5 See Perry Miller (1965) *The Life of the Mind in America*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Leo Marx, (1964/2000) *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press and David Nye (1994) *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

6 Wooldridge includes all previous utopias in this category, including Bellamy's work.

7 In *The Diothas*, written under the pseudonym Ismar Thiusen, Macnie imagines a progressive and equalitarian society, predicting a number of inventions and advances that would become common in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: international telephone networks, electric cars and the recording of classes by university lecturers. Perhaps better known is the prediction that roads of the future would have white lines dividing traffic lanes.

8 The thesis of the book, namely that technological advances could free humans from economic pressures and wage labour, opening new opportunities for leisure, spiritual well-being, aesthetic fulfillment and general happiness, invokes the principles of the Technocracy Movement that flourished in the United States and Canada in the early 1930s.

9 The text is shaped not only by a feminist perspective, but by a racially exclusive overtone, invoking, as Mahady suggests, myths of improvement "that require adherence to universal ideals and the suppression of differences that stand as obstacles to achieving visions of progress" (Mahady, 2004:93)

10 This acceleration extrapolates Moore's Law, which predicts the rate at which processors become faster and more powerful, roughly doubling their capacity every 18 months, to other domains namely nanotechnology and genetic engineering.

11 See Singularity University <http://singularityu.org/> (retrieved 10 October 2014)

12 See in particular *Marooned in Real Time* (1986) published in the collection *Across Real Time*.

13 Post-scarcity economics is a speculative theoretical post-capitalism economic model in which goods and services are universally accessible due to advanced productive automated systems. Fictional post-scarcity societies emerge in utopian science fiction, namely in the novels discussed in this paper as well as in others, like the Ian M. Banks *Culture* series, and in dystopian texts such as Stanislaw Lem's *Cyberiad*.

14 "Adhocracy", a term first used by American futurist Alvin Toffler in the 1970s, designates a system of organization defined by the absence of formal structures, with no predetermined fixed roles, supposedly more appropriate to a world of swiftly advancing technology and of societal impatience with the multilayered authority structure of the typical bureaucracies.

15 See ScienceDaily (7 March 2013) <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/03/130307110358.htm> (retrieved 18 October 2014)

16 Wheeler, Andrew (2015) "Japanese Researchers Pursue Next Gen Bio-3D Printer for Skin, Bones, & Joints" (22 January) <http://3dprintingindustry.com/2015/01/22/japanese-researchers-bio-3d-printer/> (retrieved 2 February 2015)

17 See, for example, Walter Mosley's *Futurelands: Nine Stories of an Imminent Future* (2001) or Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, (2010) for different takes on the future.

In Search of Contemporary Revolutionary Writing: A Reading of Ohran Pamuk's Snow

Márcia Lemos

UNIVERSITY OF PORTO – CETAPS

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The pale yellow streetlamps cast such a deathly glow over the city that he felt himself in some strange, sad dream, and, for some reason, it made Ka feel guilty. Still, he was mightily thankful for this silent and forgotten country now filling him with poems.

Ohran Pamuk, *Snow*
Exile is to the thinker what home is to the naïve; it is in exile that the thinking person's detachment, his habitual life, acquires survival value.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*

In his *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman claims that utopias and dystopias 'are no longer written these days' (2005: 61-62).¹ This kind of statement is not new. In 1999, Russell Jacoby had already announced the end of utopia in a broader, non-exclusively literary, scale. Many researchers and writers working in the prolific field of Utopian Studies beg to disagree for their views on contemporaneity and the findings of their readings and research prove that both the utopian thought and utopia as a literary genre didn't die; they simply evolved into more complex and hybrid systems/specimens.² Since one of my research interests lies precisely in this field of studies,³ I not only disagree with Bauman (and Jacoby), but I am particularly interested in non-conventional utopian and dystopian contemporary novels. By 'non-conventional' I mean texts that are not immediately located under the label of utopias or dystopias, because they don't strictly follow the narrative procedures and conventions of the genre,⁴ but, nonetheless, contain utopian or dystopian themes, features, concerns, or strategies.

When I first encountered Öhran Pamuk's *Snow*, I had no intention of including it in my research. I read it for leisure and not as part of my work, but as soon as I began reading it, I realised that I had found a potential candidate to my lot of contemporary utopias/dystopias. This is, therefore, my first approach to the book (and to the writer, in fact) and I am aware that it may be a bit tentative. Nevertheless, I believe there is much to be studied in *Snow* by using the wide range of conceptual tools tackled by the multidisciplinary field of Utopian Studies.

Originally published in Turkish, in 2002, *Snow*⁵ now stands in an English book collection that celebrates 'provocative political fiction from around the world' (*Snow*, back cover), coherently titled 'Revolutionary Writing'. The Faber collection is particularly interesting because it seems to disprove Bauman's claims twice. In *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman not only announces the decline of literary utopias and dystopias, but also the end of revolutions and revolutionaries.⁶ However, besides *Snow*, the Faber collection includes seven other prime 'revolutionary' novels:

A Fine Balance, by Rohinton Mistry

The Black Album, by Hanif Kureishi

The Children of Men, by P. D. James

Leviathan, by Paul Auster

GB84, by David Peace

The Feast of the Goat, by Mario Vargas Llosa

The Last King of Scotland, by Giles Foden

I wish to highlight the presence of P. D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992) in this assemblage. Both the book and Cuarón's impressive screen version plunge the reader/viewer into the world of dystopia. Thus, despite Bauman's claims, dystopia seems, indeed, well and alive.⁷ Contrary to utopias, which represent balanced attempts to build better societies, based on sustainable development and common good, dystopias usually reproduce totalitarian powers and/or repressive and violent societies that end up by destroying humanity through selfishness, corruption, and the annihilation of individual freedom as well as any form of subjectivity.⁸ As far as I can see, that is precisely what happens in P. D. James's novel and Cuarón's loose adaptation of it. In a not so distant future there seems to be little hope for humanity as humans can no longer procreate and everything that is bad or corrupt in human nature seems about to win the battle against common good (and common sense). Since no child has been born for two decades, the discovery of a pregnant woman represents a true miracle, which should be celebrated, but there are many people

ready to harm both the mother and the child. Hence, they have to be protected at all costs and taken to an organisation understandably called Human Project for the survival of this child may well be the survival of humanity. Chaos, prejudice, racism, violence, fear, impotence, paranoia, *The Children of Men* has it all. What about *Snow*?

Pamuk's *Snow* tells the tale of a young man and a city whose names and paths become suddenly intertwined. The young Turkish journalist and poet is Ka; the remote Turkish city is Kars. Both the man and the city hide a deep turmoil and when a blizzard cuts off all connections with the outside world, and Ka is forced to lengthen his stay in Kars, he eventually becomes the reluctant protagonist of an inner and outer revolution. In this paper, I will be suggesting that Kars becomes, under the 'blessing' of snow, a heterotopian space where many individual and collective projects are staged without a happy ending, for heterotopias—spatial conquests—are bound to fail when subjected to the trials of time.

Before stepping into such fragile ground as snow/*Snow*, it is imperative to define the concept of 'heterotopia'. Any definition of heterotopia must, on the other hand, depart from Michel Foucault's influential presentation of the term in an essay revealingly titled 'Of Other Spaces':

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. [...] Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and talk about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (Foucault 1967: n.p.)

Foucault proceeds by providing numerous examples of heterotopias. He mentions hospitals, museums, cemeteries, places where the traditional order and rules of society are somehow subverted. However, heterotopias are not limited to buildings or other material places. Private thoughts and feelings trusted to a journal or a book can be a heterotopia; a friendship or a romantic attachment can so too. Accordingly, one could reinforce Foucault's definition with a more recent contribution by Kevin Hetherington. In *The Badlands of Modernity, Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, the author describes heterotopias as 'spaces in which an alternative social ordering is performed' (Hetherington 1997: 40). He adds that these spaces 'are set up to fascinate and to horrify, to try and make use of the limits of our imagination, our desires, our fears and our sense of power/powerlessness' (*ibidem*). Hetherington lists,

thus, six ways in which the concept of heterotopia has directly or indirectly been used:

1. As sites that are constituted as incongruous, or paradoxical, through socially transgressive practices [...].
2. As sites that are ambivalent and uncertain because of the multiplicity of social meanings that are attached to them [...].
3. As sites that have some aura of mystery, danger or transgression about them; places on the margin perhaps [...].
4. Sites that are defined by their absolute perfection, surrounded by spaces that are not so clearly defined as such [...].
5. Sites that are marginalized within the dominant social spatialization [...].
6. Incongruous forms of writing and text that challenge and make impossible discursive statements [...]. (idem, 41)

As we are about to see, Kars shares a bit of almost every item on the list. Indeed, with the exception of number 4 (sites of absolute perfection) and number 6 (incongruous forms of writing), the border and marginal Turkish city of Kars, portrayed in *Snow*, is an ambivalent site, surrounded by an aura of mystery and danger, personified by its inhabitants (and visitors) who all seem prone to transgression. In an interview to the *Spiegel*, Pamuk explained that he visited Kars when he was in his early twenties and became fascinated 'by the foreignness of a city that was partly built by the Russians,' and was, therefore, 'very different from the rest of Turkey' (Pamuk 2005: n.p.).⁹ In another interview, Pamuk added that:

In Kars you have a tangible sense of the sadness that comes from being a part of Europe but leading an un-European existence of want and struggle. My novel is about the internal conflicts of present-day Turks, about the contradictions between modernity and Islam, about the longing to be accepted by Europe and the simultaneous fear of this acceptance. (Pamuk / Lau 2005: n.p.)

Much to the utopian taste, in *Snow*, everything begins with a journey that, as it is clearly stated, would change the protagonist's life forever.¹⁰ Ka, the protagonist, travels to Kars as a journalist to cover the strange case of a suicide epidemic among the city's young women.¹¹ Right at the beginning of the novel, the reader learns from the narrator that

Our traveller had spent his years of happiness and childhood in Istanbul; he'd returned a week ago, for the first time in twelve years to attend to his mother's funeral. Having stayed four days, he had decided to take this trip to Kars. [...] Although he'd spent twelve years in political exile in Germany, our traveller had never been much of an activist. His real passion, his only thought, was for poetry. (Snow, 4)

Ka travels in snowy weather and the dance performed by the snowflakes during their progress from sky to ground feeds his poetic soul and inspire in him nothing but happy dreams:

As he watched the snow outside the window fall as slowly and silently as the snow in his dream, the traveller fell into a long-desired, long-awaited reverie; cleansed by memories of innocence, he succumbed to optimism and dared to believe himself at home in this world. Soon afterwards, he did something else that he had not done for years and fell asleep in his seat. (Snow, 4)

When I read this passage, it immediately brought back one of my favourite writers, James Joyce,¹² and the lyrical ending of his short-story 'The Dead':

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. ("The Dead": 255-256)

In Joyce's text, snow is the trigger for a personal epiphany. Gabriel Conroy, main protagonist of the short-story, seems to find in the democratic snow that falls upon all the living and the dead an opportunity to be reconciled with his wife, his country, his past, and, above all, with himself.¹³

On the contrary, in Pamuk's text, Ka soon loses his optimism for the snow, in Kars, 'no longer promised innocence. **The snow here was tiring, irritating, terrorising**' (*Snow*, 9, emphasis added). Indeed, in Kars, the snow offers both the perils and the blessings of isolation; a peril for all and a blessing solely for some and only for a limited amount of time since, as Gonçalo Vilas-Boas points out, heterotopias don't endure; they are spatial constructs, but temporal impossibilities (cf. Vilas-Boas 2002: 95).

At this point, I would like to go back to Hetherington and his definition of heterotopia. He explains that

In using the concept of heterotopia, it would be wrong to privilege either the idea of freedom or control. [...] It would also be wrong to associate heterotopia just with the marginal and powerless seeking to use Other places to articulate a voice that is usually denied them. An Other place can be constituted and used by those who benefit from the existing relations within a society [...]. (Hetherington 1997: 52)

Kars is the perfect example to illustrate Hetherington's words. When the blizzard isolates the city and the power of the Turkish state is temporarily suspended, different personal and collective projects of freedom and control are set in motion: Ka's, to begin with, and also the Islamists', the headscarf girls', the military's, and Sunay Zaim's, to focus only on the more relevant to the present study.

During his stay in Kars, Ka meets İpek, his sweetheart back at the university, who is divorced and ready to fall in love with him again (so he hopes). For a brief, but intense, space of time, Ka's troubled soul feels inebriated by the prospects of getting back to Germany with İpek by his side. His life seems filled with love and poems (*Snow*, 169), but this idyll soon develops into an ordeal when he becomes a pawn in a perilous game played by the other men in town.

The Islamists, who are poised to win the local elections, want to impose their religious values and remove from Kars any sign of Europe and of the West in general (*Snow*, 81). This faction is pungently represented by Blue, a charismatic leader, with whom all women in the novel seem to fall in love (including İpek and Kadife). In his tense 'conversation' with Ka, Blue makes clear that the journalist is not to write a single word about the suicide epidemic: 'Suicide is a terrible sin! It's an illness that grows the more you focus on it! [...] If you write that she was a Muslim girl making a political statement about headscarves, it will be more lethal for you than poison' (*Snow*, 77).

The headscarf girls, led by Kadife, wish to hold on to their pride and take a stand as women:

'You don't understand a thing!' said Kadife. 'A woman doesn't commit suicide because she's lost her pride; she does it to show her pride.'

'Is that why your friends committed suicide?'

'I can't speak for them. Everyone has her own reasons. But every time I have ideas of killing myself, I can't help thinking they were thinking the same way I am. The

moment of suicide is the time when they understand best how lonely it is to be a woman, and what it really means to be a woman.' (Snow, 405)

Kadife later adds that one of the differences between men and women is that women 'kill themselves because they hope to gain something,' whereas men 'kill themselves because they've lost all hope of gaining anything' (Snow, 406). These girls are persecuted by the military due to their insistence in using the headscarf and when they decide to commit suicide as a protest, the Islamists also condemn them because suicide is, as Blue says, an unforgivable sin:

**HUMAN BEINGS ARE GOD'S MASTERPIECES
AND
SUICIDE IS BLASPHEMY (Snow, 434) ¹⁴**

These women are caught in the middle of a conflict between two opposing groups of men, who impose their wills on them—by enforcing religious values or an alleged freedom, through the form of a veil ban, that condemn them either to jail or suicide—, while claiming to act on their behalf,¹⁵ but their voice is never actually heard. That's why Kadife so strongly emphasises the differences between men and women when approaching suicide. This also explains why she considers womanhood a lonely condition. Regardless of the men in power, free will is a luxury non attainable by the women of Kars. Their physicality perpetuates this state of violence for they are, as Kathleen Kirby might say, nothing but surfaces, as far as those men can (or care to) see:

My sexuality centers my bodily consciousness, making an open berth for me to occupy as a specifically female subject. [...] Though subjects of all races, classes, and ethnicities may live their bodies as volumes, for subjects from marginal groups the margins of the body may prove more palpable, central, defining, and affecting. If I live my body as volume, my "femininity", my gender, resides at its surface, on the level of the clothes I wear or the lipstick I (do or don't) apply. [...] The surfaces of our bodies interact with the divisions between groups drawn up by ideology [...] and it is precisely when the space of the body coincides with the space of ideology that violence can occur. (Kirby 1996: 13)

When talking about individual and collective projects and ideologies, one cannot forget the military's and Sunay Zaim's. The militaries' aim is to lead Turkey towards a progressive era, 'in the name of republicanism and Westernisation' (Snow, 416), and, in order to achieve this, they use the isolation brought by the snowstorm to

arrest, and massacre, 'all the radical Islamists and reactionaries in town' (Snow, 308), including the headscarf girls, if need be. As Nanki Chawla shrewdly observes, 'The massacre itself is interesting. It is not as one would assume, reading Western media, Islamic fundamentalists killing the secularists, but instead, secularists killing the Islamic high school students for threatening their new, Westernised state.'

As a true Orwellian disciple, Sunay Zaim, an actor and also the head of the military, uses his power to fabricate the news and the *Border City Gazette*, owned by Serdar Bey, becomes the depository of his fictional written news. A good example of this would be the untruthful piece of news that, following Zaim's orders, Serdar Bey writes, exposing Ka's life to mortal danger in the process:

We have been hearing many rumours about the so-called poet who came close to ruining yesterday's joyous performance by the Sunay Zaim Players when he strode on the stage halfway through the celebrations of Atatürk and the Republic and robbed the audience of their happiness and their peace of mind by bombarding their ears with a joyless, meaningless poem. [...] Can it be true that his efforts to provoke an incident at our religious high school resulted in his making the following statement [...]: 'I am an atheist. I don't believe in God, but that doesn't mean I'd commit suicide, because after all God - God forbid - doesn't exist.' Can these be his exact words? [...] Is it because you are ashamed of being a Turk that you hide your true name behind the fake, foreign, counterfeit name of Ka? (Snow, 301-302)

In spite of being a Turk, Ka is seen by the inhabitants of Kars as the outsider, the European or the Westerner. As a result, the military use this article to threaten Ka and make him act in their behalf for, if published, this text would make him a target for radical Islamists. Tailoring the news is thus an expedient often used in Kars, by Zaim and his cohorts, who are not ashamed to confess it and see it, in fact, as a proof of their kinship with the West:

'If this paper gets distributed, they'll shoot him in the street tomorrow.'

'Nonsense,' town.' He turned to Ka. 'I can see in your eyes that you haven't taken offence, and you know how much I respect your work - and the esteem in which I hold you as a human being. Please don't do the injustice of holding me to European standards that were never designed for us. [O]f course, we're going to run the sort of news our subscribers want to read. All over the world - even in America - newspapers tailor the news to their reader's tastes. And if your readers want nothing but lies from you, who in the world is going to sell papers that tell the truth? If the truth could raise my paper's circulation, why wouldn't I write the truth? Anyway, the police don't let me print the truth, either.' (Snow, 308, emphasis added) *said Serdar Bey. 'Madam, I assure you, you have nothing to fear. The soldiers have rounded up all the radical Islamists and reactionaries in*

Although the news may not reflect the truth, they sometimes become true.
That's the case of Zaim's death on stage:

Yesterday, while appearing in an historic play at the National Theatre, Kadife the headscarf girl shocked audiences first by baring her head in a moment of enlightened fervour, and then by pointing a weapon at Sunay Zaim, the actor playing the villain, and firing. Her performance, broadcast live, has left the people of Kars trembling in horror.

Three days ago, the Sunay Zaim Theatre Company stunned the people of Kars with an evening of original revolutionary plays that gave way to a real-life revolution before their eyes, and last night, during their second gala, the Sunay Zaim Players shocked us yet again. The vehicle on this occasion was an adaptation of a drama by Thomas Kyd, a wrongfully neglected English playwright who nevertheless is said to have influenced the work of Shakespeare. [...]

This real-life drama reminded the people of Kars of the performance two days earlier in which the bullets flying across the stage had turned out to be real, so it was in the horrified knowledge that these were real bullets too that the people of Kars watched Sunay fall. (Snow, 343, emphasis in the original)

This is how Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* becomes *A Tragedy in Kars* (Snow, 399). Indeed, with Zaim all metaphors connecting the world of theatre with the world of war make sense. As he wishes to conquer immortality, he plans his death on stage and writes about it to guarantee that, the following day, the news reach the public exactly as he wishes. Sunay Zaim sees Kars as his private stage and he himself as the main character of an appallingly real *coup de théâtre* (Snow, 309):

'It was Hegel who first noticed that history and theatre are made of the same materials,' said Sunay. 'Remember that, just as in the theatre, history chooses those who play the leading roles. And just as actors put their courage to the test on the stage, so, too, do the chosen few on the stage of history.' (Snow, 202)

'What I am trying to do is push the truths of art to their outer limits, to become one with myth,' said Sunay. 'Anyway, once the snow melts tomorrow and the roads open again, my death will cease to have the slightest importance for the people of Kars.' (Snow, 344)

Sunay Zaim is right. As soon as the snow melts, all heterotopias fade away. Blue, the leader of the Islamists is killed; Zaim fulfils his wish and dies on stage, at the hands of Kadife who is arrested for two years;¹⁶ and back in Germany and living alone again, without his beloved İpek, Ka is murdered by someone who probably took the fictional *Border City Gazette's* news too seriously and considered him a traitor.

As the text clairvoyantly promises, 'life and art were to merge in a bewitching historical tale of unparalleled beauty [...]' (Snow, 373). Life and fiction are, indeed,

unmistakably intertwined in *Snow*. There are plays within the plays, a science-fiction novel within the novel—the first Islamist science-fiction novel ever—,¹⁷ a book of poetry,¹⁸ which collects the poems Ka wrote during his stay in Kars and which he (predictably, but meaningfully) entitled *Snow*—the exact same title of Pamuk’s tale—, and another novel by a storyteller named Ohran, who researches Ka’s misadventures in Kars, after his death.

Kars is, consequently, more than just a border city; it is, as Hetherington might put it, a marginal (and marginalised) site within the dominant social spatialisation of Turkey. It is a creative place, ridden with paradoxes, subversive dreams, and conflicting visions. It is a site of hope, mystery, danger, and transgression that overflow when a blizzard cuts off any connection with the outside world and various heterotopic plans collide as snowflakes falling from the sky.

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Notes

1 Bauman's full quote reads as follows: 'No wonder that dystopias are no longer written these days: the post-Fordist, 'fluid modern' world of freely choosing individuals does not worry about the sinister Big Brother who would punish those who stepped out of line. In such a world, though, there is not so much room either for the benign and caring Elder Brother who could be trusted and relied upon when it came to decide which things were worth doing and having and who could be counted on to protect his kid brother against the bullies who stood in the way of getting them; and so the utopias of the good society have stopped being written as well' (Bauman 2005: 61-62).

2 Extensive literature has been published on contemporary 'critical utopia' and 'critical dystopia.' See, for example, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (eds.) (2003), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, London and New York, Routledge; and Fátima Vieira (2006), "Still learning with More and Morris: Old Recipes for a New Utopianism", *Utopia and Utopianism*, nr.1, Madrid, The University Book, pp. 59- 71.

3 Since 2008, I've been collaborator of 'Mapping Dreams: British and North-American Utopianism,' a research line of CETAPS (Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies, <http://cetaps.com/>), based at Faculdade de Letras, University of Porto. I also took part in a project titled 'Literary Utopias and Utopian Thought: Portuguese Culture and the Western Intellectual Tradition,' hosted by the Institute for Comparative Literature Margarida Losa (<http://www.ilcml.com/>) of the same Faculty, and supported by the Foundation for Science and Technology. This project was successfully concluded in September 2010 and the team is now working on a new one that aims at identifying and studying contemporary utopias in literature, predominantly, but also in other media, such as film, for example.

4 On utopia as a literary genre, see, for example, Vita Fortunati (2000), 'Utopia as Literary Genre,' in *Dictionary of Literary Utopias*, ed. by Vita Fortunati and Raymond Trousson, Paris, Honoré Champion Éditeur, pp. 634-643.

5 Henceforth all quotes from Snow will be identified by its title and respective page or pages.

6 'If the time of systemic revolutions has passed, it is because there are no buildings where the control desks of the system are lodged and which could be stormed and captured by the revolutionaries; and also because it is excruciatingly difficult, nay impossible, to imagine what the victors, once inside the buildings (if they found them first), could do to turn the tables and put paid to the misery that prompted them to rebel. One should be hardly taken aback or puzzled by the evident shortage of would-be revolutionaries or the kind of people who articulate the desire to change their individual plights as a project of changing the order of society.' (Bauman 2005: 5)

7 On Bauman's demise of utopia and dystopia, see Michael Hviid Jacobsen (2004), 'From Solid Modern Utopia to Liquid Modern Anti-Utopia? Tracing the Utopian Strand in the Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman,' *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies*, Vol 15, No. 1, 63-87.

8 On literary dystopias, see Raymond Trousson (2000), 'Dystopia,' in *Dictionary of Literary Utopias*, ed. by Vita Fortunati and Raymond Trousson, Paris, Honoré Champion Éditeur, pp. 180-185.

9 Orhan Pamuk, 'Orhan Pamuk and the Turkish Paradox', *Spiegel*, Frankfurt Book Fair Special (21/10/2005), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,380858,00.html> [accessed February16, 2012].

10 'If he hadn't been so tired, if he'd paid more attention to the snowflakes swirling out of the sky like feathers, he might have realised that he was travelling straight into a blizzard; he might have seen from the start that he had set out on a journey that would change his life for ever; he might have turned back.' (Snow, 3-4)

11 On the epidemic, see Snow, 13-17.

12 Curiously, Ka shares with Joyce not only a passion for writing, but also the condition of exile.

13 I address this subject more thoroughly in Márcia Lemos (2010), ‘“Bussoftlhee, mememormee!”: A Journey through Place and Memory in Joyce’s “The Dead” and Muldoon’s Horse Latitudes,’ *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada* 22/23, org. by Alexandra Moreira da Silva and Gonçalo Vilas-Boas, Porto, Afrontamento / Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa.

14 This self-explaining message could be read on a poster hanged above the entrance of the Divine Light Tea-house, in Kars.

15 See Snow, 372-373, emphasis added: ‘An announcer soon appeared, to proclaim that this evening’s live performance would bring to an end a tragedy that had visited social and spiritual paralysis upon the nation, and that the people of Kars would be delivered at last from the religious prejudices that for too long had excluded them from modern life and prevented women from enjoying equality with men.’ It is interesting, moreover, to notice the choice of the word ‘paralysis’ to characterise Kars. Joyce applies the exact same word to Dublin, in *Dubliners*: ‘Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis’ (‘The Sisters’, 7, emphasis added).

16 ‘They found her guilty of negligent homicide and lack of forethought [...]’ (Snow, 417)

17 This science-fiction novel is started by Necip and finished by Fazil who fears the mockery of Western readers (Snow, 419): ‘In the year 3579, there was a planet we haven’t even discovered yet. Its name was Gazzali and its people were rich, and their lives were much easier than our lives are today, but, contrary to what the materialists would have predicted, their rich and easy lives did not bring the inhabitants of this planet any spiritual satisfaction’ (Snow, 106).

18 Interestingly, Ka’s book project presents an imaginative snowflake structure. See Snow, 267.

Kristeva, Psychic Space, and Utopia: Toward a Sketch of Abject Utopianism

Ellis Cameron

TRENT UNIVERSITY, CANADA

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Julia Kristeva, a contemporary French psychoanalyst, literary/cultural critic, and author, is one of the paradigmatic figures of what is known in North America as contemporary French feminism. Kristeva's work includes novels, theoretical essays in the fields of semiotics and linguistics, and autobiographical prose related to the phenomenon of borderline subjectivity or liminal states of consciousness. Her 1980 book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur (Powers of Horror)* revolutionized psychoanalytic theory and practice through her introduction of the concept of *l'abjection* (abjection) and its relationship to the constitution of modern subjectivity. In this article I argue that Kristeva's work in the fields of psychoanalysis and cultural criticism, especially pertaining to what she calls "the new maladies of the soul," speaks to a utopian philosophy that becomes manifest through the reconstitution of what Kristeva calls Psychic Space. According to Kristeva, a healthy living psychic space is made possible only through a historically specific psychological process of subjectification that is characterized by great pain and suffering, but also by joy and pleasure. The suffering is proper to what Kristeva calls *l'abjection*; the pleasure is proper to what Kristeva calls *jouissance*. Together, these terms sketch out a particular range of Kristeva's work that can be used to complement extant critical theory informing utopian studies today.

For Kristeva, as is consistent with traditional psychoanalytic theory, the individual subject is a split subject.¹ The individual is split into a conscious and unconscious aspect. This constitutive splitting of the subject perpetually alienates the subject from himself or herself. Alienation is not a bad thing, absolutely; it is what

keeps the subject in motion. The forces of alienation acting on the subject—within and without—are the forces of *négativité* (negativity). The latter is a Hegelian concept that, when borrowed by psychoanalysis, refers to the everlasting subversion of a static or stable identity. *Négativité* operates unconsciously at the level of bodily *pulsions* (drives); however, these forces can be brought to the subject's conscious awareness through such contemplative practices as the arts, but especially via psychoanalysis.

Kristeva is part of a psychoanalytic tradition in France that is indebted to the work of Jacques Lacan. Like the way in which Alexandre Kojève introduced France to the work of Hegel, Lacan reintroduced the work of Freud to France intermingled with the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. Kristeva is important to the development of psychoanalytic theory and practice because she diverged, quite radically, from the teachings of Lacan, her one time analyst.² Like Lacan, Kristeva understands the individual subject to be constituted through language, which is to say via the symbolic. However, unlike Lacan, who thought that the subject was constituted by means of the symbolic and *only* the symbolic, Kristeva argues that the subject is equally constituted by the 'other side' of the symbolic: *le sémiotique*. The *sémiotique* is the non-signifying "baby-talk" proper to the *infans* (i.e., pre-linguistic infant): babbles, crying, tones, silences, and rhythms. It is that aspect of subjectivity that Lacan thought to be meaningless because it cannot be codified or pinned down by the Law of the dominant symbolic. This should not lead one to think that the *sémiotique* and *symbolique* are mutually antagonistic or antithetical. They do, in fact, work together: the *sémiotique* imbues the *symbolique* with force and movement such that without the former, all that remains is a dead archive of the *symbolique*. On the other hand, the *symbolique* provides the grammatical structures through which the *sémiotique* can operate.

This relationship is not always harmonious; when the *sémiotique* fails to connect with a strong symbolic structure (or vice versa), the results can prove wildly anarchic, as there is nothing to channel the drives. This usually occurs in moments of great historical upheaval, whether in science, politics, or art. For example, Kristeva is very interested in the "great upheaval" of the avant-garde movement in art during the early part of the 20th century, but one could just as well consider paradigm shifts in science (à la Thomas Kuhn) and/or mass protests such as May '68 or the Arab Spring. Since scientists, activists, and artists are implicated in expressions of the *sémiotique*, it should be apparent that the *sémiotique* is not restricted to pre-linguistic phase of

development but is present throughout the entirety of the subject's life. Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1988) articulates 'semiotic subjectivity' when she writes:

Self as a semiotic [le sémiotique] principle constitutes the subject; self as experience in which both agent and receiver act and are acted upon; and self finally as constituted by the Other, which is the field of the political. Together they form not layers of a self like the flesh of an onion easily peeled apart but rather types of chemicals whose different properties bind to produce for each individual a unique process, reaction, and alchemical substance. (see Smith and Watson, 444)

The "void" for Kristeva, which Lacan posited beneath language, is *full* with non-signifying meaning. This point of difference between the two thinkers is important, for it radically sets apart two very different interpretations of the individual subject—analytic practice and ethics—and their respective worldviews.

With regard to Lacan's view of the individual subject's inauguration into language or the symbolic, such a move is made—indeed forced—by the split in subjectivity affected through the separation from the pre-Oedipal Mother. This is, in short, castration. For Lacan, castration is total, complete, and psychically traumatizing, leaving the subject with a constantly plaguing sense of lack: a part of me is missing/lacking and I can never return to, or find, it (i.e., the pre-Oedipal Mother); nor would one want to, Lacan would say, as the death-bearing capacities of the Phallic Mother signify the abolition of my existence. To go beyond the pleasure principle would be to completely give oneself over to *Thanatos* and the veritable enactment of the death drive. The description above draws a picture for the reader of what constitutes the absolute, impossible, and endlessly painful nature of what Lacan calls *jouissance*. Kristeva develops a radically different understanding of *jouissance* and it too has to do with the *infans's* inauguration into language or the symbolic. For Kristeva, the subject's inauguration into language is not caused solely by a painful and traumatizing castration but also by affects of love and pleasure.

According to Kristeva, the pre-Oedipal Mother of the *infans* lovingly and carefully works *with* the non-signifying *sémiotique* speech, gradually bringing it into accord with the symbolic (i.e., making it into language). This process is pleasing and enjoyable for the *infans* as the pre-Oedipal Mother infuses the *infans* with creative potentiality via a loving and caring "apprenticeship of language": "[T]he progenitor inhabits the mouth, the lungs, the digestive tube of her offspring and, in accompanying the echolalia, guides them toward signs, phrases, tales: *infans* becomes infant, a speaking subject" (Kristeva 2006, 43-4). Kristeva, too, acknowledges that

entrance into the symbolic is painfully enacted through the loss of the pre-Oedipal Mother; she simply claims that this is not exclusively that which accounts for the constitution of subjectivity. In contrast to Lacan, Kristeva does not view the splitting of the subject from the pre-Oedipal Mother as total and complete. By virtue of *le sémiotique* operating at the borders of the self (i.e., between psyche and soma), the law-before-the-law (maternal law) is never truly severed as such; rather, it is conveyed in speech-acts not consecrated by the dominant symbolic (e.g., babble, cries, bellows, nonsense). As such, one is always already in contact with the pre-Oedipal Mother and thus capable of participating in the ecstasy of *jouissance*. For Kristeva, *jouissance* is not impossible but rather a possible space of the unknown (a “yet-to-come”). Leon S. Roudiez articulates the meaning of this ecstasy that is ‘beyond’ meaning typically understood by breaking down the French word *jouissance* into parts: *j’ouïs sens* = I heard meaning (Roudiez in Kristeva 1969/1977, 16). For Kristeva, *jouissance* is the intuitive perception of that which is beyond conventional symbolic codification and which ‘speaks’ of a meaning that is yet to come. This notion of the ‘yet-to-come’ *qua jouissance* is where I see the germs of Kristeva’s greater utopian philosophy.

The sensation of this ‘meaning’ that is yet to come is, for Kristeva, experienced during times when the individual and the social are not in accord. These times are identified as what Sara Beardsworth (2006) calls “tendential severances”:

[...] where modern institutions and discourses have failed to provide everyday social and symbolic sites or practices for the adequate connection of the semiotic and symbolic [...] When the semiotic and symbolic are inadequately connected, the linguistic universe, symbolic bonds with others (communication), and social bonds are felt to be meaningless and without value. (14)

The feeling of meaninglessness and nihilism conjures within the individual subject—who has, for security purposes, turned inward into himself/herself (i.e., primary narcissism)—sensations of disgust and revulsion. Without readily available cultural resources by means of which to express these sensations of unrest (for the *sémiotique* is always moving), the latter will invariably erupt in wildly anarchic and destructive ways. These outbursts can take the form of vulgar street level anarchy as might be witnessed through acts of vandalism and graffiti, or on a mass scale approximating social uprisings. These actions are not guided by positive visions (in the sense of definite plans or courses of action), but rather are simply base expressions of rejection of the status quo. In short, this phenomenon is akin to, if not emblematic of,

abjection.³ Abjection, although unpleasant in every sense of the term, is a necessary process to undergo in order for (a new) subjectivity to become manifest; which is to say, for the “tendential severance” to become reconciled.

The problem Kristeva diagnoses, according to Sara Beardsworth (2004), is that the late-modern individual subject is called upon to perform the impossible; that is, to perform the function of a social institution that can knit together *sémiotique* and *symbolique*. This is an impossible task since by definition the individual is not the social; faced with such overwhelming responsibility, the individual regresses into nihilism and despair, which manifests in the form of crippling psychological ills. In place of the dearth of cultural resources necessary to help bring forth such uniting social discourses, Kristeva suggests that the arts and psychoanalysis can be utilized toward this end; for without such resources, individuals wander about aimlessly, with little or no social meaning to which to connect their own ‘bodily meaning.’ An example of this is the student riots in London in Summer 2011. Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of the discipline of cultural studies, quoted in *The Guardian*, describes the 2011 student London riots which speak to Kristeva’s point:

Some kids at the bottom of the ladder are deeply alienated, they’ve taken the message of Thatcherism and Blairism and the coalition [...] nobody’s going to help you. And they’ve got no organised political voice, no organised black voice and no sympathetic voice on the left. That kind of anger, coupled with no political expression, leads to riots. It always has. (see Williams 2012)

This state of being—whereby a disconnect lingers between social meaning(s) and bodily or sensual meaning(s)—Sara Beardsworth calls “unacknowledged suffering” (Beardsworth 13-17) The rebellious actions of the protesters/rioters are received merely as senseless violence; and this is good for news media and right-wing propaganda. However, on a much deeper psychological level, Beardsworth, following Kristeva’s critique, would suggest that the violent outbursts witnessed are in fact symptoms of the disconnect between body and social, a disconnect that the individual is unable to adequately amend on their own. When there is no strong social symbolic to meet these private desires, the individual turns into a symptom of social pathology; or, as Kristeva articulates the same point: “Private suffering absorbs political horror into the subject’s psychic microcosm” (1987, 234)

The declining status of the capital-O Other, in this case the State/Politics, is but one symptom that today we live in “a new suffering world” (Kristeva, 1987, 235). These moments of violent outburst are not to be coded in merely negative language,

which is to say they are not just “outrageous and monstrous”; by way of the outburst’s abject nature these moments are also productive in terms of what they allow the individual subject to achieve. Kristeva states, for instance, “The modern political domain is massively, in totalitarian fashion, social, leveling, exhausting. Hence madness is a space of asocial, apolitical, and *paradoxically free individuation*” (1987, 235; my emphasis). Riots and violent protests are abject attempts to bring forth—give birth?—to a new individual subjectivity from within an undifferentiated collective event. Kristeva articulates the imperfect, messy, and arduous process of this abject individuation when she relates her experience of being forced to drink handed to her by her parents: “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*. [...] ‘I’ am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (Kristeva 1980, 3). The disgust conjured as a result of being forced to drink the milk is symptomatic of the overbearing and/or oppressive symbolic figures that her parents represented. Although the reaction in question is reactionary at best, it is pregnant with elusive and subversive tendencies that give birth to new and unexpected subjectivities.

One of the burdens placed upon the subject under late modernity is the responsibility to establish new connections that could possibly lead to a new social symbolic, while knowing that society has ‘advanced’ to the point where such a symbolic is virtually impossible. Keeping in mind that *le sémiotique* is always pulsating at the edges of subjectivity (i.e., operating at the borders of the individual and society), disrupting the possibility of a stable symbolic, such efforts are perpetually thwarted. “[I]t is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so - whence the element of crisis which the notion of abjection carries with it” (Kristeva qtd. in Oliver 2002, 374). This is not to say that the establishment of such symbolic codes is impossible and therefore hopelessly utopian; rather, the sensations of disgust and revulsion unsettle complacent subjectivity such that the subject is forced into action of some kind. Because abjection does not point to an object as such, but instead pushes away from an existing object, such an experience requires one to remain open to radical possibility as it presents itself en route to ‘nowhere.’ What is offered to the individual subject is a *chance* to establish a more harmonious balance between *le sémiotique* and *symbolique* such that a healthy psychic space can be discovered and sustained for open and fluid dialogue and exchange to take place.

For Kristeva the reconstitution of psychic space amounts to the reconstitution of a better world, and I will be bold and claim such a world to be utopian. Kelly Oliver (2004), philosopher, clarifies the point that “psychic space is not just an inner drama or psychological interior [...] Constant and free-flowing negotiations, transference, and translations between the bodily drives and cultural language are necessary to sustain robust psychic space” (217n4); which is another way of saying, as Kristeva does in *Tales of Love*, “The psyche is one open system connected to another, and only under those conditions is it renewable. If it lives, your psyche is in love. If it is not in love, it is dead” (1983, 15). The psyche is not the mind or the soul, contained within the strictly narrow confines of the skull and brain of the individual, but is rather an open and fluid exchange of drive-energy *between* an individual and his or her social milieu. If these open and fluid conditions are not readily available (as Kristeva believes to be the case today, with her diagnosis of the “new maladies of the soul”), psychic space becomes reduced to or reified in terms of *drive* or *culture* (i.e., the individual’s body *qua* somatic symptom or external to the body in culture, namely, the ‘entertainment industry’). By this, Kristeva is claiming that during times of “tendential severance” (see Beardsworth), the ‘closed’ and unhealthy psyche seeks security by turning inward and indulging in the self-gratifying private fantasies of the body, or by cocooning itself in the substitute oceanic feeling provided by culture, namely the entertainment industry. Both of these options are security measures that the psyche enacts in order to protect it from having to take the risk of erecting a new symbolic.⁴ Such reclusion can also dull the subject to the potential joy and pleasures to be gained through wagering such a risk.

The refounding of an open, healthy, and living psychic space begins with and works through abjection. The *jouissance* to be gained from having worked through this hardship is akin to “an ‘oceanic feeling,’ as a jubilant osmosis of the subject in the common flesh of a ‘not-yet oneself’ swallowed up in a ‘not-yet world’” (Kristeva 2006, 8). Just like the process of pregnancy/birth there are no guarantees. The life awaiting the pre-natal being *ex utero* necessitates a risk, a risk of which the pre-natal being is unaware. If it were the case that the pre-natal beings could be made aware of the risks of their birth, it is unlikely that such beings would opt to wager such a risk. However, that is exactly the wager or risk that is forced upon the subject confronted by abjection.

One particular historical event that is very important to Kristeva—and that knits together abjection, psychic space, and utopia—is May ’68. “[F]undamentally, I

think, May '68's radicalism bears witness to an indefinite sense of mutation in the essence of man, the search for other forms of the sacred" (Kristeva 2002, 37). Earlier in the same text: "I am going to use a vocabulary that may shock people [...] Infinite *jouissance* for each person at the intersection of happiness for all... is it anything else but the sacred" (Kristeva 2002 34). Kristeva's notion of a "not-yet-world," precipitated by the radical wager of *jouissance* for each person, echoes Ernst Bloch's notion of the not-yet-conscious developed in the latter's *Principle of Hope*. Similarly, Kristeva's statement that "significance [*signifiante*] is indeed inherent in the human body" (Kristeva 1982, 10) seems to reiterate Bloch's idea that hope functions at the core of what constitutes the human being, much the same way Freud proclaimed the human being to be constituted by the pleasure principle (see Bloch 1954-59). However, in contrast to Bloch, who viewed psychoanalysis as a negation of futurity, Kristeva sees psychoanalysis as one of the few surviving methods available to preserve any possibility of futurity.

May '68 was a historical event that witnessed the utopian potential (both constructive and destructive) of confronting/embracing the pure negativity of that which is in excess of the symbolic order. The potential good to emerge from such a radical wager is complicated by the potential harm it can inflict upon both individuals as well as groups. Like the tired-out desire of Kristeva's melancholy woman who knows no bounds, the analysand—once brought to his/her psychic limits—"wants everything, to the end, until death" (Kristeva 1987, 86). This desire for everything until death should not be misunderstood as the exanguination of the powers of agency in the empirical act of dying; rather, Kristeva is using the term "death" metaphorically for purposes of illustrating the level of risk that the individual subject is willing to test in order for the pleasures harboured deep within their suffering to become manifest. Is this not the kind of intensity that we lack today? How does one, today, wager utopia?

Unfortunately, but perhaps not unexpectedly, Kristeva does not offer her reader any ready-made answers. The closest she does come to proffering any recommendation is through her defense of psychoanalysis as a method by means of which the individual subject can return to deeply ingrained psychic traces of abjection and thus work through their own unfulfilled potentialities. Other possible sites for hope include literature and the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, music). By means of these cultural resources, Kristeva encourages the individual subject to expand the imaginary limitations/horizons of their psyche-soma and by extension increase the

sensitivity of his/her affective capacities with regard to his/her own body, others, and the world at large. "I think we all need an experience, by which I mean something unknown, surprise, pain, or delight, and then comprehension of this impact. Is it still possible? Perhaps not [...] I prefer to welcome these experiences: I keep my curiosity on call, expectant" (Kristeva 1996, 11). Kristeva's cultural theory may appear pretentious, but this would be to miss the intention behind her method. Through her particular recourse to the humanities, her almost religious observations seek to bring the otherwise wildly anarchic *sémiotique* under control through sublimated practices such that psychic space will remain less volatile, and thus less likely to become reified as either *drive* or *culture*. "Theologies and literatures, beyond sin and fiendish characters, invite us to carve out ourselves in a sublime Other—metaphor or metonymy of the sovereign *Good*" (Kristeva 1983, 7). Literature provides a symbolically rich signifying practice by means of which the psyche can rearticulate its topography in a controlled imaginary environment, which is to say, reconstitute its capacities by means of charting unknown psychic lands.

Kristeva argues, "[L]iterature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises" (1980, 208). Literature *qua* 'semiotization of the symbolic' (or, vice versa) is a practice through which *jouissance* infiltrates that symbolic order. "In cracking the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, and releasing from beneath them the drives born by vocalic or kinetic differences, *jouissance* works its way into the social and symbolic" (Kristeva 1974, 79-80). The particular examples that Kristeva uses to illustrate her point, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, are the French poets Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore-Lucien Ducasse 1846-1870) and Stéphane Mallarmé (Étienne Mallarmé 1842-1898). Their poetic works, at the end of the 19th century, constitute a veritable rupture of the dominant symbolic of their time, by most clearly representing the modern form of desire in language. In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Kristeva engages with More's *Utopia* directly—if for only a few paragraphs—where she lists the various artifacts in More's work which she calls so much "negative rhetoric": the Achoriens are a people *without* a territory; Adamus is a prince *without* a people, and the chief city, Amauratum, is a mirage. Kristeva's point is to affirm that, "surely ...we are dealing with a *work of the imagination*, not a piece of reporting" (117; my emphasis). Kristeva means to draw her reader's attention to the psychic meaning of utopia, that utopia is *primarily* an experience of the imaginary, and more precisely that of the individual. "When one dreams of a happy, harmonious, utopian society, one imagines it built upon love, since love exalts me at the same time as it exceeds or overtaxes me" (Kristeva 1983, 4).

The liminal or frontier zones of the psyche are precarious and sometimes threatening or even dangerous, but given the dire status of the psyche today, it is, as she says, a chance one must take.

Kristeva's refined engagement with various signifying practices invites others to do the same (i.e., read, write, act, paint, etc.) with the expectation that, through such personal and private engagement, the individual subject will become conscious of something that will affectively increase the psychic range within which they might explore the wonders of the universe. This is, I believe, what Kristeva is hinting at in the quotation borrowed from Reé (1997): "It [Kristeva's work] was an archeology [...] An archeology in search of utopia" (267), and is what Reé meant by titling his paper "Revolutionary Archeology: Julia Kristeva and the Utopia of the Text." This form of literary/cultural engagement might, contrary to expanding the range of one's psychic space, also narrow it through an encounter with something that is traumatizing and that one is not ready to face. Yet Kristeva writes, "However distressing, unbearable, deadly, or exhilarating it may be, this psychic life ... allows you access to your body and to other people. [...] Whether it harms you or saves you, you are its subject. Our purpose here is to analyze psychic life, that is, to break it down and start over" (1993, 6). This suggests that regardless of the risks—i.e., excessively expanding or reducing psychic space—one must devote oneself to this imperative if one is to have a hope of any sort in today's late-capitalist cultural climate.

These abject psychic spaces manifest as "abject" relative to their status quo but are nonetheless utopian in their own right. These psychic spaces are utopian in the way that Susan McManus (2003) proclaims utopia as "resolutely disruptive, inherently transgressive, profoundly performative, and fundamentally creative" (14). Although I argue that these psychic spaces and relationships are utopian, they do manifest as abject within the context of the culture at large and from which they emerge. Subjectivity is never achievable as such since, as Kristeva asserts, "abjection is above all ambiguity" (1980, 9). The abject utopian is neither subject nor object but rather a pre-egoistic fledgling, teetering on the cusp of undifferentiated psychic/somatic development, and characterized by "the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (Kristeva, 1980, 5). To this end, abjection is a *productive* concept to work with, despite its abhorrent qualities, and indeed I claim it is couched within a decidedly utopian context. Kristeva says that abjection is experienced when the subject "weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside," (the result of a weak or declining social-symbolic), "finds the

impossible within" (5). The "impossible within" is terrifying and is equally as flawed as a failed external identification in the symbolic.

The abject utopian projects radically alternative—abject—ways of living compared to the standardized commodity form of late capitalism. Insofar as this is the case, the abject utopian mimics Kristeva's reinterpretation of Albert Camus's dictum "I rebel, therefore we are." For Kristeva, Camus's reformulation of the *cogito* with regard to the challenges of modern living becomes: "I revolt, therefore we are still to come" (Kristeva 2002, 42). The horribly distorted desires and anticipations of such a utopian anticipate a future world—i.e., a utopian world—made possible by means of a reconstituted psychic space that has its origins in the decrepit, sometimes violent and horrifying, conditions of their contemporary life-world. Indeed, I agree that this is an unorthodox approach to imagining a path toward utopia, but Kristeva's is a theory that imagines the *necessary preconditions* in order to maximize any utopian potential (i.e., meaning, language, desire, etc.). In other words, it is only by confronting one's own "abominable limits" that abjection becomes "*an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new signifiante*" (Kristeva 1980, 15; my italics).

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Notes

1 Kristeva is best understood in terms of her linguistic theory and its implications for subjectivity. Her body of work can be ‘split’ into two parts: the early, more Marxian, writings of the late-1960s through mid-1970s (best represented in the book version of her doctoral dissertation *La révolution du langage poétique* (Revolution in Poetic Language, 1974) and the later, more properly psychoanalytic, writings that Sara Beardsworth (2006) calls “the trilogy of the 1980s”: *Pouvoirs de l’horreur* (Powers of Horror, 1980), *Histoires d’amour* (Tales of Love, 1983), and *Soleil Noir* (Black Sun, 1987a). Respectively, these three latter works address and examine abjection, love, and loss. Compared to Revolution in Poetic Language’s Marxian emphasis on *procès* (process) by way of *dialectique* (dialectics)—i.e., between the grammar of *le symbolique* (symbolic) and the drives of *le sémiotique* (semiotic)—her work in the 80s shifts focus onto a constitutive moment proper to subjectivity, an incomplete *clivé* (split), around which love, loss, and abjection circulate.

2 As with the work of Kristeva, I will not attempt an encyclopedia-like recounting of the work and theory of Lacan. Such work already exists and is very thorough; see Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher (1991), Fink (1995), and Apollon, Bergeron, and Cantin (2002).

3 In one of its manifestations, abjection is the pure repulsion and pushing away from something that one violently distastes, which is to say abjection is reactionary and not affirmative at its core in Kristeva. The subjectivity of her subject-in-process is therefore a subject that is constituted on the basis of pure negation. Phenomenologically the subject-in-process may experience the world in ways that can be described as affirmative and productive but, under the 'surface' of the ego, negative—or, negating—forces fueled by distaste and repugnance drive the subject. This does not, in any sense, imply that the subject-in-process is morally corrupt or motivated by dodgy forces; rather, it merely sheds light on the intersubjective context within which conflicts and desires arise. For Kristeva, the hope would be that once the subject becomes aware of the fact that his/her desire is negative and motivated by the psychological forces of abjection then s/he will be better situated to make sense of his/her life experiences and projects. In terms of understanding how this knowledge of abjection informs the political nature of the social uprisings mentioned in the main body of the text, Kristeva's theory suggests the following: It is therapeutic to abandon thinking of the future in purely positive and constructive way such that we can get what we want. The subject of late modernity, according to Kristeva, is not a subject who wants; rather, s/he is a subject who detests and rejects. Typically thinking in terms of the latter is considered pessimistic and thus dismissed and degraded, which is to say devalued. But the alternative of thinking positively and being optimistic are not yielding the kind of world that we want. As such, the challenge is to embrace the abject aspect of our subjectivity and learn to think and act with it productively. This would effectively amount to thinking and acting in ways that are considered inappropriate and/or obscene at times; however, I hold that these are the only remnants of utopianism in today's late modern capitalist society.

4 See above, the example of the London rioters—individually together—attempting to achieve such a symbolic.

Between Empirical and Alternative Worlds: Board Games, Players and the Politics of Emotional Immersion

Teresa Pereira

NOVA UNIVERSITY OF LISBON/CETAPS

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One of the most significant current discussions in Utopian Studies and Science-Fiction Studies is the idea of Singularity, described by Vernor Vinge in the article "The Coming Technological Singularity: How To Survive in the Post-Human Era" (1993) as "the imminent creation by technology of entities with greater than human intelligence" (Vinge, 1993: 12). The concept of singularity is central to the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) as well as to the adaptive texts of the popular television series.

Having risen to prominence as an object of academic research, a large and growing body of critical studies - composed, for example, of *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica* (2008), *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Knowledge Here Begins out There* (2008) and *Battlestar Galactica: Investigating Flesh, Spirit and Steel* (2010) - has been published on *Battlestar Galactica*. Nonetheless, far too little attention has been paid to the renowned series' award-winning games. Stemming from the colossal success of the revisioning of Glen A. Larson's post-apocalyptic universe, *Battlestar Galactica's* adapting texts promptly entered the lexicon of video and board game players. Although innumerable computer games have been recently designed, no single video game exists which adequately evokes the landscape of the space opera. While its digital counterparts highlight the bellicose rivalry between humans and Cylons, only *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* (2008), along with its various expansion packs (*Battlestar Galactica: Official Variant Rules*, 2008; *Battlestar Galactica: Pegasus Expansion*, 2009;

Battlestar Galactica: Exodus Expansion, 2010; and *Battlestar Galactica: Daybreak Expansion*, 2013), imports the political and social dimensions of the sci-fi TV series.

Drawing upon Science-Fiction Studies and the aesthetics of play, the following paper offers some insights into *Battlestar Galactica*. While research on the subject has focused mostly on the textual machinery of the space opera, the taxonomy of *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* will be at the core of this study. Perhaps the whole logic of the game is summed up in its overview:

Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game provides a unique gaming experience. Unlike most games where players win individually, Battlestar Galactica is a team game, with the added complication that which players are on which teams is kept secret. Each player is secretly assigned a team at the start of the game. The two teams are the humans and the Cylons, and each team has a specific objective. The human players are trying to find the map to Earth, while the Cylon players simply want to annihilate the human race. Players win or lose with the other members of their team... but must figure out who they can trust in order to lead their team to victory (Konieczka, 2008a: 2).

Whereas similar games seek to remediate specific moments of the popular series, the board game brings players to the climax of *Battlestar Galactica*, giving rise to a conflict of allegiances between humans and Cylons.

A strand of indisputable relevance within dystopian science-fiction, *Battlestar Galactica* rethinks the empirical world of its author and readers:

sf is (...) "didactic", it (...) works by way of a readerly delight in the thoughtful and thought-provoking activity of imagining the elsewhere of a given text, of filling in, co-creating, the imagined (...) paradigm of a society that does not exist but that nevertheless supplies a cognitive map of what does exist (Moylan, 2000: 5).

Generating "cognitively estranged alternative worlds that stand in a potentially critical relationship with empirical reality" (Moylan, 2000: 50), the television series' adaptation transports its players to an illusive 'elsewhere' of a semiotic nature" (Angenot, 1979: 14). As a result, "the process of working through the text (...) [launches] an adventure within the mind" (Moylan, 2000: 8).

Comparable to what has been suggested above, Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1944) argues that play, owing to its capability to take place in an independent time and space, "only becomes possible,

thinkable, and understandable when an influx of the *mind* breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos" (Huizinga, 1944: 3). Moreover, the Dutch historian implies that:

All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the "consecrated spot" cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart (Huizinga, 1944: 10).

Seductive and exotic, the textual machine forces its players to uphold the significant game world. Because of this, the player negotiates the processes of combining and constructing the symbols that interpenetrate the complex fabric of the science-fiction universe of *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game*, stepping straight into an absorbing reality.

Within this framework, the overall structure of the following study has been divided into three parts, including this introductory section. The second part will deal with the ambiguous experience generated by an immersive platform - by analyzing the interplay between players and characters within the game world -, as well as with the elements that make up *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game*. The final section will draw upon the entire paper, tying up the various theoretical strands in order to assess the enigmatic immersion of the player in the science-fiction narrative that characterizes both the television series and the board game.

Commenting on immersion, Marie-Laure Ryan argues that, within the textual world, one "plunges under the sea (...), reaches a foreign land (...), is taken prisoner (...), and loses contact with all other realities", returning "to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey" (Ryan, 2002: 93-94). The metaphor of transportation, developed by Richard Gerrig in his book *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: on the Psychological Activities of Reading* (1993), divides the experience of immersive reading into three dimensions: spatial immersion, concerned with setting; temporal immersion, connected with plot; and emotional immersion (at which the following section will take a closer look), related to characters.

Hinging on Aristotle's crucial term *catharsis*, techniques such as the omniscient narrator and internal focalization are able to elicit the emotional

immersion of the reader in the textual world. Because the one who reads gets to immerse her or himself in the secluded consciousness of an imaginary character, the reader becomes inextricably intertwined with the fate of fictional beings (Ryan, 2001: 148-150). An example of this is Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877):

She did not take her eyes off the wheels (...), and drawing her head down between her shoulders threw herself forward on her hands under the truck, and with a light movement as if preparing to rise again immediately dropped on her knees. And at the same moment she was horror-struck at what she was doing. 'Where am I? What am I doing? Why?' She wished to rise, to throw herself back, but something huge and relentless struck her on the head and dragged her down. 'God forgive me everything!' she said, feeling the impossibility of struggling (...). The candle, by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief, and evil, flared up with a brighter light, lit up for her all that had before been dark, crackled, began to flicker, and went out for ever (Tolstoy, 1877: 757).

By virtue of the power of literary discourse, the reader is located "within the center of consciousness of the characters [she or] he tries to understand" (Ryan, 2002: 111), thus launching her or himself at the universe in which Anna Karenina commits suicide. Although fictional, the novel's landscape allows one to create emotional responses, thereby permitting the reader to gaze helplessly in terror and pity at the heroine.

In the same vein, Peter Fitting's "Positioning and Closure: on the 'Reading-Effect' of Contemporary Utopian Fiction" (1987) emphasises that the science-fiction reader is hauled up into the text:

As readers, we are no longer addressed simply as listeners; we have become involved in an experience which goes beyond the discovery and apprehension of a better society, one in which the description of the ideal society forms the background to a sequence (...) of unfolding events which we follow through the eyes of a hero (...). (...) the "novelization" of utopia involves a significant transformation: from the positioning of the reader as the addressee in a philosophic dialogue who is persuaded through reasoned presentation, to the process of identification with a fictional character where the reader is implicated on an emotional and experimental level as well as on the intellectual one (Fitting, 1987: 29-30).

Drawing upon the utopian works of Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Marge Piercy, Fitting stresses that, by way of the reading convention of "positioning", the relationship established between the text and the one who reads suffers a major change.

Nevertheless, the reactions generated by the text are in the realm of make-believe. Central to the entire discipline of immersion, the parallel between fiction and games of make-believe is directly related to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's defence of the act of reading as a "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" (Coleridge, 1817: 97). As suggested by Coleridge, the reader enters into a contract with the textual world, granting it the power to energize her or his mental set up.

Similarly (although in a notably different way), Huizinga asserts that play (which is analogous to a performance) captivates and enchants, "absorbing the player intensely and utterly" (Huizinga, 1944: 13). Separated from the everyday world, play - as a consequence of being an intermezzo - is a "stepping out of 'real' life" into an "only pretending" domain, abolishing, at the same time, "that troublesome 'only' feeling" (Huizinga, 1944: 8). The following quotation illustrates this point clearly:

Every child knows perfectly well that he is "only pretending" (...). How deep-seated this awareness is in the child's soul is strikingly illustrated by the following story, told to me by the father of the boy in question. He found his four-year-old son sitting at the front of a row of chairs, playing "trains". As he hugged him the boy said: "Don't kiss the engine, Daddy, or the carriages won't think it's real" (Huizinga, 1944:8).

Comparable to Huizinga's anecdote, the player of *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* performs an act dissociated from common reality.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to discuss the game at issue. Transposing and commenting on the informing source, the television series' adaptation destabilizes the authority of the original text and brings into life a dynamic mosaic of textual surfaces (Sanders, 2006: 3). In a postmodern fashion "of borrowings and *bricolage*" (Sanders, 2006: 34), *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* ambiguously reshapes and rethinks the television series that itself reshaped and rethought the 70's space opera *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-1979).

A creature with multidimensional degrees of complexity, the board game - designed and developed by the widely acclaimed Fantasy Flight Games -, transports its players across humanity's, as well as Cylon's, plight to Kobol. As explained earlier, the narrative of the game takes place under the desperate struggle of both humans and Cylons for survival.

In addition to a square game board (on which *Galactica*, *Colonial One*, and the Cylon Locations - Caprica, the Cylon Fleet, the Human Fleet, and the *Resurrection Ship* - are, among other things, positioned), *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* is composed of ten character sheets (of which no less than three and no more than seven can take part in the game), fifty-two tokens (such as two basestars, twelve civilian ship tokens, and so on), one hundred ten bridge-sized cards (divided into Crisis, Super Crisis, Loyalty, and Quorum Cards and President and Admiral Titles), and one hundred twenty-eight small cards (organized according to Skill - thereafter arranged in politics, leadership, tactics, piloting, and engineering - and Destination Cards, including one Kobol Objective Card). Furthermore, among the component list of the game there also is an eight-sided dice, thirty-two plastic ships (consisting of eight vipers, four raptors, sixteen Cylon raiders, and four Cylon heavy raiders), and ten character stands (where the ten character tokens are placed).

Once the board game has been set up¹ and each player has been assigned a character sheet², the dice is rolled and whoever gets the highest score goes first. A turn-based game, *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* is played over a number of turns until either humans or Cylons have reached their ultimate goals. At the start of her or his turn (which is divided into six steps), the player selects the number and types of Skill Cards listed in his character's skill set (Receive Skills Step), moving, if she or he wishes, to a different location (Movement Step). During the Action Step, the current player chooses one action to perform (activate location, Skill Card action, character action, activate viper, Title and Quorum Cards, Loyalty Card) or does nothing. In the course of the fourth stage, the Crisis Step, a Crisis Card is drawn and subsequently resolved. Afterwards, over the Activate Cylon Ships Step, Cylon ships, if any are in play, may attack and damage their enemies. Finally, throughout the Prepare for Jump Step, the human fleet may proceed to prepare for jump.

Secretly appointed to the human or Cylon teams at the start of the game³, a player may choose to reveal her or his true identity. On a revealed Cylon player's turn (which is organized in three steps), she or he selects two Skill cards of any type(s) (Draw Skills Step), moves to a Cylon location (Movement Step), and performs an action (Action Step).

Players must cooperate throughout the game in attaining their team's objective. Whereas human players must successfully jump the fleet enough times to reach Kobol, the main aim of Cylon players is to annihilate the human race. If at least one human resource (Fuel, Food, Morale, and Population) is depleted to zero or

if *Galactica* is either invaded or destroyed before humans manage to limp towards Kobol, Cylons win the game.

Stepping into the shoes of the character she or he chooses to represent, the one who plays pledges to be absorbed, in time and space, by the game world. By imagining her or himself as a member of *Battlestar Galactica*, the player becomes emotionally immersed in the cosmos to which she or he is transported.

Within this framework, Loyalty Cards (owing to the attributes of the board game and, to some extent, through the player's agency) are an efficient immersive mechanism. As explained earlier, players start the game with either a "You are Not a Cylon" card or a "You are a Cylon" card. Later on, during the Sleeper Agent Phase, players who had been portraying a member of the human team may be dealt an additional "You are a Cylon" card, thus experiencing the same enigmatic internal conflict that characterized Sharon "Boomer" Valerii for the duration of the first two seasons of the popular TV series. Shortly after shooting Adama, nearly killing the veteran of the First Cylon War, Boomer finds herself consciously rejecting her Cylon nature. Stripped of her own free will, Boomer's anguish is similar to that felt by the player who has been suddenly forced to engage in acts of sabotage against the human race (Moore, 2008: 111).

On the other hand, the "You are a Sympathizer" card introduces a three-dimensional effect of ambiguity. Besides human and Cylon players, the sympathizer embodies a member of one of the species previously mentioned who wishes to betray her or his peers. Much like Sharon "Athena" Agathon, the sympathizer deliberately transgresses the trust of her or his equals, siding with the other team.

Renewing permanently the adapting text, the player becomes utterly immersed. In the midst of the game world, literary mechanisms such as the omniscient narrator and internal focalization (already discussed above) are replaced by the imaginary "aura of presence" (Ryan, 2002: 158) of the player. Instead of gazing helplessly in terror and pity at the fate of the remnants of humanity and the Cylon species, the one who plays becomes momentarily a member of *Battlestar Galactica's* universe.

As was pointed out in the introduction, this paper set out to assess the enigmatic immersion of the player - who is simultaneously a traveller (an idea highlighted by

Ryan) and a performer (as suggested by Huizinga) - in the science-fiction universe of the adapting text of the award-winning TV series. Having briefly discussed Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of immersion and the aesthetics of play, it is now possible to correlate science-fiction, the politics of immersion, and board games.

Comparable to what has been suggested by Ryan, the player of the board game at issue becomes emotionally involved with the textual structure of the estranged world. Or, in Fitting's previously mentioned words, she or he undergoes a "process of identification with a fictional character where the [player] is implicated on an emotional and experimental level as well as on the intellectual one" (Fitting, 1987: 30). Indeed, the active involvement of the player (who is located at the centre of the narrative) in the fictional world of the board game "includes performative strategies [related to the concept of "positioning"] which attempt to directly engage the [player]" (Fitting, 1987: 32).

Inside the symbol system in which the game is set, the player is invited "to identify with the fictional protagonist and the goal of the game" (Juul, 2011: 161). In spite of this, whereas the reader, as Coleridge suggested, suspends his disbelief - "which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge, 1817: 97) -, "you [the player] (...) are supposed to suspend your belief in yourself, rather than in the unrealism of the game-world, so you can *be* the character you're playing. (...) You have to enact the text's performative in order to play" (Walker, 2001: 45). Pulled into the game's dimension, the player actively engages in the processes of constructing, combining, and renewing the elements of the board game. Willing her or himself to the estranged shore, the one who plays sinks to the depths of the make believe realm of only pretending in which *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* takes place.

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Notes

1 The reader should bear in mind that a comprehensive review of how to prepare to play *Battlestar Galactica: the Board Game* is beyond the scope of this paper.

2 Additionally to character type - of which there are four categories (political leader, military leader, pilot, and support) -, abilities, and set up, every last character's skill set is listed on the character sheet. Because the skill set enumerates the skills the character has expertise in, each game turn the current player draws the number and types of Skill Cards specified on his character sheet (Receive Skills Step). By way of illustration, read the following transcript: "It is William Adama's Receive Skills step. He looks at his skill set, which lists 3 leadership and 2 tactics. He therefore draws three leadership Skill Cards and two tactics cards" (Konieczka, 2008a: 9).

3 At the beginning of the game each player is given one Loyalty Card in order to determine whether or not she or he is a human or a Cylon. Halfway through the game, during the Sleeper Agent Phase, an additional set of Loyalty Cards (containing the "You are a Sympathizer" card - which represents a human or a Cylon who wishes to support the opposing group) is dealt. This can be clearly seen in the following case: "Carl 'Helo' Agathon has two Loyalty Cards, one 'You are a Cylon' card and one 'You are Not a Cylon' card. Since he has at least one 'You are a Cylon' card, he is a Cylon player" (Konieczka, 2008a: 18-19). Even though these cards are kept secret, their owner may, during the Action Step, reveal them.